

ANGLO SAXONICA

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ANGLO

SAXONICA



University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies  
Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa



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SER. III N. 5 2013

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**THEMATIC SECTION**  
**SECÇÃO TEMÁTICA**





**EUDORA WELTY**



# Introduction

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## Introduction

Eudora Welty (1909-2001) is currently considered one of the most important 20<sup>th</sup> century US writers, namely because of her remarkable style, which combines deeply idiosyncratic and poetic passages with lengthy dialogues in a humorous, vernacular language accessible to the average Southern reader. Probably inspired by her photographic practice from the 1930s to the 1950s, Welty's narratives evince an extraordinary attention to visual detail, and are structured around revelatory moments that often describe a character's connection with her natural surroundings. This author's prose is also characterized by an incantatory musical rhythm that at times underscores the plot's thematic development or contributes to unveiling the characters' intentions. Interspersing several points of view, the writer weaves a communal perspective, mostly centered on female characters but also on artists, travellers or children, leading the reader to embrace the diversity of human experience. Indeed, if there is one word that may condense this fictional universe, it would be "compassion", with its etymological root of "feeling together", since Welty's "passion [is] not to point the finger in judgment but to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight", to quote her own words in the Preface to her first photographic album, *One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression* (12).

Throughout her long career, Welty wrote several uncollected short stories, three short story collections, one short story cycle, a novella, four novels, a book for children, and an autobiography (that remained for more than a year on the *New York Times* best seller list when it came out in 1983, the first time that happened with a book published by the Harvard UP). In addition, she was a prolific essayist and gave numerous interviews

to journalists and scholars from all over the world, which are collected in two volumes of the University of Mississippi Press's Literary Conversations Series. The fact that she was the first living woman writer to be included in the prestigious Library of America collection testifies to the overwhelming appreciation her work merited. In her lifetime, Welty was distinguished with many honors, including several O. Henry Awards, the William Dean Howells medal for fiction, the Pulitzer Prize, and the PENN/Malamud Award for the Short Story, amongst others.

This group of seven essays comes partially from a two-day symposium organized by ULICES in 2009, under the title *Post-Racial America: Has the USA Moved Beyond the Race Issue?*. The essays by Maria Teresa Castilho, Maria Antónia Lima, Isabel Maria Fernandes Alves and Diana V. Almeida were initially presented at this encounter and all more or less problematize Welty's political involvement throughout her artistic career. Considering the author's autobiography and her fictional texts, with an emphasis on her novels, Castilho argues that Welty dealt with the specificity of Southern female identity and refused any larger political commitment. Lima focuses on the Gothic undertone present in the author's fiction, claiming that it masterly depicts the ambivalence and mystery at the core of life and that it cannot be associated with a Manichean political perspective. Alves analyses the novel *The Optimist's Daughter*, underlining on the one hand the erasure of racial tensions and on the other the important role the protagonist's black housekeeper plays in helping her find artistic independence. Almeida engages in a close reading of the short story "The Demonstrators", written at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and maintains that Welty's political view is based upon the belief that individual healing is the sole basis for a larger communal harmony.

Tereza Marques de Oliveira Lima, Jan Nordby Gretlund, and Mário Avelar were later invited to write an essay on Welty and chose three very different approaches. Oliveira Lima provides a brief outline of the reception of Welty's work in Brazil and focuses on *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter*, studying the female characters in relation to Southern identity politics. Gretlund summarizes the publication history of Welty's non-fiction and contemplates some of the current editorial options, namely the choice of just presenting the first publication date of a given text, which

tends to ignore and render invisible its several versions. Avelar reads Welty's photograph *Helena Arden* as a parody of the advertising industry and simultaneously a self-reflexive exercise that comments on the conventions of photography and spectatorship.

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# How Welty Doesn't Crusade

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## How Welty Doesn't Crusade

By controlling her public persona and by firmly insisting both in interviews and in her essay, “Must a Novelist Crusade?”, that her fiction is apolitical, Eudora Welty made many critics feel what Warren French defended in 1983 and which I think is still true today: “I think that the reason why critics have scarcely known what to make of Eudora Welty’s work is that most of them, like the writers with whom they identify, can flourish only on denunciations of the very civilization that makes their trade possible” (*Thirteen Essays* 125).

It also seems to me that critics have had some difficulties to accept both the writer’s own point of view on what she herself wrote and on her own criticism. In 1955, in “Writing and Analyzing a Story” Welty wrote: “The story and its analysis are not mirror-opposites of each other. They are not reflections, either one. Criticism indeed is an art, as a story is, but only the story is to some degree a vision; there is no explanation outside fiction for what its writer is learning to do” (*Eye of the Story* 110). Furthermore, in 1980, she also wrote:

I have been told, both in approval and in accusation, that I seem to love all my characters. What I do in writing of any character is to try to enter into the mind, heart and skin of a human being who is not myself. Whether this happens to be a man or a woman, old or young, with skin black or white, the primary challenge lies in making the jump itself. It is the act of a writer’s imagination that I set most high. (*Collected Stories* XI)

On the other hand, in 1972, the writer had told Linda Kuehl in an interview: “I just think of myself as writing about human beings and I happen to live in a region, as do we all, so I write about what I know —

it's the same case for any writer living anywhere. I also happen to love my particular region. If this shows, I don't mind" (*Conversations* 87).

It is clear that Eudora Welty wants to emphasize that neither her region alone nor the social or political problems of her "real" present life are the topics of her stories. And it is also evident that the writer faces her own stories as visions built not by particular political events or aims but, instead, by what she closely experienced and knew. However, just because this seemed to be a problem for critics of Welty's fiction, Warren French rightly underscored that many critics "have scarcely known what to make" of this writer's fiction since they think that the writers with whom they identify have to be politically involved; they have to crusade to flourish. And this is probably why more recent critics have done their best to involve Eudora Welty politically. Furthermore, current criticism focusing on the writer's fictional proximity to the Civil Rights movements or on race issues has been published. In addition conferences involving the theme of "Welty and Politics" in general, such as the one in Jackson in 1997, have been organized.

In 1998, Ann Waldron published an unauthorised biography of Welty where she wrote in the first chapter: "Nothing could illuminate the horror and stupidity of the segregated South more vividly than the fact that Richard Wright and Eudora Welty never met, although they were the same age, had similar interests, and lived in the same town for several years" (16).

In this biography Ann Waldron seems to suggest that Welty's resounding "no" to her own question "Must a Novelist Crusade?", denying that her fiction could be read as a starting point for a political debate, emerges just because she did not want to be involved in a crusade that was not hers. Yet, on the other hand, and now seeming to refuse her own attack on Welty, Ann Waldron also focuses on the living conditions and the poverty of black servants in *Delta Wedding*, contradicting Diana Trilling, who talked about this novel as a "narcissistic Southern fantasy" (578), and J. C. Ransom, who defined it as "one of the last novels in the tradition of the Old South" (507).

In fact, *Delta Wedding* is perhaps the fictional work where Welty most clearly manifests the strong emotion that connects her to the South. Here the reader perceives the knowledge that this region offered her from

her childhood onwards. And it was perhaps that emotion, the fact that *Delta Wedding* shows in many of its pages a true fictional lyricism, which motivated Trilling's above-quoted comment. But in my view, it is undoubtedly the inability of Trilling and of others to understand this text in all its depth that made them make this evaluation and thus describe the novel as a pure celebration of the land:

In the Delta the sunsets were reddest light. The sun went down lopsided and wide as a rose on a stem in the west, and the west was a milk-white edge, like the foam of the sea. The sky, the field, the little track, and the bayou, over and over — all that had been bright or dark was now one color. (*Delta Wedding* 4-5)

Indeed, most critics did not understand that some of the passages that we find in *Delta Wedding* are much more than a supposed celebration of the South. They did not perceive that those pages are definitely delicate moments of prose poetry.

In fact, critics have never understood that what Diana Trilling considered an “exacerbation of poeticism” at no time disturbed the necessary distance for Welty to make a serious and careful study of life and of the sense of family in general, and this, I stress, is made from an evident Southern feminine perspective. “I wanted to write a story that showed the solidity of this family and that went on on a small scale in a world of its own” (*Conversations* 50), Welty said to Charles Bunting about *Delta Wedding* in an interview in 1972. But she could have said the same about *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter* since, as Dean Flower rightly stated in 2007 in “Eudora Welty and Racism”, “[Welty's] long novel *Losing Battles* in 1970 and her short novel *The Optimist's Daughter* in 1972 went back to the same non-disruptive familiar themes that had generated *Delta Wedding*”. But neither in the past nor perhaps even today have critics been sensitive to the fact that poetic lyricism, together with deep reflections on ontological and epistemological problems, is one of the great qualities of Weltyan fiction. With a thematic multiplicity concerning predominantly female characters and voices, and an undeniable complexity of meanings on the one hand, and a vision of the Southern difference on the other, what Welty really writes about is life, human beings dominated by

their emotions and fantasies and their relationships. She writes about men and women (and above all women) as heirs of a Southern past or, then, as builders of a present that, in turn, conditions themselves and their history.

Furthermore, Eudora Welty is also the writer who in the tradition of the Southern Literary Renaissance reveals what Harold Bloom called the “anxiety of influence”. But if Welty is undoubtedly linked to the tradition of the Southern Literary Renaissance, which sees the South and its tradition as problematic, then, on the other hand, she seems to look for her originality and personalization by writing not exactly about a patriarchal South, as Faulkner did, but above all about Southern feminine characters and worlds. And these characters either reaffirm the tradition of the society to which they are linked or then question it, in an attempt to resist to what was built and attributed to them from generation to generation. This is a very peculiar “matriarchy” which in fact never existed and which only served masculine power and discourse:

The work of Eudora Welty provides us, finally, with a celebration of the traditional southern community not as a kind of pastoral fortress, a place of walls built to preserve cherished values and identities belonging to the past, but as a place of windows that must be opened on the wide and mysterious world of the future beyond. (7-8)

Although Lucinda Mackethan has written these words specifically about *Delta Wedding* in 1980, the truth is that they echo my own reading of Welty’s long fiction in general. In my opinion, the “reality” that the writer makes us understand concerns the place, the characters and the families that, although looking at their past, are not paralysed in it or by it. In fact, by rethinking and reinventing the past they open windows into the horizons of the future. And all this is done with an accumulation of meanings, worked with subtlety and harmonised with Welty’s choice of place, characters and time. As Elizabeth Evans said in 1981, and I accept it for the whole of Welty’s long fiction, Welty certainly deals with a study of life, of being and of the sense of family (See 97).

More recently, in 2005, Suzanne Marrs published a very interesting and stimulating biography of Welty where she states:

Widely considered a master of the short-story form, Welty wrote in many modes, creating the comic terror of a small-town beauty parlor, the 1807 'season of dreams' that arrived in Mississippi with Aaron Burr, the tortured interior monologue of a husband who imagines beating his wife's lover with a croquet mallet, and a ghost story of sorts in 'No Place for you, My Love'. Her novels — *Delta Wedding*, *Losing Battles*, *The Optimist's Daughter* — and her novellas — *The Robber Bridegroom* and *The Ponder Heart* — show a determination to experiment and to approach head-on issues of love and death, oppression and transcendence. (IX- X)

Here, Suzanne Marrs expresses how complex Welty's fiction is. But to affirm a complex and a polychromatic web of meanings in Welty's work does not necessarily imply to put aside the writer's own opinions on fiction, which, I think, very often happens today. This happens precisely to pursue a particular path in order to prove that Welty adopts (or should have adopted?) the point of view of political tracts concerning racism or race issues.

In a very clear evaluation of a possible relation between Welty's fiction and racism, Dean Flower stated: "What Welty did not expect, probably was the extent to which she would be asked to represent the South". And perhaps she did not. But this does not mean that Eudora Welty was not very much aware of segregation in the South. Her own words to William F. Buckley clarify any possible doubt: "I once did a story — I was writing a novel at the time, and when Medgar Evers was assassinated here — that night, it just pushed up to what I was doing. I thought to myself, 'I've lived here all my life. I know the kind of mind that did this'" (*Conversations* 100).

Welty's knowledge of the unfair racial situation in the South is undeniable. However, what more recent criticism wants to discuss seems to me not to be central to Welty's fiction. Indeed I do not think it involves concrete dynamics of politics addressing racism or racial issues.

"Where is the Voice Coming From?", published in 1963, has been seen as the story where Eudora Welty changed her attitude by breaking her silence on racial issues. However, it is important to understand that what she really did with this story was to go deeper towards the human self and

the human condition itself. Indeed, undoubtedly questioning racism in the South of her time and place, Welty went beyond it. As she herself explained, “Whoever the murderer [was, she knew] him: not his identity, but his coming about in [that] time and place” (*Stories* XI).

But I want to make it clear that my reading of “Where is the Voice Coming From?” does not imply that this story does not show how very close Welty was to that actual event on that night in June 1963. On the contrary, she was close and she was shocked, which unmistakably explains her emotional reaction in writing that particular story on the night of the murder. But as Welty says in *One Writer’s Beginnings*”, all that absorbed [her]” and she felt the necessity to enter “into the mind and inside the skin of a character who could hardly have been more alien or repugnant to [her]” (43).

Converting reality into fiction and adopting the narrative voice of the killer, Welty finally makes the reader question how particular pressures, brought about by living in a particular place, can determine feelings, inner selves and their circumstances, making people behave well or badly without questioning themselves. And this involves all of us universally. Thus, in this story there is a complexity of emotions and feelings that constitute the murderer’s inner life and self and which he inevitably voices. And it is the questioning of this complexity that matters for Welty and not so much the events that took place that day in June in Jackson.

Analysing this story Jan Nordby Gretlund states:

The problems that preoccupy Welty in this story are and have been particular to the place she describes. They echo an era when ‘ancient rituals demarcated the separate spheres of racial life’, and they echo a time when individual black men ‘were made sacrifices to a sacred concept of white supremacy.’ But the problems of this community are finally universal in that the subject is our basic sense of right and wrong. (...) The situation speaks for itself without any crusading on the part of the author, and the story never becomes a tract of social protest. “Where is the Voice Coming From?” demonstrates how Welty, even in the thick of the racial upheavals of the 60s, managed to write fiction that is stone deaf to argument. (228)



At the very end of the story we are face to face with a perverse and pathetic man who is not aware of his perversion or pathos, simply because he is unable to understand his act as such:

Once, I run away from my home. And there was a ad for me, come to be printed in our county weekly. My mother paid for it. It was from her. It says: 'SON: You are not being hunted for anything but to find you'. That time I come on back home.

But people are dead now.

And it's so hot. Without it even being August yet.

Anyways, I seen him fall. I was evermore the one.

So I reach me down my old guitar off the nail in the wall. Cause I've got my guitar, what I've held on to from way back when, and I never dropped that, never lost or forgot it, never hocked it but to get it again, never give it away, and I set it in my chair, with nobody home but me, and I start to play, and sing a-Down. And sing a-down, down, down, down. Sing a-down, down, down, down. Down. (*Stories* 607)

From my perspective, what Welty emphasizes here is the inner nature of a human being in a specific time and place. And this is exactly what she means in "Place in Fiction" when she writes, "Place, then, has the most delicate control over character too: by confining character, it defines it" (*Eye of Story* 122).

Welty's approach to feelings, to love and to death is tied to a strong sense of place, or rather, concretely to the region where she was born and in which she always lived. And to clarify my point I now quote from *One Writer's Beginnings*: "A writer cannot escape his material; that is, he cannot escape where and when he was born" (81). In her fiction, and above all in her long fiction, Welty shows that she herself doesn't escape either from where and when she was born or even from her experience as a woman in a very particular society which officially worshipped womanhood through time and through history.

In *The Robber Bridegroom*, *Delta Wedding*, *The Ponder Heart*, *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter*, Eudora Welty tells apparently simple stories about Southern events and identities, about Southern families and their own lives, as well as about Southern women,

who dominate a very well defined fictional Southern world. Being a muse of Southern Culture, reigning in a virtual matriarchy, the Southern woman of the “Old South” tacitly agreed to ignore the fact that the demands made on her, on her immaculate condition, were not shared by her companion. He frequently experienced the pleasure of miscegenation outside a kind of sanctuary nurtured by the rituals of that matriarchy which, in fact, wasn’t real. Thus, as “queen of her home” (and of the plantation) she took the “power” and the hypocrisy of that “matriarchy”, which paradoxically emerged from the subjection to an ideology which kept the man — the Master, the owner of the plantation, of the slaves and of his Ladies and “Belles” — at the top of the social pyramid. And so, the woman in the old South, grounded by fantasies that made her believe in a life she never had, contributed to the falseness and configuration of the Southern world. In fact, what women in the Old South defended and maintained from generation to generation was the honour of their place, of the Southern plantation and family and of their Master right up to the violation of that world represented by the Civil War. All this, in turn, intensified the role of this woman in the organization and management of her fantasized matriarchy. As Louise Westling underlines in *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O’Connor*, “The Southern world provided only a dishonest basis for a girl’s identity as she grew into a woman, and dishonest grounds for relations with men” (27).

My point is that Welty’s fiction, and in particular her long fiction, poses a question about the inner nature and self of the human condition. Furthermore, it also offers us flashes on and around the South. Thus, with *The Robber Bridegroom*, Welty starts a kind of macrotext, an “album” of “Southern Visions” where *Delta Wedding*, *The Ponder Heart*, *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist’s Daughter* also appear: an “album” through which we can also interpret and go deeper into our own lives. As Welty said about *The Robber Bridegroom* (and I take it for her long fiction in general):

The validity of [this] novel has to lie in the human motivations apparent alike in the history of a time and in the timeless fairy tale. In whatever form these emerge they speak out of

the same aspirations — to love, to conquer, to outwit and overcome the enemy, to reach the goal in view. And in the end, to find out what we all wish, to find out exactly who we are and who the other fellow is, and what we are doing here all together. (*Eye of Story* 311)

Considering Welty's long fiction as a whole, the reader understands the presence of women who are either enslaved by their fantasies, as in *The Robber Bridegroom*, or fight to put an end to them, as in *Delta Wedding*, *The Ponder Heart* and *Losing Battles*, or try out the fairy tale itself, as in *The Optimist's Daughter*. As Ben Byrne aptly stated, "Where the earlier novel is a magical story of starting out in life, *The Optimist's Daughter* is fairy tale tried out" (*Critical Essays* 253).

By telling us a real "Southern fairy tale", Welty's "album" revisits the history of the Southern frontier, as happens in *The Robber Bridegroom*. But questioning fantasies in Rosamond and exploring the desire to be both robber and gentleman in Jamie Lockhart, Welty reveals universal circumstances, which involve all of us: the way fantasies and dreams shape us all — women and/or men — as well as determine our inner selves and lives. In addition, this kind of album also celebrates and recovers, through different visions, a past grounded in myths. But it also offers visions in which the past is set against the reality of a present which, in turn, brings and imposes changes, as in *Delta Wedding*, *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter*; or simply, as in *The Ponder Heart*, it gives us a vision where the writer presents hilarious dialogues and descriptions emerging from the characters' or even from the narrator's mouth, making us wonder who in Edna Earle's family is sane.

But with her eyes on the future, Welty very often transforms an actual event or a particular circumstance into an imagined one. She is a Southern writer whose long fiction also gives place to a kind of implied textual meaning where the South and its identity glow, an implied meaning which clearly allows us to perceive the South. By problematizing the Southern past and present and making her region the starting point for a reflection on life and feelings, the writer goes far beyond the evocation of a place and a historical time. And thus once again I quote Welty's own words about *Delta Wedding* and *Losing Battles*:

In the case of *Delta Wedding* I chose the twenties — when I was more the age of my little girl, which was why I thought best to have a child in it. But in writing about the Delta, I had to pick a year — and this was quite hard to — in which all the men could be home and uninvolved. It couldn't be a year when there was a flood in the Delta because those were the times before the flood control. It had to be a year that would leave my characters all free to have a family story. It meant looking in the almanac — in fact, I did — to find a year that was uneventful and that would allow me to concentrate on the people without any undue outside influences; I wanted to write a story that showed the solidity of this family and the life that went on on a small scale in a world of its own. (...) In the case of *Losing Battles* I wanted to get a year in which I could show people at the rock bottom of their whole lives, which meant the Depression. (...) I wanted a clear stage to bring on this family, to show them when they had really no props to their lives, had only themselves, plus an indomitable will to live even with losing battles (...). I wanted to take away everything and show them naked as human beings. So that fixed the time and place. (*Conversations* 49-50)

In this interview Welty analyses her compositional choices both for *Delta Wedding* and for *Losing Battles* and we understand that she chose time and place according to what she wanted to focus on, so that she could make serious and careful studies of life and of the sense of a family facing easy times or otherwise facing troubles and disasters.

In *Delta Wedding* we are face to face with Laura's inner development, which takes place in Shellmound — a huge plantation suspended in time, in the Southern Delta — where traditionally feminine and Southern values inform and dominate the Fairchild "matriarchy". But in *Losing Battles*, Welty offers us a different perspective. We meet a poor family, the Beecham/Renfros, preparing a large family reunion to celebrate the ninetieth birthday of the matriarch, Granny Vauhn. However, the two novels have something in common. Both *Delta Wedding* and *Losing Battles* underline and question private relationships, predominantly through women's stories and rites of domesticity, on the one hand and, on

the other, they raise the question of individual identity, here posed by Miss Julia Mortimer: "Is this Heaven, where you lie wide open to the mercies of others who think they know better than you do what's best — what's true and what isn't? Contradictors, interferers and prevaricators — are those angels?" (*Losing Battles* 299).

In *The Home Plot: Women, Writing and Domestic Ritual*, Ann Romines expresses her point of view about the presence of women in *Delta Wedding* by stating the following: "Through all these women, *Delta Wedding* expresses the cost, as well as the beauties and the strengths, of domestic culture. Ellen, who is the mistress of Shellmound and thus deeply implicated in its house keeping comprehends this most fully" (230).

Indeed, if Ellen Fairchild embodies and symbolises the stability of the past plantation and the necessary fertility to maintain it, Granny Vauhn represents the same on her side but now within the centre of a poor family of agrarians dominated by women. However, this family does not seem able to win battles since its members do not understand that they also have to accept the education and the modern ways which Julia Mortimer represents.

In fact, the dominant theme in Welty's long fiction highlights a kind of learning process which is predominantly presented from (Southern) women's point of view. It is a learning process involving the discovery that the fantasies cherished by women and men and attached to particular places can make people retreat forever into the prison of their past and thus betray both memory and the present forever. But, in Welty's vision, this process never denies the importance of the past for the present. This is at the center of *The Optimist Daughter* and is illustrated by the basic difference between two women (Laurel and Fay) and their attitudes toward the past, as made explicit in the breadboard incident:

'I don't know what you're making such a big fuss over. What do you see in that thing?' asked Fay. 'The whole story, Fay. The whole solid past', said Laurel. 'Whose story? Whose past? Not mine', said Fay. 'The past isn't a thing to me. I belong to the future, didn't you know that?' (...) 'I know you aren't anything to the past', [Laurel] said. 'You can't do anything to it now'. And neither am I; and neither can I, she thought, although it has been everything and done everything to me,

everything for me. The past is no more open to help or hurt than was Father in his coffin. The past is like him, impervious, and can never be awakened. It is memory that is the somnambulist. (*The Optimist's Daughter* 206-207)

Laurel finally discovers that what Fay can't understand is the importance of memory to recover the past and its influence on the present. For Welty, as she herself pointed out in "Some Notes on Time in Fiction", "Remembering is so basic and vital a part of staying alive that it takes on the strength of an instinct of survival" (*Eye of Story* 171). And this is what Laura also learns through her experience in Shellmound:

When people were at Shellmound it was as if they had never been anywhere else (...). She tried to see her father coming home from the office, first his body hidden by leaves, then his face hidden behind his paper. If she could not think of that, she was doomed; and she was doomed, for the memory was only a flicker, gone now. (*Delta Wedding* 134)

With her long fiction Eudora Welty seems to have created a 'picture album' where she paints the Southern identity brushstroke by brushstroke. And in these polychromic visions she also portrays the end of its social imagery: the imagined fantasy of Southern superiority and aristocratic singularity which was defeated in the past, in 1865, and still goes on being defeated in the present by the announcement of other worlds and other histories. And this is what also happens to many of us and to the private and particular worlds in which we live. Indeed, and I quote Vande Kieft:

the best part of the meaning we perceive in Eudora Welty's or any other fiction, I think, is what spills over from the story into our lives, enabling us to make connections — not only of our private experience with those of fiction, but the connection between literature, art and music; of our bonding, both within and beyond the limits to time and place, with the whole human race. (*Critical Essays* 299)

But Welty is also the writer who makes us rethink a national Adamic myth, embodied by masculine heroes such as Huck Finn. If Twain's South is the one that emerges from the celebration of America and from the dream which the writer contemplates and celebrates with nostalgia, Welty's South

arises from the recovery and assimilation of the region's difference and from the confluence of its past and present. By announcing the South to the nation in this way, Welty finds her place in the U.S. literary canon.

From a feminine perspective and voice, Eudora Welty brings us visions associated to themes concerning a pastoral but also aggressive past (as in *The Robber Bridegroom*), fertility, women's role, domesticity and Southern womanhood and human relationships within the family (as in *Delta Wedding*, *The Ponder Heart*, *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter*). The writer thus recreates and reorganizes the Southern history because, as Welty wrote in "Place in Fiction", "The moment the place in which the novel happens is accepted as true, through it will begin to glow, in a kind of recognizable glory, the feeling and thought that inhabited the author's head and animated the whole of his work". (*Eye of Story* 121) Undoubtedly, Welty makes use of the South, of what is there, whether right or wrong, fair or unfair, and of dominantly feminine Southern worlds to find answers to her existential doubts in order to take us up to the point where, by opening curtains, we question our own choices and decisions.

There is no better way of emphasizing my reading of how Welty doesn't crusade than by quoting Jan Nordby Gretlund's words: "[Welty's] view of mankind is not obscured by any crusading for a cause, nor has she become blinded by nostalgia and a longing for the past" (224).

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**ABSTRACT**

Eudora Welty firmly insists both in interviews and in her essay “Must the Novelist Crusade?” that her fiction is apolitical. As the writer states in *One Writer’s Beginnings*, her stories are visions built not by particular political events or aims but, instead, by what she closely experienced and knew. With a thematic multiplicity concerning predominantly female characters and voices, and an undeniable complexity of meanings on the one hand, and a vision of the Southern difference on the other, what Welty really writes about is life, about human beings dominated by their emotions, their fantasies and their relationships. She writes about men and women (and above all women) as heirs of a Southern past or builders of a present that, in turn, conditions themselves and their history. And although the short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?”, published in 1963, has been seen as the fictional text where Eudora Welty changed her attitude by breaking her silence on racial issues, it is important to understand that what she really did with it was to go deeper towards the human self and the human condition itself.

**KEYWORDS**

Welty; South; Literature and Politics; Race.

**RESUMO**

Tanto em entrevistas como no seu ensaio “Must the Novelist Crusade?”, Eudora Welty sulinha que a sua escrita é apolítica. Como a escritora declara em *One Writer’s Beginnings*, as suas histórias são visões baseadas não em eventos políticos mas, pelo contrário, naquilo que ela experienciava e conhecia de perto. Com uma multiplicidade temática sobretudo relacionada com personagens e vozes femininas, acrescida de uma inegável complexidade de sentidos, por um lado, e uma visão da diferença sulista, por outro, Welty escreve essencialmente sobre a vida, sobre seres humanos dominados pelas suas emoções, fantasias e relacionamentos. Escreve

sobre homens e mulheres (em particular mulheres) herdeiros do passado sulista e construtores de um presente que, por seu lado, os condiciona a si mesmos e à sua história. E embora o conto “Where is the Voice Coming From?”, publicado em 1963, tenha sido visto como o texto ficcional onde Eudora Welty mudou de atitude e quebrou o silêncio sobre as questões raciais, é importante perceber que ela apenas aprofundou a sua abordagem do ser humano e da própria condição humana.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Welty; Sul; Literatura e Política; Raça.

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# “All things are double”: Eudora Welty’s Prismatic view

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## “All things are double”: Eudora Welty’s Prismatic view

Quoted from *The Robber Bridegroom* (1946), a Gothic story that rewrites one of the Brother Grimms’ fairy tales, the expression “all things are double” seems to concentrate the essential spirit of Welty’s fiction. Showing a deep understanding and respect for this doubleness, which is not only the cause for conflict between characters, but also the reason for their interest in one another, Welty’s writing was always able “to see a thing from all sides”, the most appropriate technique to reveal the complexity of human relationships such as only a prismatic and photographic view is able to apprehend. The radical experiments in subject and form, that led Welty to consider her stories as “visions”, show that she only could demonstrate a very subtle engagement with the politics of her time, for the simple reason that she was much more interested in art. Indeed, in her essay “Must the Novelist Crusade?”, she insists that her work was not political, and defends that a novel is an act of imagination that should never be confused with journalism or political speeches. Consequently, the novelist’s purpose should be to avoid generalities and judgments in order to present human beings as real as possible, observing and revealing their inner truths through passion and not for the sake of a cause. Welty’s integrity, honesty and insight could only lead her to conclude, in the above mentioned essay, that “love and hate, hope and despair, justice and injustice, compassion and prejudice, truth-telling and lying work in all men; their story can be told in whatever skin they are wearing and in whatever year the writer can put them down.” (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 157).

Very interested in experimenting with composition, using light, pattern, textures, framing and perspective, Welty wrote stories and took photographs to reveal the complexities of the lives of the population living in the segregated South. In order to capture their authenticity and all their

varied forms of expression, she assumed a certain aesthetic distance that, instead of ignoring their dramas and injustices, exposed the multiplicities of their grotesque realities. This distance suggested the authenticity and particularity of characters whose identities and actions were not to be judged by an author who refrained from turning fiction into a platform for her opinions and deemed it to be something “highly personal, but objective” (ibid. 142). Her photographic practice helped Welty to develop and maintain an essentially visual and objective style that still preserved the passionate approach of her writing. Indeed, her characters were kept at a distance and transmuted into something universal through the power of her observation, because she knew that “frame, proportion, perspective, the value of light and the shade, all are determined by the distance of the observing eye” (Welty, *One Writer's* 21). This approach preserved the integrity of Welty's vision and voice, preventing her from generalizing and giving her the possibility of studying people from within, of exercising her power of observation and reaching the inner truth of individual human beings, which she sought to transmit in her fictional texts (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 149).

Thus Welty developed a prismatic view, in order to expand the scope of her subject, common to all writers, since “our subject is humankind. When we write about people, black or white, in the South or anywhere, if our stories are worth reading, we are writing about everybody” (ibid. 156). Thus, she sought to apprehend the multiple aspects of people's personalities in their relationships with each other and to dramatize life as it is (not as it should be), because “great fiction shows us not how to conduct our behavior, but how to feel” (ibid. 154). In fact, “relationship” is a key word to define Welty's fiction, because all elements in her fictional universe are related and complement each other through opposition and contrast, as it happens in her black and white photos. What really interested her was the dynamics, the complementarity and the harmony of relationships, at an individual and communal level, taking into consideration several factors, amongst them family lineage and race, as she underlined:

No matter how fast society around us changes, what remains is that there is a relationship in progress between ourselves and other people; this was the case when the world seemed stable, too. There are relationships of the blood, of the passions and the affections, of thought and spirit and deed.

There is the relationship between the races. How can one kind of relationship be set apart from the others? Like the great root system of an old and long-established growing plant, they are all tangled up together; to separate them you would have to cleave the plant itself from top to bottom (ibid. 155).

In "The Love and the Separateness in Miss Welty", Robert Penn Warren went deeply into the dialectics of Welty's fiction and confessed he admired the stories in *A Curtain of Green*, because each of them was "a fresh start in the business of writing fiction, as if she had had to take a new angle each time out of a joy in the pure novelty of the perspective" (71), also noticing her interest in the variety of the world, specially in the "variety of ways in which one could look at the world" (72).

This prismatic view allowed Welty to deal with several aspects of the same subject simultaneously instead of concentrating in only one of them and lent her fiction a more interesting and complex dimension. Such is evident in the interconnected stories of *The Golden Apples*, where we can see how different individuals in a closely knitted community cope with isolation throughout a generation. "A Still Moment", one of the six stories of *The Wide Net*, offers another example of this prismatic approach, featuring three very different male characters, an Evangelist, an ornithologist and an outlaw, who are united by the intensity of their visionary response towards a heron they encounter in the Mississippi forest.

The true nature of Welty's writing is apprehended by J. A. Bryant when he underlines her ability "to make language suggest several dimensions of reality simultaneously, by use of allusion, by selection of detail, and by free (and sometimes licentious) use of metaphor; [and above by] all her most infallible ear for idiomatic diction and rhythm" (quoted in Howard 175). "The Purple Hat", a ghost story, is a good illustration of the critic's argument as well as an apt translation of Welty's visual penchant, showing how an enigmatic tale can intensify our awareness of the world, suggesting that our imaginative minds create and are trapped by obsessions, such as gambling. Such obsessions distort our sense of reality making victims of people who are "ensnared" by ghosts of destruction and hypnotized by their mysterious powers. This Gothic tale fosters enough obscurity to allow the reader to see something for himself without the need for an argument or an explanation, since the text's enigmatic aura opens it

to several readings; we should remember that Welty declares “there is absolutely everything in great fiction but a clear answer” (*Eye of the Story* 149). This accounts for the combination of different angles, polarities, dichotomies and contradictions, because all these help to produce that creative and enigmatic complexity which is the basis of a writing that, above all, is an act of insight and a refusal to compromise with just one cause (Welty, Ed. Prensshaw 289). Part of that complexity comes from the creation, in her early fiction, of so many demented, isolated, disturbed and alienated characters, such as murderers, suicides, deaf-mutes or mentally retarded figures whose psychotic isolation seems to transcend questions of class and race, and induces the readers to penetrate into the dark-side of that not so “green curtain” that hides some grotesque reality beyond the immediately visible.

During the 1960s, so often accused of not being directly engaged in defending certain political causes, of not writing about black people in a racial perspective, and of being indifferent to the larger social and political problems, Welty very often decried the effect that ideological blinders can have upon readers, being more interested in the literary qualities of her work, mainly in its language, structure, and character development, because she really wanted her stories to be as complex and ambiguous as the world they depicted. That is why she declared that she considered all her characters as individuals not as symbols (*ibid.* 152), since, though “All [her] life [she had] been opposed to such things as racism and injustice and cruelty”, she “[wanted her] stories to show [all wrongs] as they are, to let them speak for themselves [, not] to preach” (*ibid.* 168).

This commitment to truth led Welty to depict human life in all its duplicity, which may explain her ambivalent assessment of gender and racial roles in the South, “writing about human beings as human beings with all the things that make them up, including bigotry, misunderstanding, injustice, and also love and affection, and whatever else” (*ibid.* 203). To the many complaints she received during the social crisis in the 60s, accusing her of not writing about racial injustice, she answered that that had always been the theme of her fiction, but not in a propagandistic way (*ibid.* 184). She went on stating that her intention was not to write social criticism, but to reveal life’s mysteries in a process she compared to photography, so that people could read a story as if they were watching a



negative develop, slowly taking shape before their eyes.<sup>1</sup> Welty was aware of the complicated relationship between the races, but she felt that writing about this issue could not be a deliberate choice; instead she chose to write about all people, being conscious that her characters were "about half and half black and white" (ibid. 334).

To apprehend the complexities of all these polarities, Welty recurrently used in many of her short stories and novels the theme of the "double", so common in Gothic fiction. *The Robber Bridegroom*, a novella set on the Natchez Trace during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which combines South-western humor with the genre of fairy-tale, tells the story of the frontier and its settling. Keenly aware of how much it owed to her celebrated prismatic view, she stated: "In [this text] I used fairy tales and real folklore and historical people and everything alike and simultaneously" (ibid. 210). In fact, this aesthetic technique finds its fictional equivalent in some characters' exceptional vision, which gives them "the power to look both ways and to see a thing from all sides" (Welty, *Complete* 88). The benefit of this point of view is to develop a broader perspective on life, as Welty argued in "Place in Fiction", where she states: "We see that point of view is hardly a single, unalterable vision, but a profound and developing one of great complexity. The vision itself may move in and out of its material, shuttle-fashion, instead of being simply turned on it, like a telescope on the moon" (*Eye of the Story* 132).

Her dynamic vision in this satiric fantasy makes readers aware of human duplicity, since all the three main characters have doubles, a strategy echoed in the following remark by one of these figures:

For all things are double, and this should keep us from taking liberties with the outside world, and acting too quickly to finish things off. All things are divided in half — night and day, the soul and body, and sorrow and joy and youth and age,

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<sup>1</sup> Walker Percy seemed to perfectly understand Welty's position, since he approached questions of race saying that "From a novelist's point of view, human relations are much more complex than saying that the white racist is wrong and the black protester is right. I mean, Faulkner was always dealing with the complexities of human relations between white people and black people and between black people and black people" (ibid. 110).

and sometimes I wonder if even my own wife has not been the one person all the time, and I loved her beauty so well at the beginning that it is only now that the ugliness has struck through to beset me like a madness. (*Welty Complete* 61)

This duplicity illustrates Welty's idea that "characters in the plot connect us with the vastness of our secret life" (*Eye of the Story* 90). Indeed, all of them have secret identities proving that nothing is what it seems: Clement Musgrove is both a wanderer and a planter; Rosamond, his daughter, is a beautiful woman and a liar; Jamie Lockhart is a bridegroom and a bandit. According to Warren French, Welty's point here cannot be simply resolved in terms of dichotomous categories, because she "is concerned rather with the quite non-Aristotelian notion that people are two things at once and that their 'identity' at any given moment is determined by the context in which they are discovered" (84). This context transforms *The Robber Bridegroom* into a complex tale revolving around the rape of two young women and their different, racially-identified fates. Rosamond and the Indian maiden act as doubles within this novella, as mirror images of one another, since Welty is exploring the dichotomous relationship of women and race and also confronting the issues of race and rape in the Natchez Trace. What the repeated use of the rape imagery "reveals, in fact, is Welty's assessment of gender and racial roles in the South. In both her short [and longer] fiction (...) Welty uses rape to reveal cultural norms and expectations in Southern society" (Donald 24-25). However, race and rape are not the only subjects that Welty focused upon in this novella. In *One's Writing Imagination* (2002), Suzanne Marrs observed that "Welty uses legendary history to depict the destructive nature of self-glorification" (56), because by acting solely in self-interest the characters violate the sanctity of others. Thus the writer establishes a parallel between the dominating moral wilderness at the Natchez Trace, inhabited by thieves and murders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the social climate dominated by the Axis leaders in the 1930s and up till 1945, where the dark side of the American experience was also revealed. Definitely, Welty possessed the gift of perceiving doubleness in everyone and everything, because reality showed her that nothing was what it seemed to be, which made her bring into the "heart of fiction" the subversion of moral and ethical values characteristic of her Age. Her vision of life's duplicity appears to be the very condition of our time, when we

seem to live the same terrible contradictions, which led Eudora Welty to comment that hers was "an age when modes and matters are ruled by mediocrity" (Ed. Preshaw 169) and when "so many of the people who (...) feel the most are, powerless, and so many of the wrong-headed people have all the power" (ibid. 253).

Possessing a visual imagination and a tendency to see things in their connectedness respecting their different identities, it is understandable that Welty disliked all the generalities that could reduce the specific qualities of her work to mere labels. It is in this context that her negative response to being called a Gothic writer should be evaluated: "When I hear the word I see in my mind a Gustave Dore's illustration for 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. Anyway it sounds as if it has nothing to do with real life, and I feel that my work has something to do with real life. At least I hope it has." (Ed. Preshaw 152). But Welty's affinities with the Gothic mode do not come directly from the classic Gothic romance, but from the tradition of the American lyric short story developed since Poe and Hawthorne. Indeed, as Ruth Weston highlights in *Gothic Traditions and Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Eudora Welty*: "[Welty] does not share Hawthorne's extreme pessimism, still she shares with him the fascination with the Romantic idea of the primitive and fragmented self: of doubleness and loneliness, of love versus freedom and enclosure versus space" (50). On the other hand, considering "The Burning", a Civil War story, Harold Bloom declares that this enigmatic tale is "the most formidable of all Welty's stories" and it "belongs to the dark genre of Southern Gothic, akin to Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily' and O' Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'" (6). The symbolism of Welty's story is directed to the presence of an old Venetian mirror that reflects the happy times of a flourishing civilization and not to the tragic events that led a traditional but decadent family to ruin, at the exact moment the black maid, Delilah, gathers the bones of the last inhabitant of the totally burned house where she lived with two demented high-born ladies. Contaminated by the madness of her mistresses, the black woman crosses a river towards her freedom and/or her death, a double destiny that remains very ambiguous at the end: "Submerged to the waist, to the breast, stretching her throat like a sunflower stalk above the river's opaque skin, she kept on her treasure stacked on the roof of her head, hands laced upon it" (Welty, *Collected*

494). To conclude, I would like to emphasize that the idea that “all things are double” persists in Eudora Welty’s work and it translates this author’s ambivalence towards race, the South, and violence. In fact, we may take the author’s words regarding a painting by Goya, as emblematic of her approach to fiction, since she asserts that what fascinates her is the nuances of light and darkness, “half the action revealed and half hidden in dense, clotting shade” (*Eye of the Story* 90).

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#### ABSTRACT

This essay argues that Eudora Welty's vision was influenced by the American Gothic tradition, with its emphasis on doubleness and mystery. Indeed, not only in several interviews conceded throughout her career but also in her essays and in her fictional writing, did Welty refuse to indulge into conclusive generalizations or to moralize her readers. Thus, she revealed an extraordinary capacity to probe the constitutive ambivalence of situations and characters, and to allude to the flux at the heart of life.

#### KEYWORDS

Eudora Welty; American Gothic; Ambivalence.

#### RESUMO

Este ensaio defende que a visão de Eudora Welty foi influenciada pela tradição do Gótico Americano, com a sua ênfase na duplicidade e no mistério. De facto, não só em diversas entrevistas concedidas ao longo da sua carreira como também nos seus ensaios e na sua escrita ficcional, Welty recusou entregar-se a generalizações conclusivas ou a assumir diante dos leitores uma postura moralista. Assim, revelou uma extraordinária capacidade de auscultar a ambivalência constitutiva de situações e personagens e de aludir ao fluxo da vida.

#### PALAVRAS CHAVE

Eudora Welty; Gótico Americano; Ambivalência.

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‘The waiting arms of Missouri’:  
human connections and sheltered  
lives in Eudora Welty’s *The  
Optimist’s Daughter*

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## 'The waiting arms of Missouri': human connections and sheltered lives in Eudora Welty's *The Optimist's Daughter*

When one reads Eudora Welty's work, one has the impression to be taken into a comprehensive and large human embrace. Human flesh and human nature are always present, and the reader is invited to see and contemplate the whole world, to take it into his own mind and arms, as Welty herself has done when working with the Works Progress Administration, travelling all over Mississippi, and embracing its varied, complex and colorful life. From reading her texts, one gets a firm conviction: the world is to be held dearly. I wish to contribute to the idea that Welty's art is a large and sheltered embrace, a place from which the reader may safely ponder at human flightiness and inconstancy. Thereby, and in spite of the safety of the place from which the world is observed, the result of the contemplation is not stable or definite. Eudora Welty lived in a place and in a time that secured no definite answers or visions, and her understanding of human lives includes the inevitable oscillation between light and shadow, and between comedy and tragedy. Implicit is the idea that though Welty knew the settings of her fictional world, that knowledge only aggravated her sense of responsibility towards the physical reality and the human other. Her main fictional arena is always human emotions, and therefore her characters are never fixed to a place but are always on the verge of taking flight towards the free territory of the unexpected; some of them fly into the realm of artistic imagination.

These considerations are a prelude to my main focal point: Missouri, the black servant in the McKelva's household in *The Optimistic Daughter* (1972, OD), and her dual symbolic role. On one hand, she helps Laurel to discover her own identity as an artist; on the other hand, Missouri's presence in the novel is a subtle indicator of the race relations in the South. Therefore and parallel to the many views this novel illustrates — Welty's

preoccupation with the past, the clash between social classes, and the survival of the community (Gretlund, *Eudora Welty* 514) — my interest is to understand the way Missouri's role emphasizes the uneasiness of human relations in the American South, a place where prejudice against blacks prevailed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, since slavery and imprisonment framed the black community's social and individual lives. In order to understand Welty's vision, I relied on her comments about Willa Cather's work, grounded on the relevance of symbol and suggestion: "the relationships, development of acts and their effects, and any number of oblique, felt connections, which are as important and as indispensable as the factual ones in composing the plot, form a structure of revelation" (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 48). Missouri's presence in the novel is characterized mostly by discretion and silence, thus I felt it necessary to look for something that, though not specifically named upon the page,<sup>1</sup> would be relevant to the understanding of race relations in *The Optimist's Daughter*, and to the final revelation of Laura McKelva.

Though racial issues are apparently almost nonexistent in the novel, I kept in mind Toni Morrison's thesis that in America "matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (Morrison 9). Although Morrison considers that Welty writes about black people in "the way they should be written about" (qt McHaney np)<sup>2</sup>, in discussing *The Optimist's Daughter* one may call upon Morrison's questions: "how does literary utterance arrange itself when it tries to imagine an Africanist

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Willa Cather's statement: "whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there — that, one might say — is created" (837). Similarly in "Must the Novelist Crusade?", Welty states: "What distinguishes it [the novel] from journalism is that inherent in the novel is the possibility of a shared act of the imagination between its writer and its reader" (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 147). Further ahead Welty writes: "The novelist works neither to correct nor to condone, not at all to comfort, but to make what's told alive. He assumes at the start an enlightenment in his reader equal to his own, for they are hopefully on the point of taking off together from that base into the rather different world of the imagination" (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 152).

<sup>2</sup> According to Pearl McHaney, "in a 1977 interview, Toni Morrison named Eudora Welty as a fearless writer, explaining that Welty writes 'about black people in a way that few white men have ever been able to write. It's not patronizing, not romanticizing — it's the way they should be written about'" (qt McHaney np).

other? What are the signs, the codes, the literary strategies designed to accommodate this encounter?" (Morrison 16). Simultaneously, as a scholar who has been working on Ecocriticism and nature writing, I am also interested in the way the American South has been an invisible landscape. In contrast to the images portraying a landscape of rural bliss, simplicity and felicity, representing plantation life in the Old South, there existed varied landscapes in the region that remained invisible; strongly ideological, those images of bliss were intended to illustrate the superiority of the Southern social system.<sup>3</sup> The absence of African Americans from the depictions of harmonious southern landscapes shows the general invisibility of their lives.

However, to relate African Americans and nature may prove to be an interesting approach to American culture and literature, for though nature may represent danger to blacks,<sup>4</sup> to associate this community to the natural world and to agriculture emphasizes a context which gave them roots and direction. In "Slavery and African American Environmentalism", Mart Stewart suggests that most of slaves' working hours were spent in labor on the land, but this labor gave them knowledge of the land that was intimate and precise, and in turn had material, social, and political usefulness (Stewart 11). Before the mass migrations to Northern cities in the early 1900s, more than 90% of blacks were a people of the earth, and to grow

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<sup>3</sup> As noted by Susanne Dietzel, the absence of blacks from the U.S. visual and popular culture reinforces the idea that landscapes and representations of landscape are never 'natural' or realistic descriptions of the look of the land. They are always signifiers of culture, shaped by prevailing discourses of aesthetics, economics, politics and science, as well as by the natural environment itself. Therefore Dietzel suggests that blacks were intentionally absent from the visual images of the South because only one fraction of the landscape — that of the plantation or the garden, the site of Southern white hegemony — was to be represented in order to reinforce the image of the South as a region of a prelapsarian garden and a plantation space for white America (Dietzel 40-1).

<sup>4</sup> Many fugitive slaves sought their freedom in the wilderness, but that territory represented primarily a struggle for survival. Melvin Dixon expands on this theme, confirming that slaves looked for alternative landscapes, places outside the plantation where birds and roaming animals provided them with geographical and naturalistic referenced for freedom (17).

food and flowers was a way of fighting dehumanization; to see things growing from the earth confers hope and to watch plants rising from the land with no special tending reawakens the sense of wonder and reverence for life.

The perspective presented above aims at highlighting Missouri's context in *The Optimist's Daughter*, namely the symbolic relation between Missouri and the bird she helps to set free, for in it I find a vision proclaiming how the closeness to the nonhuman world may perform a life-affirming and spiritually healing role. Missouri has behind her a long tradition of the intense relationship between African Americans and the nonhuman world, for if in the wilderness they did not find the salvation of the world, it was nonetheless 'a site of healing, a highway to kinship, a place where salvation could be gained, either through worship in the holler, through the strengthening of kin connections or through stealing oneself away permanently' (Stewart 19). Therefore my aim is to underline that Missouri's role is relevant and linked to the idea of freedom and healing. To read Missouri's interior landscape, one glimpses into an undiminished human being, someone whose role in the narrative has at its core the cleaning of the house for the play of human emotions, an act clearly intertwined with a clear vision of the Mckelva's world. Missouri's fine intuition corresponds and highlights the motif of eyes and good vision present in the novel, and her hands add an additional interest to the pervasive symbol of the hands throughout the plot, clearly reinforcing the main strain in the novel: the intense and difficult birth of an artist.

The artist is Laurel Mckelva, a fabric designer in Chicago who comes to New Orleans due to her father's eyes surgery. He dies and she goes to Mount Salus, Mississippi, for his funeral. She was widowed twenty years earlier, her husband killed during World War II, but very little is known about her life in Chicago. The setting of the story is both her parent's house in Mount Salus and her own interior dwelling. As Ann Romines states, "Laurel seems to have been living on emotional hold; now she must confront her past, must identify and claim its value" (Romines 258).

When at the beginning of Part II Laurel arrives in Mout Salus with her father's coffin, many are the arms waiting to embrace and comfort her; to take her home. A warming homecoming, for Laura was encircled by old friends, happy to see her again though regretting the circumstances under

which she made her return. These embraces are a contrast to the deep solitude Laura felt in the first chapter, either in empty rooms, lonely streets, and hospital wards, as if she were a character in one of Edward Hopper's painting. In Part I, which takes place in New Orleans, the meeting between Laurel, her father and Fay, his father's new wife, was very constrained from an emotional point of view. Though Laurel came flying from Chicago when she knew about her father's eyes operation, the encounter between father and daughter is rather cold. Laurel does not approve of his marriage to Fay who she thinks to be frivolous and superficial. Instead of warm embraces, one sees hands touching arms and shoulders, evincing either human indifference or anticipating bad news. In contrast, the second part of the novel narrates Laurel's arrival at her hometown Mount Salus where neighbors and friends all showed affection and concern for Laurel and kept embracing her, strengthening the idea conveyed by all that in Mount Salus she would have a sheltered and protected life.<sup>5</sup>

Laurel arrives at night and therefore no maid is present; only Adele Courtland, an old friend, and neighbor, is in the house to help her. Missouri appears the next morning in the middle of the kitchen as expected, 'inevitably' as the first word of that section signals. The inevitability of her presence in the house tells the story of a family counting on black work in everyday tasks, but the expectation signals human affection as well; from the first moment, she is there, ready to give and take comfort. In this first encounter, it is Laurel who takes Missouri in her arms; there is no great emotion, just a plain embrace and the strong certainty of Missouri's presence, just like in the past when Laurel's mother lived in the house. After the first embrace, Laurel and Missouri had to confront the embarrassment of Fay's presence among them. Missouri's statement about Judge McKelva's motive for marrying Fay — 'He mightily enjoyed having him somebody to spoil' (OD 59) — might have helped Laurel to face her father's decision to marry Fay Chisom, but she is still too close to the general view that Judge McKelva married under his position, dishonoring her mother's memory. However, and as Jan Gretlund points out, Missouri

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<sup>5</sup> Inevitably, one thinks of the last paragraph in *One Writer's Beginnings*: "I am a writer who came of a sheltered life. A sheltered life can be a daring life as well" (114).

was right; Laurel fails to know her father, and does not understand that in his new wife he was seeking life, vitality and youthfulness.

Further ahead the novel will be structured dramatically with people coming and going, paying their respects to Judge McKelva (OD 62). The dialogue alternates between comedy and tragedy, as in one of Chekov's plays in which the trivial talk of everyday life resonates intense feelings and the deep mystery in common human lives. In the meantime, Missouri stays "back there" (OD 102) in the kitchen, which points towards Morrison's opinion that most Southern fiction black characters are relegated to a merely decorative place (Morrison 15, 16). Accordingly, Missouri's apron may be seen as a disguise to the person she is, so the reader only knows her through the tasks she performs; her own desires or views are nonexistent. She is there to reinforce the idea that things are as they should be, as they were in the past.

But if, on the one hand Missouri represents a connection to Laurel's past, yet, on the other, she is to perform a meaningful role in the changes which are to occur in Laurel's life. I wonder, however, why she is the only character with cemetery clay sticking to her heels (OD 93), a detail that from my point of view reiterates the heaviness of her own life, and also the racial prejudices which adhere to the blacks' lives. In this sense, her silent presence resonates with the symbolism of her name. Missouri, the name of a tributary river to the Mississippi, also known as the muddy river, may carry in it the weight of Southern history. A mixture of prejudice and tragedy, and therefore a symbol of the black lives in the South, the Missouri, like the Mississippi Langston Hughes refers to, is a river in which "sorrow, pity, pain,/ tears and blood/ mix like rain" (43).

If Missouri holds back during the moments in which the well-bred people of Mount Salus and the disquieting Chisom family come to the house, at the cemetery, after everyone is gone, she embraces Laurel and her grief (OD 93). Once more silent and speechless, the two women embrace each other, performing a gesture of communion and communication; they understand each other even if they do not use many words.

The reader may question Missouri's life, but apparently the stage is ready only to foreground her lady master's voice. However and as previously referred, in spite of her silent presence she is there to help Laurel find her own voice. In the fourth and last part of the novel Missouri's presence

becomes associated to the chimney swift and her role becomes aggrandized. The swifts here reinforce a pattern of escape and return and also the seasonal pattern of the plot: in spring swifts return and nature bears again, illustrating Ruth Kieft's statement about Welty's art being also a celebration of the natural world, an artistic territory where human crises and tragedies, the beautiful and the outrageous acts are counterpointed by the larger, steadying rhythms of nature (6). Implicit in the model presented by nature is the message that humans should be prepared to change and aspire to rebirth. In addition, birds are closely related to Laurel's birth as an artist and to an independent individual who manages to integrate all experiences and from them to construct a freer life. When Laurel sees a chimney swift in her father's house, she avoids it, keeping the bird trapped in the house, hence realizing what it is to be similarly trapped: the bird is frightened and cannot find its way out. As Jan Gretlund states, what Laurel realizes is that she has been a slave to the past, unable to see it perfectly and therefore to bear meaning to her present life (*Welty's Aesthetics* 202). Setting the bird free symbolizes Laurel's ability to reach enlightenment and leave behind the terrestrial heaviness; it means that she has set her version of the past "the whole solid past" (OD 178) free. Leaving the house and the breadboard to Fay, Laurel realizes that she has got vital tools in order to fight for a life of her own: she has got the power "of passion and imagination" (OD 178). She acknowledges the artist in her.

Calling once more on the imagery of birds, the domestic and social pigeons Laurel relates to her family and to the ties between them has to be replaced by novel and more individualistic birds; sometimes it is not enough "to eat out of each other's craws, swallowing down all over again what had been swallowed before" (OD 140). A migratory bird, the chimney swift, as opposed to the pigeon, better symbolizes the new life Laurel has to embrace. Indeed, the swift represents not only the urge to leave, but also the ability to repair its old house when spring comes again. Therefore, when memories return like spring, (OD 115), Laurel will be able to select those that will enrich her life: her father's optimism, her mother's creativity, and Philips's sensitive hands.

On one of the days she stays at her father's house, in a period of internal discoveries, Laurel works in the garden, near her mother's roses. While working on the land she looks upward to see and to listen to the

birds around, mockingbirds and cardinals. Not only is the attentive look towards the sky a premonition of her own creative flight and original song, a kind of paradigm for the artistic career, but it also metaphorically represents her imperative choice between the sweet music of the cardinals (OD 117) or the imitating sounds of the mocking bird, signaling a denial of the power of creativity and artistry. The imagery of birds, as Gaston Bachelard points out, is connected to images of mobility and ascension, contrasting to images that reinforce stability and definite forms (19). By relating themselves to the imagery of birds, and therefore to the possibility of movement, Laurel and Missouri share the dynamic energy required to ascend to the world of imagination and consequently to aggrandize their own spiritual realm. In this sense, both women have to free themselves from fixed stereotyped roles and traditions and to reinvent their own positions in society, for only by rebellion will they reach a voice of their own.

In fact, as I have been arguing, Laurel's maturity as an artist with a voice of her own runs parallel to the presence of birds throughout the novel; Laurel rejects a petrified past, one represented by the seagull she sees at the end of the first part, with wings fixed, like a stopped clock on a wall (OD 45), and adorns herself with the characteristics of vitality and capacity for change that other birds embody. But, as previously highlighted, Laurel's accomplishment is not separated from Missouri's affirmative and energetic role. Both women are active in setting the bird free, and if it is Laurel who releases it, a "tilting crescent being drawn back into the sky", it is Missouri who states: "all birds got to fly" (OD 168). Being an accomplice of Laurel, Missouri's sees no other way: "It's you and me" (OD 167); she helps to liberate the bird and she helps Laurel to see her way out as well. Imagining the two women contemplating the image of the bird ascending into the sky, one sees in its pattern of flight the same openness and disclosure that Welty believes to be the purpose of any plot defined by some human truth (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 48). The liberation of the bird anticipates Laurel's recognition that the past is "memory lived not in initial possession but in the freed hands, pardoned and freed, and in the heart that can empty but full again, in the patterns restored by dreams" (OD 179).

Welty could hardly ignore the racial tension in the South, and her own photographs of the lives of black and white sharecroppers struggling with the effects of the Great Depression were an indication of that



awareness, but like other Southern writers Welty decides not to enter into black consciousness. Clearly, it was not Welty's intention to work on Missouri's interior life because there was too much in the black southern souls that she might not know; instead she gives us glimpses, inviting further consideration, further seeing and hearing. Gretlund comments that Welty's aesthetics always involves a consideration of the people who lived or live in a given place (Gretlund, *Welty's Aesthetics* 190) and thus Welty could not erase the fact that, by the time she was writing, the South was a place of racial riots. On the other hand, and as Welty herself states, there is no political crusade in her novels, for: "The real crusader doesn't need to crusade; he writes about human beings (...) he tries to see a human being whole with all his wrong-headedness and all his right-headedness" (Gretlund, *Welty's Aesthetics* 253). This perspective gives credit to what Peggy Prenshaw sees as Welty's moral position concerning the race issues: she supports a respectful listening to the position of the other and a willingness to empathetically engage in it (Prenshaw 299).<sup>6</sup> This perspective is at the basis of Welty's words on Missouri: "In the (...) wrenching experiences that Laurel is going through by herself, Missouri's instincts are perfect. She is always sensitive to what is going on" (Gretlund, *Welty's Aesthetics* 251-252).

Subtly Missouri reinforces Laurel's progress role in the novel, helping her to liberate herself from her mother's worldview. Laurel was born in a region and in a family that saw the South as a world of matriarchs and Becky McKelva, her late mother, seems to still rule over the house and other people's lives. And though she lived with passion, reaching the realm of art through her gardening and her sewing, something that obviously her daughter inherits and expands, Laurel needs to reinvent a life of her own. Laurel's trajectory may be compared with the way black women in the South were using their own mothers' domestic knowledge to liberate them

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<sup>6</sup> In Welty's own words: "Most of the things I write about can be translated into personal relationships. My stories, I think, reflect the racial relationships — guilt is just one aspect of that... I write about all people. I think my characters are about half and half black and white" (Prenshaw 299). This observation also shows that "Welty possesses a sharply aware political consciousness but that she manifests it obliquely in her work" ("Political Thought" np).

from a past of imprisonment and to reach for an artistic future. In the autobiographical essay “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (written in 1974, just two years after the publication of Welty’s novel) Alice Walker signals the immense potentialities of the far-reaching world of creative black women, for their work in quilt-making or in gardening is seen as the work of anonymous artists who left their mark in the only materials they could afford, and in the only medium their position in society allowed them to use (Walker 239). Thus, Missouri’s silence omits what the future will certainly bring, since she herself is a character inserted in a rich tradition in which women were storytellers, preservers of food, and exemplary gardeners who, like Walker’s mother, transformed the rocky soil into flourishing gardens.

Welty did not crusade in her texts but she invests Missouri with dignity, the right intuition to understand Laurel, and a predisposition to love and to embrace. Thereby, and concerning race issues, Welty gives her own answer: one needs a way to remember and another to reach for freedom, confirming Richard Gray’s statement that it has never really been possible to talk about the South in the singular (Gray xv), for there are many different Souths, all of them recreated through language and imagination. And that’s what Welty has done; she has given the reader different perspectives on how life is defined in the South, though she never attempts a definite answer. What about the impenetrable silence involving Missouri’s own life? Does she have a family? A garden? Will she miss Laurel? The reader will never know, though the silent presence of Missouri speaks for itself. In the study of Prenshaw already cited, she uses Tzvetan Todorov’s ideas on political writing to highlight her view concerning Welty’s fiction: “By means of his writing, he is already engaged, since his works help humanity to find meaning in existence, and no struggle is greater than the struggle for meaning. All true works of art create values, and in so doing they are political (Prenshaw 8).

Let’s consider the moment when Laurel and Philip see the confluence of Ohio waters with those of the Mississippi: in that moment “all they could see was sky, water, birds, light, and confluence. It was the whole morning world” (OD 160) As Laurel comes to recognize, there is little besides the assumption that humanity is a part of this world, and that each person’s life direction is a contribution to the wholeness of it. Human

lives are like a river or “a line of birds flying in a V of their own”, moving to the same flow and to the same purpose, trying to find a meaning for their voyage, for their direction. As in her and Philip’s case, “they themselves were a part of the confluence” (OD 160). But for Laurel the most important fact is that these two rivers have a common pas, just like her and Philip’s lives, “from far back, generations, must have had common memories” (OD 161). The fact that these are the rivers that figure in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, accrues their symbolic meaning. The Mississippi was the river which challenged Huck with moral options, for he had to choose between his affection for Jim and the social rules which obliged him to deliver his black friend to the authorities. Ohio was the river they wanted to reach, but which they never did. Huck had to choose and so had America. In my opinion, the Missouri river contributes to reinforce the moral strength that a culture, and an individual, has to acquire in order to pursue the truth. In *The Optimist’s Daughter*, the black character Missouri mirrors this dilemma, inviting the reader to confront his/her own vision and to question which direction to take, which margin to reach for. Unlike Huck and Jim, Laurel manages to go North, liberating herself from the past imprisoning clutch; like them, she is on the way to learning what possibilities there are for forgiveness, compassion and love, escaping from a place which can be a libel against the individual artistic sensibility.<sup>7</sup> Laurel, like Huck, leaves Mount Salus searching for the Territory; Missouri, like Jim, stays, free and ennobled by understanding that it is necessary to reach out into Territories vacant of prejudice and confinement.

In Laurel’s intuition that human experience is shaped by confluence and that, like in a river, all tributary water courses are vital to the main

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<sup>7</sup> Other aspects could be referred concerning the relationships between Twain’s and Welty’s world, namely the relevance of oral culture for the two authors. To this aspect, I would like to add Shelly Fisher Fishkin’s pervasive question: Was Huck black? The answer to this question is related to the subliminal way the African American voices speak throughout the novel, or as Fishkin puts it: “The influence that African American speech patterns had on Southern speech in general and the ways in which a black child helped inspire the distinctive voice of Huck Finn make it plausible to explore the possible African-American roots of a style that we have come to view as quintessentially American” (Fishkin 49).

individual and community, one may read the confluence of multiracial and multicultural aspects of U.S. society and culture. Commenting on the “wonderful word *confluence*”, Welty says it testifies to one of the chief patterns of human experience — each of us moving, changing, with respect to others -; and she further adds that the greatest confluence of all is the individual human memory (Welty, *One Writer’s Beginning* 113). Human memory, like a river, and like the pattern of birds flying “in a V of their own” is a living thing, joining the fragments of the individual world, making them converge in the flow of all human lives.

Going back to Welty’s essay on Willa Cather, it is worth quoting the following passage: “We see human thought and feeling best and clearest by seeing it through something solid that our hands have made” (Welty, *Eye of the Story* 58). In *The Optimist’s Daughter*, the realm of order is achieved by characters who work with their hands, as Laurel’s married surname (Hand) underlines, pointing towards her and Philips’s profession as designers; manual labor is also connected with Becky, who sews and gardens. Missouri’s hands contribute both to the achievement of order in the Mckelva’s domestic world, and, in a symbolic way, they secure Laurel an healing internal balance. Thus, the waiting arms of Missouri contribute to Laurel’s discovery of the power of her own hands as instruments for the making of art. Missouri helps Laurel to find out that though her past is precious, now she has to move towards the future, embracing life dearly, and to fly away to territories of daring freedom. The last embrace between Laurel and Missouri denounces urgency: “Laurel pressed her [Missouri] quickly to her, sped down the steps to the car where the bridesmaids were waiting” (OD 180). Laurel is in a hurry, Missouri lets her go.

Implicitly Welty is saying that a person, a region, a country should not stagnate within the past; instead of imprisoning, the memory of the past should reshape and recreate a more fluid future. Instead of the color line division, an imaginary line like the one which separated the slave states of the South and the free states of the North, and that coincidentally acquired public visibility under the conflict related to the Missouri Compromise in the 1820, Welty proposes the thread of artistry. Through art, borders, lines, rivers and states are crossed again and again endless times, enabling all human beings to see and embrace a more unbounded life. Welty’s important crossing, like the many she made with her optimist father when travelling

to Ohio, as she describes in *One Writer's Beginnings*, was accomplished through language, a shelter from where she saw the main operations of the world: rivers seeking for confluence, birds seeking for a destination, individuals searching for relationship and human connection.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reads *The Optimist's Daughter* based on the symbolic, silent, and scarce presence of Missouri, the black housekeeper of the Mckelva's house. On the one hand, her presence in the novel is rare and subsidiary; on the other hand, her presence signals Laurel's sheltered life and her need for human connections, showing, as Peggy Prensshaw suggests, that Welty truly believes in "the human connection between freely operating individuals who engage issues that directly affect their lives". Attuned to the political and social codes of the racial South, the embraces between Laurel and Missouri are silent, but they are also a reinforcement of what Prensshaw designates as the "respectful listening to the position of the other".

Besides, this paper underlines the connection between Missouri and the birds, an association which corroborates Welty's predisposition to listen to the voice of Nature. In the novel, the birds' journeys intensify and anticipate the imminent flight Laurel is to take into another life, that of imagination and artistic independence. Their presence may also indicate Welty's intuition of a collective and racially-based desire for flight and freedom.

### KEYWORDS

Eudora Welty; *The Optimist's Daughter*; Missouri; Racial South; Nature; Imagination.

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### RESUMO

Este artigo sugere uma leitura de *The Optimist's Daughter*, de Eudora Welty, a partir da presença simbólica, silenciosa, e parca de Missouri, a empregada negra

que trabalha na casa dos Mckelva. Por um lado, a sua presença no romance é escassa e subsidiária, por outro lado, é um símbolo da vida protegida de Laurel e da sua necessidade de relações humanas. Para mais, como sugere Peggy Prenshaw, o modo como Welty lida com a questão racial demonstra que esta acredita na “conexão humana entre indivíduos que operam livremente e se envolvem em questões que afetam diretamente suas vidas”. Ou seja, as posições políticas mais relevantes são do foro individual e íntimo. Em sintonia com os códigos raciais, políticos e sociais do Sul, os abraços entre Laurel e Missouri, embora escassos e silenciosos, são também um reforço do que Prenshaw designa como a “escuta respeitosa da posição do outro”.

Esta reflexão sublinha igualmente a ligação entre Missouri e a presença de aves no romance, uma associação que reforça a predisposição de Welty para ouvir a voz da natureza. No romance, o movimento ascensional das aves intensifica e antecipa o iminente voo de Laurel para uma outra vida — da imaginação e da independência artística. A presença das aves poderá igualmente sugerir a compreensão de Welty relativamente à busca de afirmação e de liberdade de um colectivo racial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Eudora Welty; *The Optimist's Daughter*; Missouri; Sul e Raça; Natureza; Imaginação.

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# “We need to write with love”: Welty’s Political View during the Civil Rights Years

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## “We need to write with love”: Welty’s Political View during the Civil Rights Years

Reconciliation does not mean to sign an agreement with duplicity and cruelty. Reconciliation opposes all forms of ambition, without taking sides. Most of us want to take sides in each encounter or conflict. We distinguish right from wrong based on partial evidence gathered directly or by propaganda and hearsay. We need indignation in order to act, but indignation alone is not enough, even righteous, legitimate indignation. Our world does not lack people willing to throw themselves into action. What we need are people who are capable of loving, of not taking sides so that they can embrace the whole of reality.

Nath Hanh, *The Sun My Heart*, 128-129.

Eudora Welty wrote the essay “Must the Novelist Crusade?” in 1965, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, just two years after publishing “The Demonstrators”, a short story that also dealt with its contemporary context of production, something highly unusual in the writer’s canon. To characterize Welty’s stance in the historical moment under consideration I will focus on both texts, relating them to other sources whenever I find it productive and mutually illuminating. Taking into account that the author’s theoretical remarks emphasize the equivalence of the writing and reading processes, I will apply the motto cited in the title of my essay to these exegetic endeavors and read with love, highlighting the affirmative quality of the short story and the “compassionate political view” expressed in Welty’s aforementioned essay. Thus, I believe that the reflections upon “reconciliation” presented in the epigraph by the Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh help us to contextualize my approach.

“Must the Novelist Crusade?” propounds empathy as the mode for producing and deciphering fiction, endowing the creative process with ontological, gnosiological, and moral implications. As a Southern writer facing the anger of both the white supremacists and the Northern self-conscious integrationists, Welty was deeply affected by the destructiveness of the ideological war that tore the country apart. In this seminal essay the author maintains that even if the novelist and the crusader share the same instrument, language, their functions are radically different. Adopting a gentle irony, the writer starts by circumscribing the radical differences between literary and interventionist texts. On the one hand, fiction reveals the universal beauty and mystery of the human heart, it springs from courage and imagination, it portrays the individual integrated in a community, molded by an organic relation to the whole cosmos, and it is an act of love. On the other hand, the crusading novel is bound to a very particular historical moment, it erases ambiguity, for it obeys a restrictive ideological agenda, it fosters divisionism, dealing with “people not like us” (806) and it follows a Manichean logic, devoid of “inward emotion” (807).

Ultimately, the rhetoric of political correctness would lead to a totalitarian text, since the moral principles governing the righteous are similar:

And what, then, is to keep all novels by right-thinking persons from being pretty much alike? Or exactly alike? There would be little reason for present writers to keep on, no reason for the new writers to start... we might guess the reason the young write no fiction behind the Iron Curtain is the obvious fact that to be acceptable there, all novels must conform, and so must be alike, hence valueless. If the personal vision can be made to order, then we should lose, writer and reader alike, our own gift for perceiving, seeing through the fabric of everyday to what to each pair of eyes on earth is a unique thing... We should not even miss our vanished novelists. And if ever life became not worth writing fiction about, that... would be the first sign that it wasn't worth living. (807-808)

In the Cold War period, Welty deliberately politicizes her argument, speculating about the creative conditions in the socialist regimes and implicitly comparing the mid-sixties coercive interventionism in the USA to the censorship experienced by artists in totalitarian states. She then

enumerates the consequences of the demagogical imperative: it fractures the generational dynamics of artistic creativity, it violates individual freedom and the right to self-expression, it poses a threat to the vital impulse that feeds imagination, making life “[un]worth living”. In the excerpt “vision” refers to the individual’s “unique” perspective and also to the community of “visions”, to the relational process of artistic communication, deriving from love, “the *source* of... understanding” (812) that inspires the writer to create out of “abundance” (813), in “sympathy for the human condition” (812).<sup>1</sup>

Welty’s empathy informs both her writing and her photographs and it presupposes a humanitarian ethics of compassion, encompassing all human beings in their utter singularity. Moreover, her fictional universe is grounded on a holistic philosophy, akin to Buddhism, that “intimates the essential wholeness, not just of art, but of life, even while recognizing that her characters usually see only fragments” (Carson xiii).<sup>2</sup> The creative mind will be the tool to apprehend totality because it is able to perceive both union and distinction, making “traditional opposites exist in polar unity” (Carson viii) and subverting the dualist paradigm prevalent in Western thought since the Greek atomists. In reality, this other way of knowing does not come from detached analysis but stems from comprehension, in its etymological sense of “*tak*[ing] something and *join*[ing] *together* with it” (Nhat Hanh 34), thus abolishing the barriers between subject and object and conceiving knowledge as a process of participation (not mere codification) and an ultimate encounter with mystery.<sup>3</sup> The notion of interconnectedness extends to the entire cosmos, where “every part belongs

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<sup>1</sup> Welty also describes the writing and reading processes as acts of love in the essays “Place in Fiction” (787) and “Words into Fiction” (137).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Carson argues that there may have been several sources for Welty’s holistic vision, namely: i) the constitutive nature of creativity itself; ii) on a psychological level, the more inclusive feminine perspective, tending to consider identity as a continuum; iii) biographical elements, such as the Southern character and her upbringing; iv) her contemporary intellectual milieu, from the Theory of Relativity to Quantum Physics; v) possible influences from Eastern mysticism (xiv-xxii).

<sup>3</sup> Mortimer declares that in her fiction “Welty does not intend to *solve* the mystery but to *reveal* it” (107).

inseparably to a larger whole” (Carson xi), disturbing the boundaries between static categories, such as the human and the natural realms, and introducing a complex non-linear temporality.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that both Welty’s writing and her photographs reflect the same philosophical perspective demands for an inclusive methodological approach to her legacy, considering this “complex system” of verbal and visual texts in their dynamics of “reciprocal intelligibility” (Chouard “Retina of Time” 19). In fact, the artist’s photographic practice had a considerable impact on her fiction because it influenced its narrative strategies and it revealed its major thematic strands, helping the writer to understand the compassionate nature of her artistic purpose. In the preface to *One Time, One Place* (OTOP), a volume of photographs first published in 1971 that Pitavy-Souques considers to be the author’s answer to the Northern militants’ criticism of her apparently apolitical posture (41), Welty confides that her camera made her realize that her life mission “would be not to point the finger in judgment but to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other’s presence, each other’s wonder, each other’s human plight” (12). Welty’s photographs (yet to be studied in their totality) may thus be considered a “sketchbook” (Pitavy-Souques 34, Kempf 37) illustrating the development of the author’s mature vision and accounting for some of the distinctive traits of her fiction, namely: i) the use of epiphany and the careful framing of precise visual scenes in a narrative structured by a cumulative effect; ii) the lively Southern individuals and communities portrayed in her texts; iii) the author’s empathy towards all her characters, revealing their uniqueness and celebrating human connectedness.

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<sup>4</sup> Mortimer considers that Welty’s fictional perspective shares some similarities with the medieval worldview, and her “fictive [universe] (...) suggests a meaningful, cosmic interdependence among all things. She portrays this as a multilayered universe of coexisting realms in which patterns of significance are echoed regularly from one dimension of experience to the other” (39). Chouard makes a similar point when she alleges that in Welty’s oeuvre the body is the center of multiple conjunctions, a space “where aesthetics interact with ethics as physicality often assumes a metaphysical dimension... [besides the fact that the human body] may also be metaphorically identified with the geographical body, the cosmic body or even the body politic” (“The Body” 9).

Most of the pictures included in *OTOP, Photographs* (Ph, 1989) and (to a lesser extent) *Eudora Welty as Photographer* (EWP, 2009) are centered on the Mississippian black community and were taken between 1929-1936, the period when Welty started her career as a fiction writer. These images constitute a clear political statement because they thematize racial (di)vision framing the black population, paradoxically invisible in the Jim Crow era, i.e. unrepresentable except by stereotypes (Pollack "Round Table" 49). Though apparently inscribed in the grammar of racial imagery informing the FSA typology, defined by specific thematic approaches ("laboring bodies... poverty of the wounded proletarian... the noble agrarian" [*idem*]), Welty's photographs transcend this script, for they "[bring] African American beauty and imaginative play into focus... [as sites of] resistance to racial degradation" (Pollack "Round Table" 50). Having been captured from the privileged position of a white viewer in the Southern historical context during the 1930s, these images nonetheless confer agency to the subjects portrayed, suggesting a partnership in composition.<sup>5</sup> In stark contrast with the FSA anthropological and mostly demagogical parameters, Welty's presence is not intrusive and she deliberately chose not to decontextualize neither universalize her subjects, that are depicted as individuals immersed in their daily context. In general, these photographs: i) show oblique (not frontal) perspectives and are unposed; ii) have met with the subjects' explicit or implicit consent (Welty "Preface" 9);<sup>6</sup> iii) value individual stamina and joy in the face of adversity.

We may thus see these African American individuals "looking through... Welty's lens into the '60s and '70s" (MacNeil 11), since they are represented with the proud dignity that their descendants reclaimed a few decades later. The artist's deliberate "resistance to racial degradation" is especially clear in the couple of short stories written during the Civil Rights

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<sup>5</sup> Welty's extraordinary attention to the potential relationship of power involved in the act of photographing is also underlined by the fact that she turned many of her subjects into viewers, sending them prints of their own photographs (Ladd 163-64).

<sup>6</sup> In reality, Welty says that "the majority of... [her pictures] were snapped without the awareness of the subjects or with only their peripheral awareness... [and] the snapshots made with people's awareness are, for the most part, just as unposed" ("Preface" 9).

period and published by *The New Yorker* in 1963 and 1966— “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” and “The Demonstrators”. The first text was composed at one sitting on the night of the black Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers’ assassination in Jackson and came (exceptionally) out of “anger”, but it hyperbolizes Welty’s empathy, the capacity for “entering into the mind and inside the skin of [her] character[s]”, since she chose to incarnate the assassin telling his own version of the event.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, “The Demonstrators” “[seems] more a response to the general tenor of the times than to a specific inciting event” (Pingatore 406) though it also alludes to contemporary political facts, such as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement.<sup>8</sup> Set in Holden, Mississippi, a small-town marked by violence and stricture, as its toponymy indicates, it describes a middle-aged white doctor’s Saturday night tending to an old schoolteacher and to a black woman mortally wounded by her lover, who ends up dying in the protagonist’s presence too. The last section of the text foregrounds the racial prejudices inherent in the hegemonic discursive configurations, contrasting a reportorial biased newspaper account with the main narrative’s telling of the same story, an option that accentuates the text’s self-reflexivity.

Interestingly enough, some of the characters, sceneries, and situations in “The Demonstrators” were probably inspired by earlier encounters registered in Welty’s photographs. The story describes the black neighborhood of a Southern small-town and the domestic intimacy of one of its families in a tragic moment. It details the architecture of the houses, documented in several pictures taken in Jackson (Ph 61, 85), and it describes the synergy between neighbors and family members, testified by several photographs that show the affinity between siblings (Ph 49, 50, 53), the mother-child bonds (Ph 37, 43), and the lively interactions taking place

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<sup>7</sup> In *One Writer’s Beginnings*, Welty comments upon the motif behind the composition of the story: “all that absorbed me, though it started as outrage, was the necessity I felt for entering into the mind and inside the skin of a character who could hardly have been more alien or repugnant to me... and I don’t believe that my anger showed me anything about human character that my sympathy and rapport never had” (882-883).

<sup>8</sup> This situatedness is further underlined in *The Collected Stories*, where the title of the story is followed by its publication date, which is absent from the Library of America edition.



on the porches (Ph 38, 39, 40 and EWP 36) or on the front yards (Ph 59). The narrative also highlights the importance of the local church in the segregated society, comparing it to “a bedroom” (742), a space of introspection and peace amidst the tumultuous political context, and referring to “the sounds of music and dancing [coming from it] habitually” (*idem*), which brings to mind Welty’s series about the Holiness Church, portraying its members proudly posing for the camera or performing a ritualistic ceremony (Ph 104, 106, 107, 105). Indeed, religious institutions and its leaders played an instrumental role in the black community’s cohesion, a fact again emphasized when one of the character’s impending death is described, in opposition to the sick white characters’ isolation, as a shared passage accompanied by the preacher of the Holy Gospel Tabernacle, a “small black man... wearing heeltaps on his shoes” (741) that could be associated with yet another of Welty’s photographs (Ph 29). To conclude the dialogue between the artist’s visual legacy and this short story, I would like to quote two other photographs referring to specific details in the narrative — the pet guinea pigs (Ph 18), and the ice pick turned into a potential weapon (Ph 12), humorously brandished by a bootlegger in this particular photograph (Welty “Preface” 9 and “Welty and Photography” xxv).

Though it won the O. Henry Prize for 1968, “The Demonstrators” has not received much critical attention, and so far its readings have mainly explored the narrative’s tension, bleakness and despair (Harrison, Mark, Romines, Yaeger). Accepting Welty’s challenge to read with love, I aim to point out the affirmative quality of this story, simultaneously opening it up to an intertextual dialogue with some of the author’s texts. I will highlight the story’s politics of empathy and develop Ferguson’s argument that the text’s “play of cognitive dissonances” (45), diction and imagery connote love and hope, not only despair and bitterness.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The critic maintains that though the story oscillates between positive and negative poles, it is mainly hopeful in tone: “Imagery of natural death and natural renewal, images of community, order, and affection, of the joys of children in toys and celebrations, of color and light, determination and restfulness break through the darkness and sickness of the community, lifting the spirit from conflict and contempt into equilibrium and acceptance” (45).

Set in a referentially bounded context, a stylistic marker with deliberate political intentions, as we have seen, the story opens with the third person narrator presenting the protagonist through his professional title. Significantly, it is going to be Miss Marcia Pope, his old schoolteacher now bedridden, that names him: “Richard Strickland? I have it on my report that Irene Roberts is not where she belongs. Now which of you wants the whipping?” (733).<sup>10</sup> Even if the impotent call to authority by someone who “had a seizure every morning before breakfast” (*idem*), in the narrator’s humorous tone, makes this character somehow pathetic, I believe we should read Miss Pope in the light of other heroic teacher figures in the author’s fiction, namely Miss Julia Mortimer in *Losing Battles* and Miss Eckhart in the *Golden Apples*. Besides, it is striking that the excerpt describing the old lady closely resembles the passage in *One Writer’s Beginnings* that refers to Mrs. Welty’s last years, when confined to bed she still recited poetry: “Reciting her voice took on resonance and firmness, it rang with the old fervor, with ferocity even. She was teaching me one more, almost her last, lesson: emotions do not grow old.” (894). Miss Pope had also “retained her memory” (608) and “The more forcefully [she] declaimed, the more innocent grew her old face — the lines went right out” (*idem*). In both extracts the passion for literature is associated with strength in the face of adversity, with the impulse towards vitality that Welty praises in her preface to *OTOP* — “Trouble, even to the point of disaster, has its pale, and these defiant things of the spirit repeatedly go beyond it, joy the same as courage” (10). Furthermore, Miss Marcia Pope is said to “[have] carried, for forty years, a leather satchel bigger than the doctor’s bag” (733), a detail that asserts the teacher’s heavier professional responsibilities, subtly dislocating the site of power from the medical (mostly male) to the pedagogical (mostly female) realm.

So far the doctor seems to be shielded by routine, dealing with familiar situations in a somewhat detached (if diligent) manner, but soon he will begin a journey into the Underworld, guided by an unknown child

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<sup>10</sup> As always in Welty’s fiction, names have symbolic resonances: Marcia is phonetically close to “martial”, connoting the character’s resilience; her family name denotes authority; the doctor’s last name points towards the devastation that affects the community and the country.

into the black neighborhood, lying in complete darkness due to a power failure, the only light coming from the hell-like “vast shrouded cavern of the gin” (734). Unable to elicit any answers from the child, he drives through a surrealistic landscape where even the relative weight of the elements seems inverted: “His car lights threw into relief the dead goldenrod that stood along the road and made it look heavier than the bridge across the creek” (*idem*). The mystical quality of this midnight encounter is accentuated through the *chiaroscuro*, a technique borrowed from the visual arts that establishes an extreme contrast between dark and light areas in order to create a dramatic effect, which Welty appreciated in Goya’s oeuvre.<sup>11</sup> While it provides a visually accurate narrative surface, the *chiaroscuro* also plays a symbolic function, underlining the racial and economic boundaries that separate the doctor from his patient. This strategy is foregrounded when the protagonist self-consciously contrasts his white hand with the prevailing black skin that surrounds him, once he is inside the dying woman’s house: “The nipples of her breasts cast shadows that looked like figs... Sweat in the airless room... glazed his own white hand, his tapping fingers... The women’s faces coming nearer were streaked in the hot lamplight” (735).

On his arrival, Richard Strickland moved through a crowd of man getting bigger as “more people seemed to be moving from the nearby churchyard” (734), a growing community presence that testifies to solidarity and impotent voyeurism.<sup>12</sup> After crossing the threshold marked by a lamp “being held for him” (*idem*), the protagonist steps into a female universe,

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<sup>11</sup> Speaking about Hemingway’s stories, Welty praises his obstructionist methods and compares them to “a painting by Goya, who himself used light, action and morality dramatically... the bullring and the great wall of spectators are cut in diagonal halves by a great shadow of afternoon (unless you see it as the dark sliced away by the clear, golden light): half the action revealed and half hidden in dense, clotting shade”, (“Looking at Short Stories” 89-90). The author may have been referring to *Bullfight in a Divided Ring*, belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, and whose authorship is nowadays contested (“Bullfight in a Divided Ring”).

<sup>12</sup> The already packed room itself will receive more spectators as the narrative progresses: “While he was preparing the hypodermic, he was aware that more watchers, a row of them dressed in white with red banners like Ruby’s, were coming in to fill up the corners” (738).

in a darkened room punctuated by the theatrical illumination of this single source of light. Unable to distinguish any faces, he “experience[s] a radical otherness” (Harrison 94), since he occupies the paradoxical position of the observer being observed, a role reversal that will deconstruct his authoritarian position. Moreover, framed by newspapers (on the floor, in a path leading to the bed, and covering the walls) the body of the wounded woman resists the doctor’s effort to classify and appropriate it, foregrounding textuality, as Harrison cogently proves (96-99). Since he recurs to the wrong interpretative frame, the practitioner seems to miss “the right question” (736) for a while, and is mercilessly scorned by the disembodied voices in the dark room, a tragic chorus that watches and comments his actions. Even though he repeatedly tries to isolate Ruby from her family and neighbors (735), his interaction with her is mediated by several community members who instigate him to engage into a more participative observation, till he finally manages to recognize the apparently anonymous patient as his maid at the office.

The epistemological nature of the doctor’s quest is highlighted by the semantic field of vision (especially dense from page 737 to 740) and by his own perplexed question — “Am I supposed just to know?” (736). Nonetheless, this protest signals a progressive movement towards understanding, as the character starts following a deductive approach to the events which makes him guess the instrument used for the assault on Ruby and the name of her aggressor. Therefore the physician’s attitude evolves from an initial paternalistic position to an appeal to a communication pact, on the basis of trust and shared knowledge. He evokes the stories that Ruby’s family and neighbors know about his relationship with some of their own community’s most violent members, and the presumption that he would be able to recognize his interlocutors’ individual identities: “‘Dove Collins? I believe you. I’ve had to sew him up enough times on Sunday morning, you all know that,’ said the doctor. ‘I know Ruby, I know Dove, and if the lights would come back on I can tell you the names of the rest of you and you know it’” (737). Richard Strickland’s compassion will manifest when he carefully washes Ruby’s hand, a Christic gesture that may be read as a modest tribute to the embodied black subject, pointing towards the protagonist’s later reconnection with his own body: “while he stood there watching her, he lifted her hand and washed it — the wrist,

horny palm, blood-caked fingers one by one" (739).

At this point in the narrative, the pathos of Ruby's impending death will be increased by several disparate references to motherhood that seem to question the limits of love, its protective excesses verging on authority and its impotency in the face of loss. The practitioner recognizes his "anger as a mother's" (738), when the lamp is brought too close, seeming to "devour" (*idem*) his patient; the dying woman's baby is put near her, in an effort to stimulate her resistance, her "fight" (*idem*) for life, but she has slipped into unconsciousness; Ruby's mother resists acknowledging the gravity of the situation, insinuating that her daughter will still be able to rise her own child (739). The moribund woman's eyes accentuate the tragic nature of the human condition, since they are "filled with the unresponding gaze of ownership. She knew what she had" (*idem*), which suggests her attachment to the material bonds that will soon cease to define her identity, bringing to mind Miss Katie's exhaustive enumeration of her belongings at the moment of her death in "The Wanderers" (519-520). Alternatively, Ruby's look may stem from a positive reckoning of her life, from the certainty of belonging to a community, of being integrated in a generational continuum (in opposition with the doctor's sterile family). On the other hand, her helpless condition — "bleeding inside" (*idem*) — obliquely refers to the South's political state during the Civil Rights Years, here characterized by fractures at the individual and social levels.

Despite the fact that he is conscious of the futility of his efforts to save Ruby and that he keeps being bullied by the women who refuse to recognize his competence, Richard Strickland dismisses his own physical exhaustion and persists in fulfilling his mission as the sole physician in town, offering to come back if the anesthesia fails, though apparently unpaid for this work. His generosity will be rewarded because, at a time when even "the water supply... had been a source of trouble" (746), the female group accedes to quench his thirst — "Dr. Strickland drank with a thirst they all could and did follow" (740) — symbolically reconnecting him with vital sources. Then, just before leaving the claustrophobic room, he recognizes a figure from his youth, the "Angel of Departure", as Welty describes this character (OWB, 937-938), who seems to propitiate the development of his internal journey.

Once outdoors, the protagonist gets immersed in a phantasmagoric

scenery, a liminal space where the familiar landscape seems to dissolve into the vast cosmos:

When he stepped outside onto the porch, he saw that there was moonlight everywhere. Uninterrupted by any lights from Holden, it filled the whole country lying out there in the haze of the long rainless fall. He himself stood on the edge of Holden. Just one house and one church farther, the Delta began, and the cotton fields ran into the scattered paleness of a dimmed-out Milky Way. (741)

Richard Strickland is going to experience his first vision now, when he transfigures “a row of dresses hung up across the front of the house” (*idem*) into angelic presences that connect him with the most important female figures in his life. This image is ambivalent, though, since on the one hand the clothes appear to block the protagonist’s path, obstructing his movement and binding him to past mores (“they were hung again between him and the road”, *idem*); on the other hand they connect him with his familiar lineage, providing some peace in the midst of turmoil.

Referring to the white community’s recycled clothing and household items, Welty uses a surface detail to highlight the power structures inherent in the segregated Southern society, conferring a political valence to the domestic universe (Romines 116). Likewise, it is significant that the writer criticizes capitalistic rapacity referring to the mill’s pollution on culinary terms as a “cooking smell, like a dish ordered by a man with endless appetite” (742). In addition, the white detritus filling the landscape — “The telephone wires along the road were hung with white shreds of cotton, the sides of the road were strewn with them too... Pipes hung with streamers of lint fed into the moonlit gin” (*idem*) — serve as indexes of the economic system responsible for the social and racial inequalities pervasive in the Southern states.<sup>13</sup> Still the text inflects towards subjectivity, centering on the protagonist’s imaginative approach to the industrial scene, when he

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<sup>13</sup> I am extrapolating an argument used by Yaeger in *Dirt and Desire*: “literature by southern women explores a radically dislocated surface landscape filled with jagged white signifiers and pallid detritus that bespeaks a constant uneasiness about the meaning of whiteness” (20).

associates the wagons and trucks outside the mill with “the gypsy caravans and circus wagons of his father’s, or even his grandfather’s stories” (*idem*).

Rooted in a male lineage of storytellers and connected with the astral body connoting female intuition — “From the road, he saw the moon itself” (741) — Richard Strickland will recover a memory of love. During a brief moment of suspended action, the protagonist gets in touch with his emotional landscape, while a long train passing by seems to confer a “solid” quality to light, making it capable of physically moving objects — “a long beam of electric light came solid as a board from behind him to move forward along the long loading platform, to some bales of cotton standing on it, some of them tumbled against the others as if pushed by the light” (742). These are the signs of a deep internal movement that definitely shatters the physician’s professional persona, the numbness concealing his emotions under the imperative of duty. It is worth noting that the character’s heightened state of consciousness is first experienced on a physical level, through auditory and sensory perceptions, as he surrenders to a regressive state:

Presently the regular, slow creaking [of the train passing by] reminded the doctor of an old-fashioned porch swing holding lovers in the dark.

He had been carried a cup tonight that might have been his mother’s china or his wife’s mother... a thin, porcelain cup his lips and his fingers had recognized. In that house of murder, comfort had been brought to him at his request. After drinking from it he had all but reeled into a flock of dresses stretched wide-sleeved across the porch of that house like a child’s drawing of angels.

Faintly rocked by the passing train, he sat bent at the wheel of the car, and the feeling of well-being persisted. It increased, until he had come to the point of tears. (742-743)

Only now does the text provide some information about Dr. Strickland, through an analepsis condensing the desolation of his personal life, devoid of emotional ties now that his parents are dead and his wife has left him after their only daughter’s death, a few months before.

This deluge of memories includes yet another political reference to the Civil Rights Years, questioning the validity of the crusader’s approach,

with its Machiavellian manipulation of facts for the sake of persuasion at the service of an ideological cause. Highlighting the ethical complexity underlying the judgment of truth, the text again parallels the public and private realms, when Irene disparagingly compares the activist's strategy with her husband's option to withhold medical information in terminal cases. The incident of the broken glass "spread the length and breadth of [the Stricklands'] driveway" (744) denounces the violent methods used by both factions involved in the conflict, since this unclaimed retaliation could have been performed by either the white supremacists criticizing the doctor for having hosted a Northern agitator, or by the civil-rights activists blaming him for his condemnation of their actions. This threat to individual tranquility characterizes the social tension at the time<sup>14</sup> and echoes Welty's references to the accusatory long distance calls that "have waked most writers in the South from time to time" throughout the 1960s ("Must" 804). Violence leads to polarization and generates a destructive cycle that encompasses every American citizen, across geographical and racial borders, threatening individual autonomy. In her couple of uncollected stories dealing with the Civil Rights Years, the author depicts the pernicious effects of separation emphasizing both her male protagonists' oppressive sense of loneliness, lack of vitality and hopelessness.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, in "The Demonstrators" Richard Strickland briefly recovers a lost sense of identity in a world desacralized by spectacle, as the "sign that spelled out in empty sockets 'BROADWAY'" in the façade of the "shut-down movie house" (745) testifies:

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<sup>14</sup> For the sake of historical memory, and because racial and ethnic inequalities still affect minority groups in the US and elsewhere nowadays, it is worth consulting the comprehensive timeline of "The Civil Rights Movement".

<sup>15</sup> In "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" the narrator confesses: "I'm so tired of ever'thing in the world being just that hot to the touch!... There just ain't much going that's worth holding onto it no more" (730). In "The Demonstrators" Richard Strickland "thought he had been patient, but patience had made him tired. He was so increasingly tired, so sick and even bored with the bitterness, intractability that divided everybody and everything" (744).



And suddenly, tonight, things had seemed just the way they used to seem. He had felt as though someone had stopped him on the street and offered to carry his load for a while — had insisted on it — some old, trusted, half-forgotten family friend that he had lost sight of since youth. Was it the sensation, now returning, that there was still allowed to everybody on earth a *self* — savage, death-defying, private? The pounding of his heart was like the assault of hope, throwing itself against him without a stop, merciless. (744-745)

This passage has to be situated in the tradition of the lyrical short story — from Anton Chekhov to Kate Chopin, Katherine Mansfield, Isak Dinesen or Elizabeth Bowen, to name just a few storytellers that Welty admired — continued on in the magical realist approach in the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The protagonist experiences a revelatory moment that heals his fractured sense of self, integrating past and present. I believe that epiphany here does not necessarily serve to “[reveal] the dangers inherent in the centralizing impulse of modernist nostalgia” (Harrison 102), but stems instead from Welty’s spiritual perspective.<sup>16</sup> Addressing the modernist anxieties about the solitude of the individual lost in a cruel world ruled by the survival of the fittest, the author proposes the possibility of human cooperation in a community of mutually responsible human beings. As Prenshaw so eloquently maintained in “Eudora Welty’s Language of the Spirit”, throughout her fiction the writer proposes a revisionary theology, creating moments of disrupted self-consciousness filled with enlarged possibilities of mystical regeneration. Thus, this passage indicates

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Welty repeatedly defines herself on spiritual terms, beyond the limits of institutionalized religion; interviewed by Wheatley, for example, she avers: “I have a reverence toward, well, you can call it God, or something over and above—but I don’t like to be preached to any more than I like to be editorialized at” (“Writer’s Beginnings” 130). Moreover, in “Place in Fiction” she declares that “From the dawn of man’s imagination, place has enshrined the spirit” (787) being a “spiritual [home]” (794) that “heals” (795), and she also ascribes a spiritual quality to literary creativity—“when we think in terms of the spirit, which are the terms of writing” (793), “For the spirit of things is what is sought” (789).

the prospect of a symbolic rebirth, which is accentuated by an altered sense of temporality (“It seemed a long time that he had sat there”, [745]) and reinforced by the adjectives chosen to qualify this sense of selfhood: “savage”, or creative, as opposed to tamed, ordered by ideological imperatives; “death-defying”, or vital, as opposed to sick and destructive; “private”, or intimate, as opposed to centered on external principles.

The protagonist experiences the physical impact of his epiphany as nausea, though, and he seems unable to fully integrate this revelation. Not wanting to go back to the old routine represented by his house, he succumbs to escapism, initiating a circular movement through his neighborhood, now also affected by the power failure. Engulfed in darkness, the small-town ceases to be a familiar place, and the doctor becomes a stranger moving through a miniaturized scenery reduced to façades, reminiscent of Virgie’s description of MacLain when she last visits it on the verge of traveling, in “The Wanderers” (552-553). The *chiaroscuro* effect plays an important part in denaturalizing the description of the buildings and in transfiguring Dove Collins into a golden apparition, an image that has motivated radically different interpretations.<sup>17</sup> After all, the protagonist’s ramble had a purpose that he had already intuitively guessed — “What was there, who was there, to keep him from going home?” (745) — for the mortally wounded man was looking for him. It is noteworthy, of course, that this utterly vulnerable figure seeks refuge near the physician’s office and trusts him enough to ask for help. But tragic irony emerges once again and the text resounds in a larger dimension — the South, indeed the whole country, is trapped in a net of blood (paraphrasing Dove’s physical description) and there is no hiding place from the violence ravaging its society.

Dr. Strickland epitomizes the American restlessness during the Civil Rights Years epoch for he spends “the other half of the night” (746) answering phone calls from his patients; his abrupt answer to Eva Duckett Fairbrother’s concerns about her chronically ill husband may be read as a

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<sup>17</sup> Ferguson considers that Dove is “associated with elemental vitality”, representing a mythic “flower-god” and the folk “seal-lover” (51); Harrison disputes this reading, suggesting that this brutalized black body is perceived by the focalizing white character according to racist myths (105); Yaeger argues that the lyrically charged description of this figure questions the political basis of infrastructures (“Women Trashing”).

result of physical exhaustion or as the end of his duplicity, for “he is showing the vulnerability of all of them” (Welty “A Conversation” 260). This last character’s presentation with a full name illustrates the plutocracy of the Southern small-town, “often in the control or the grip... of a solid, powerful family... [which] makes it all the harder for any change to penetrate [a place] like that”, as Welty remarked (*idem*). This oblique comment upon the prevalent power structures in Holden, Mississippi, creates a suggestive context for the newspaper report with the local authorities’ version of the events related beforehand in the story. This text’s incoherence, with its poor syntax and the apparently irrelevant details interspersing the racially tinged account of the lovers’ deaths, bluntly shows “the eagerness of the white official population to disown any responsibility for the black community and its individual members” (Ferguson 53).

Having read the newspaper, oblivious of the cook who “had refilled his cup without him noticing” (749), another hint at the privileged white population’s need to expand their perception in order to include the so far invisible African American community, the doctor “[carries] his coffee out onto the little [back] porch” (749). This old habit points out the character’s emotional ties with his disabled child, whom he “had loved... and mourned... all her life” (743), and whose daybed used to be there. Richard Strickland’s last act of love will lie in his ability to imaginatively reconnect with his daughter and share her vision, when he contemplates a pair of flickers: “He was pretty sure that Sylvia had known the birds were there. Her eyes would follow birds when they flew across the garden” (749). After this brief poetic suspension, the doctor resumes his routine, expecting yet another difficult day ahead. The story closes with the protagonist’s reflections about the old schoolteacher’s resiliency, contrasted with the despondency affecting the rest of the town’s population, which may be read as a thematic resolution (Ferguson 54), in particular because Welty deliberately chose to use this tenacious figure to frame the narrative (“A Conversation”, 261). Furthermore, Miss Marcia Pope is associated to her fragrant “sweet-olive tree, solid as the bank building” (745), in a curious simile that equates the resistance of a plant with the supporting institution of American materialism; curiously, this reference also echoes the opening section of “The Wanderers”, where a blooming sweet-olive in Mrs. Stark’s front yard represents the continuity of Morgana’s matriarchal lineage (515).

Once again Welty dislocates the political to the private realm, a strategy not only due to the historical context that mediated her biographic experience and defined its potential models for action,<sup>18</sup> but also informed her spiritual beliefs, as I hope to have persuasively argued. Indeed, the artist defends that all meaning is private, requiring silence, concentration and commitment, the willingness to engage in a process of self-discovery beyond the security of dogma, “for life is *lived* in a private place; where it means anything is inside the mind and heart” (“Must” 809). Welty’s fictional universe derives from a holistic perspective that correlates micro and macrocosm, the private and the political, and suggests that to be human is to recognize that each one of us exists in a complex and dynamic system of interconnections. She thus refuses to take sides, since her ultimate artistic purpose is reconciliation, love not judgment, a position of non-aggressiveness well expressed by Thich Nhat Han’s considerations in the epigraph. “Must the Novelist Crusade?” alerts to the impending perils of alienation if the individual opinion gets submerged by “the voice of the crowd” (*idem*) and becomes instrumental to propaganda, ceasing to communicate in its zeal to convince, because the source of true understanding is love:

I think we need to write with love. Not in self-defense, not in hate, not in the mood of instruction, not in rebuttal, in any kind of militance, or in apology, but with love. Not in exorcisement, either, for this is to make the reader bear a thing for you.

Neither do I speak of writing forgivingly; out of love you can write with straight fury. It is the *source* of the understanding that I speak of; it’s this that determines its nature and its reach.  
(812)

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<sup>18</sup> The particular circumstances of the writer’s life were indeed significant in shaping her civic perspective, as Prenshaw details: “In the 1920s and 1930s authentic public political exchange was largely unavailable to Mississippians, especially to white women and blacks who were constrained by their ‘place’ in the social hierarchy... [The fact that Welty witnessed] a World War in the 1940s, McCarthyism in the 1950s, and the violent resistance to the civil rights movement... [throughout the] 1960s all greatly lessened whatever trust she had in the political macrocosm and bolstered her belief in the microcosm as the only efficacious, viable sphere of human understanding and negotiation” (“Transformation” 38).

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#### ABSTRACT

This essays applies Eudora Welty's theoretical remarks about the reading process, namely those presented in the essay "Must the Novelist Crusade?", to one of the short stories she wrote during the Civil Rights movement, "The Demonstrators". I argue that the writer adopts a compassionate, non-violent approach to the racial crisis especially acute in the Southern states, based on the belief that the political arena is concomitant with the individual sphere.

#### KEYWORDS

Eudora Welty; Civil Rights Movement; Literature and Politics; Compassion.

#### RESUMO

Este ensaio aplica as considerações teóricas de Eudora Welty, em particular aquelas que a autora apresenta no ensaio "Must the Novelist Crusade?", a um dos contos por si escritos durante o movimento dos Direitos Cívicos, "The Demonstrators". Argumento que a escritora adopta uma postura compassiva e não violenta perante a crise racial especialmente aguda nos estados do Sul, baseada na crença de que a arena política é concomitante com a esfera individual.

#### PALAVRAS CHAVE

Eudora Welty; Movimento dos Direitos Cívicos; Literatura e Política; Compaixão.

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# Eudora Welty: A View from Brazil

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## Eudora Welty: A View from Brazil

The literary critic Carol S. Manning notes many examples of total or partial invisibility of Southern women writers in the works of some critics (33). Richard H. King is one of them: in his book, covering the period of 1930-1955, he excludes all African American writers and all female writers because “they were not concerned primarily with the larger cultural, racial, and political themes that I take as my focus” (8). He excluded, that is, made invisible, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, and Flannery O’Connor, who were already known and prized in 1955, arguing that they did not “place the region at the center of their imaginative visions” (8). In spite of King and other critics’ myopia, and due to the contribution of feminist critics and other revisionists, the panorama of Southern literature produced by women changed considerably in the last four decades, paving the way for further researches in this field.

The invisibility noticed by King as regards women writers was also present in my Portuguese-English course when I was an undergraduate student at the Universidade Federal Fluminense - UFF in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in the period of 1968-1971. My first encounter with Southern literature was with the work of William Faulkner and his South. The American Literature Professor was very enthusiastic about his work: her doctoral thesis dealt with time in his novels. In addition to the regular courses on American literature in which Faulkner was inserted, she created an undergraduate optional course on his work which was given both in English and Portuguese, offered to undergraduate students from different departments, due to the many translations available. When I began my academic career at UFF as a trainee in 1972, I was influenced by her enthusiasm and passion for the South, which has always accompanied me and led me to participate in a post-graduation course titled “Southern

Women Writers: Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers” given by a Fulbright Professor at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro- UFRJ in 1985, part of a program whose aim was to provide a post-graduation American literature course to Brazilians, bringing scholars from different areas.<sup>1</sup> The impact of this course on me was so strong that I applied for a Fulbright scholarship for the year of 1986 at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, the famous Ole Miss. In 1994 I returned to it, with a scholarship from the Brazilian government to research for my doctoral thesis on Eudora Welty.<sup>2</sup>

When I came back to my University, I created two new optional undergraduate courses: Southern Women Writers and Southern Literature, besides including in the undergraduate and post-graduate programs those women writers King had excluded from his book, and the ones who began their career later. And from that time on I dedicated my academic life to Southern Studies, having had my doctorate on Welty, and my post-doctorate on Ruth McEnery Stuart, Mollie E. Moore Davis, and Grace King.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the outstanding position Eudora Welty occupies in the United States in the actual panorama of Southern Literature, to my knowledge we only have in Brazil one Master thesis and two doctoral theses on her

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1970s, in Rio de Janeiro and in Niterói there was no Master of Arts degree on American Literature, my thesis, concluded in 1977 at UFF, was on the work of a writer I also liked much, Dylan Thomas. As a matter of fact, there was a sort of rivalry between English and American literatures, the latter being considered minor. My professor, mentor, and friend, Selma Cecília Dantas Monteiro, fought bravely in order to have eight hours for each course on American literature and for having four semesters for it, the same amount covered by English literature.

<sup>2</sup> I had the great honor of interviewing her twice. The interview on humor is in the Appendix of my doctoral thesis, but part of it, titled “Eudora Welty and her sense of the comic” was published in the *Eudora Welty Newsletter*, vol. XXIV n. 2, Summer 2000. 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> My doctoral thesis is titled *The Presence of Humor in Eudora Welty's Novels*, and was presented at Universidade de São Paulo – USP, 1997. My post-doctoral thesis is titled *Far Beyond the Shadow of the Magnolias: Women's Space in American Southern Narrative Produced by Women in the Last Decade of the Nineteenth Century* and was presented at Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro – UERJ, 2003.

work, mine included.<sup>4</sup> Since the first time I laid my eyes on “A Worn Path” in that Fulbright course in Rio, I have presented many papers focusing on Welty’s novels and short stories in several conferences, in addition to publishing essays in journals and chapters in books, hence making her work more visible to academic audiences in different regions in Brazil.

As a matter of fact, the average Brazilian reader has only access to translations of two short stories and two novels. The short stories are “A Visit of Charity” [“Uma Visita de Caridade”] and “The Whistle” [“O Assovio”] and were included in anthologies of American short stories, the former in 1945 and the latter in 1998.<sup>5</sup> The two novels were translated into Portuguese only in the 90s: *Delta Wedding* [*Casamento no Delta*] published in 1991 and *The Optimist’s Daughter* [*A Filha do Otimista*] in 1997<sup>6</sup>.

What would possibly attract a Brazilian reader to a novel that deals with the American South written by a Southern woman writer? The answers are many and different, and I am aware that there is a myriad of possibilities. Nevertheless, based on my teaching experience and research, I will provide some: the popularity and high esteem of William Faulkner’s work; the fact that we, Brazilians, also have our “South” — which geographically is in the Northeast of Brazil — and an aristocratic past in

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<sup>4</sup> Noemia Davidovich Fryszman. *Fertility and Sterility in Eudora Welty’s Vision of the South: An Analysis of Some Stories*. Universidade de São Paulo-USP, 1983. Master thesis; Silvestre Böing. *A Tensão Fragmentária no Conto de Eudora Welty*. [The Fragmentary Tension in the Short Stories of Eudora Welty]. Universidade do Estado de São Paulo-UNESP, 1993. Doctoral thesis.

<sup>5</sup> “Uma Visita de Caridade”. Trans. Luis Jardim. *Os Norte-americanos: Antigos e Modernos* [Americans: Ancient and Modern]. Ed. Vinicius de Moraes. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Editora Leitura, 1945. “O Assovio”. Trans. Carmen Gago Alvares. *Os Herdeiros de Poe: Uma Antologia do Conto Norte Americano no Século XX*. [The Inheritors of Poe: An Anthology of the American Short Story in the XXth Century]. Ed. Munira Mutran. São Paulo: Olavobrás, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> *Casamento no Delta*. Trans. Sonia Coutinho. Introduction by Paul Binding. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1991. *A Filha do Otimista*. Trans. Aulyde Soares Rodrigues. Introduction by Helen McNeil. São Paulo: Mandarim, 1997. Both titles are literal translations of the original titles. Both introductions were written in London: the first in 1981 and the second in 1984.

which the agricultural economy of sugar cane depended on slavery. Another reason is related to the fact that the South is a geographical, historical, and mythical region much permeated by paradoxes and exclusions when seen in relation to other parts of this mosaic that is the United States. Or perhaps another, closer to our time, may be inferred from what the feminist geographer Linda McDowell states: the anxiety generated by globalization is decreasing and people are gradually becoming aware that “there are many signs of a continued, and even intensified, sense of locality in many parts of the world” (3). Therefore, the local, the different, attracts attention.

Another possibility that complements the latter could be the apprehension of other experiences and other cultural scripts for women in a place that developed a society known for its patriarchal rigidity concerning female roles and privileges in society. McDowell argues that “Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial — they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience.”(4) Thus, readers would be attracted to the South in order to verify how that place negotiated power relations and how it dealt with exclusion.

I always ask my students for their ideas about the American South and how they picture it. Most of them claim to have watched the movie *Gone with the Wind* (1939), run many times at TV Globo, a Brazilian television net.<sup>7</sup> Scarlett O’Hara is known and admired, offering the example of a woman who, like the Phoenix, is able to come to life again, resurrecting from her own ashes, providing hope and determination, characteristics highlighted by Margaret Mitchell when she wrote the homonym novel which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1936. In it, we see the portrayal of the *antebellum* days, the plantation system and its aristocracy, the Civil War and the Reconstruction period, in which all major political issues are interwoven and most of the time erased by the romance between Scarlett and Rhett Butler.

The questions often posed by Brazilian readers are: how different is the South from Brazil regarding exclusion and the paradoxical societal

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<sup>7</sup> When I was finishing this paper, *Gone with the Wind* was run again, on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2010, but on Cable TV.

ways of life? To what extent does the Brazilian woman differ from the Southern woman? Are there any elements that are present in both social constructions of women?

In order to understand the Southern woman it is important to remember the feminist critical appraisal by Judith Butler when she points out that “there is not a woman but many women, depending on the intersections of the geographic and cultural space, social class, sexuality, ethnicity, and race” (3-4). The Southern woman is a creation of the plantation system where the social roles of the Master, the Fair Lady, the Southern Belle, and the slaves were very well established, and difference was seen as immutable and inherited. The stereotype of the Southern white woman provided the image of an ideal woman who possessed high standards of purity, kindness, sociability, dependence, capacity of governing the house, the children, and the servants. According to that belief system, a higher degree of education would affect women’s brains, and make them less feminine and less adequate to meet their “real” roles of wives and mothers (Berkeley 1537). It is true that many of the attributes of the Southern patriarchal society are due to the influence of the Victorian era, but there is still an essential and specific component, i.e., the ideal of the Southern woman comprehended the very construction of the Southern identity, and to preserve it was to preserve the ideology of this society in which prevailed the notions of class, gender, and race (Lima 220).

Women’s History, this new and fundamental field of History, especially when the focus is the American South and the myth of the Old South, provides new elements to this discussion of the Southern woman before and after the Civil War, a devastating and yet promising watershed. Historian Nina Baym shows that with the advent of the war women had to play new social roles, creating and negotiating new spaces for their actions. Nonetheless, they were prey to various kinds of dissatisfaction, such as the feeling of inferiority in relation to men; the double standard of conduct imposed on the white woman of the elite, who was forced to occupy the niche of purity and to promote the sublimation of her own desire whereas the Master indulged in a life of pleasure and unbound possibilities; the resulting miscegenation; the absence of safer birth control mechanisms, which meant that the Fair Lady would spend over twenty years of her life in the role of mother; the existence of an education that

aimed to transform her into the mother and nurturer of the plantation owner; and the very existence of slavery. Another historian, Anne Firor Scott, presents several traits of the Southern woman collected in many speeches, novels, memoirs, and poems, in addition to Journals of the time, showing that the myth wanted this woman to be a paragon of virtue, with an entirely devoted life to her Lord and Master: "By the time they arrived at their teens most girls had absorbed the injunctions of the myth. One young woman wrote in her diary that she longed to die because she had not found a husband". And she added: "I know I would make a faithful, obedient wife, loving with all my heart, yielding entire trust in my husband" (7)<sup>8</sup>.

What the historical discourse unveils is the fact that the notions of gentility, the republican political ideals, and the evangelical religion changed the ideals of gender, forcing women to engage in a renegotiation of their roles during the Civil War, leaving behind the image of the weak and submissive Southern woman, trapped into the myth. But this myth is still present showing that even after the end of slavery the *antebellum* ideals continued to regulate social relations, especially those involving the Southern woman, as I found in my research project presented at my university that covered the last three decades of the 20th century, in five anthologies which aimed at presenting the most representative short stories of the period written by Southern writers.<sup>9</sup>

And now it is the time to ask some fundamental questions: how did

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<sup>8</sup> Another interesting construction is that of the Southern Gentleman, a mythical and social role very hard to follow. Some southern writers, Faulkner included, presented many characters that show this dilemma and its consequences.

<sup>9</sup> The title of the research project was "Re-writing the South: New Feminine Voices of the Contemporary Southern American Short Story" and the collections were edited by (1) Mary Ellis Gibson. *New Stories by Southern Women*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989; (2) Ben Forkner and Patrick Samway. *Stories of the Modern South*. New York: Penguin, 1995; (3) Susie Mee. *Downhome: An Anthology of Southern Women Writers*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1995; (4) Shannon Ravenel. *Best of the South*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1996, with the selection carried out by Anne Tyler from ten years of the anthology she organized annually, *New Stories from the South*; and (5) William L. Andrews. *The Literature of the New South: A Norton Anthology*. New York: Norton, 1997.



the work of Eudora Welty insert itself in this panorama? How did she respond to those ideals of the woman trapped in the myth of the Old South? What kind of woman is represented in her literature?

Born, raised and living in the South, she herself did not conform to the notion of Southern womanhood created by Southern society: she left the South in search of a career, returned home, did not marry, and became a writer. Inheritor of a pastoral legacy and of the agrarian cosmic vision of the *Southern Romance* of an eminently masculine tradition, she was able to denounce the faults and the frailty of the Southern patriarchal system, rebelling against it and presenting the chronicle of the South in her work.

With the publication of her two novels, Brazilian readers are offered a new portrayal of the South unveiled through the use of different modes and techniques, revealing her protean art. Welty helps to create a new Southern literary tradition in which the construction of the Southern feminine cultural identities are subtly disclosed. Her writings enable us to know the history of the South, its particular patriarchal system, and the different possibilities of this social/cultural construction that is defined as “a woman”. Her narrative strategies present how the Southern woman became gradually a human being with a voice, who created alternatives when fighting against the suffocating role established by tradition. As Anne Goodwin Jones highlights:

To have a voice is to have some control over one’s environment. (...) But in another sense — a sense familiar to writers — to have a voice is to have a self. Learning to express the self in language is intimately related to learning to be. Thus voicelessness may imply selflessness both in the familiar and in the more sinister meaning. (...) For southern women, particularly, the quality of voice reveals the condition of selfhood. (37)

To have a voice, to have a self. Is it not what women need and want? But not all of Welty’s characters in *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist’s Daughter* have a voice. However, there are rebels who teach us that even in such a patriarchal system based upon the ideal of the Southern womanhood some women wanted to tread new paths, even if at the cost of much pain. In these novels, the Southern woman trapped in the myth of *The Old South* only exists in the romantic past.

*Delta Wedding* was published in 1946 but its fictional time is 1923, because in that year nothing catastrophic happened in the Delta and so the family could be reunited. The novel is peopled by a diversity of female characters, who provide the reader with a variety of configurations. In this feminine world, Ellen Fairchild occupies a very important position: she comes from West Virginia to marry Battle Fairchild, the plantation owner. First considered as an outsider, she is gradually accepted as one of them because of her tenderness and loving heart. She chooses to be a mother and a wife. This same role will be followed by her seventeen-year old daughter Dabney, who brings a note of disruption to this model by marrying Troy Flavin, the plantation over-seer, a thirty-four year old man who actually represents a rural and pure type, a new blood that will bring vigor to the now anemic blood of the Fairchilds. Shelley, the eldest, wants to travel and to know the "world". She tries to read the latest literary success in the Delta, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned*, against her father's well-succeeded prohibition. Among the little daughters, India occupies a promising position: her power with language, her observation of people's reactions and her ability of telling stories may be a hint that she will be a representative of the new Southern moment. As regards the other family members, Mary Denis, Aunt Tempe's daughter, is another rebel: she marries a Yankee, leaves the South, and settles down in Illinois. Robbie Reid, George's wife who used to work in the small town store, represents the woman who fights for her love, even if all her husband's rich family is against her as an intruding, unwelcome outsider. And there is Laura, the nine-year old girl who lost her mother and feels as an outsider, too. There are also other women who resist change and deny the eternal flowing of time: Aunt Mac and Aunt Shannon. And, finally, the lovely aunts, Primrose and Jim Allen, who never married and try to compensate for their fragility using a powerful language, and maintaining tradition alive.

In *Delta Wedding*, Welty depicts the change that gradually invades Shellmound, destroying the insularity of the Fairchilds and showing the decadence of the plantation system, due to the new times and the failure of Battle Fairchild as a plantation owner. Fertility and celebration are the novel's primary components; lyricism prevails but humor also permeates the narrative, reminding the reader that this is a story from the South where the oral tradition of storytelling has strong roots. Since the mode chosen

is the comic, the reader is offered a happy ending, pointing to the future and embodied in the pregnancies of Ellen and Robbie.

In *The Optimist's Daughter*, published in 1972 and winner of the Pulitzer Prize, the reader is able to accompany the tension between the old and the new, the aristocratic and the average Southern world. The list of feminine characters is small, having at its center Laurel McKelva Hand who lives and works as a professional designer of fabrics in Chicago, but who must come back to Mount Salus, Mississippi, because of her father's illness. Laurel married a Yankee who died in the war and the community eyes her with suspicion as for them she is a woman who should not have left the South, leaving behind an old father free to marry a woman from an inferior social class, a theme which is a *motif* in Welty's writings.

*The Optimist's Daughter* presents this portrayal of the Southern woman who considers herself an outsider and is also seen as such. When Welty created Laurel as a character who chose to find a new place to live, who believed in personal fulfillment away from home, and who chose to marry a Yankee, she was dealing with some crucial problems the South was then facing. And when Laurel revisits her past and is reconciled to it, the reader is able to recognize her strength and determination, and wants her to be happy. The reader knows she deserves this because she was able to confront reality and to get rid of illusion, carrying in her heart the South not as a burden, not as a guilty memory, but as the very reason to keep on, searching for what she believes to be best for her. Truly, the beautiful and revealing moments of the past will enable her to live and understand her present and look towards the future.

Up to now<sup>10</sup>, these are the only examples of Welty's fiction available to Brazilian readers. If we consider the fictional discourse as legitimator and creator of new gender subjectivities, we can argue that Welty provides new feminine scripts in her fictional universe, dealing with new perceptions of womanhood. By showing how the Southern feminine subject underwent many phases in search of an identity, and by providing a positive and healing fictional universe in which life and the feminine world are celebrated, Welty's writings are of extreme value for readers in all countries,

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<sup>10</sup> This article was written in 2010.

in all cities, in all towns, in all villages, in all hamlets where the majority of women are still beginning their fight in order to have their selfhood, or are struggling to maintain it.

Eudora Welty is certainly a safe but intriguing and inspiring harbor in the dark night. Her generous art embraces men and women with passion, sympathy, love, a caring heart and understanding since that day in Tishomingo County when she decided to have a voice, parting the curtain of indifference that separates us all.

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### ABSTRACT

Using different modes and techniques, Eudora Welty created a new Southern literary tradition in which the processes of the construction of the Southern feminine cultural identities are unveiled. Her narrative strategies show how the Southern woman became gradually a human being with a voice, able to create alternatives to the paradoxical and suffocating role of women established by the Southern patriarchal system rooted in the ideals forged by the myth of the Old South. Thus, our purpose in this essay is to present her two novels translated into Portuguese in Brazil, focusing on her portrayal of women and their capacity to create new feminine scripts.

### KEYWORDS

Eudora Welty; Southern Woman; Old South; Brazil; New Feminine Scripts.

### RESUMO

Usando diferentes técnicas e modos, Eudora Welty criou uma nova tradição literária sulista em que os processos de construção das identidades culturais femininas são revelados. Suas estratégias narrativas mostram como essa mulher transformou-se gradualmente num ser humano com uma voz, capaz de criar alternativas para o papel paradoxal e sufocante da mulher estabelecido por um sistema patriarcal enraizado nos ideais forjados pelo mito do Velho Sul. Assim, nosso objetivo neste ensaio é apresentar seus dois romances traduzidos para o português no Brasil, focalizando a representação das mulheres e sua capacidade de criar novos roteiros femininos.

### PALAVRAS CHAVE

Eudora Welty; Mulher Sulista; Velho Sul; Brasil; Novos Roteiros Femininos.

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# Versions of Insight: Eudora Welty's Essays

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## Versions of Insight: Eudora Welty's Essays

Eudora Welty's non-fiction was published over many years. The most successful essays were collected and some of them were collected more than once, often under new titles. At the end of its entry in a collection it is customary to add the year of its first publication. But it would make the life of a Welty scholar much easier if the exact year of the version being read were added instead; because so much was deleted, added, and rewritten from version to version.

We should go back and read earlier versions of Welty's essays, as she had other, sometimes very personal and often non-critical reasons, for changing her essays over the years. So much insight is lost if we do not retrieve, and therefore forget, brilliant Welty passages in early publications of her essays and reviews. And we do forget, because it is so much easier to use the available collected editions than to accept the rather arduous job of trying to get a copy of an earlier version, at times from small and now perhaps forgotten magazines, periodicals, and newspapers, such as *Bozart-Westminster*, *New York Post*, *Concept*, *Capital Reporter*, *Silhouette*, *Critical Inquiry*, *American Education*, *The Spectator* (not the British one), *Jackson Daily News*, *Magazine of Art*, *Junior League Magazine*, *The Archive*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, *The Clarion Ledger*, or *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters*.

In April 1978 Eudora Welty enriched the lives of her many faithful readers by publishing *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews*. It is an obvious advantage to have so much of Welty's non-fiction collected in one volume and I reviewed the appearance of *The Eye of the Story* with enthusiasm in *The Southern Humanities Review*. I did miss Eudora Welty's amusing satire of the magazine *Popular Mechanics*, "Women!!

Make Turban in Own Home!" (1941), the fine essay on the nature of the fairy tale "And They All Lived Happily Ever After" (1963), and above all the wonderfully poetic "The Abode of Summer" from *Harper's Bazaar* (1952), which spawns sentences on Southern summers such as:

Summer is the time when Southerners are South, where they live; and South is where it is summertime most.... The South's Summer is the heart of Summer. Those ribbonby afternoons of childhood (it is the children who stir in afternoons) live in our memory.... Southern Summer is nostalgic, because even when it happens it's dreamlike.... We do not fight Summer, we persuade it; it is our own, we have learned measures, little ways to accommodate it, from which we take virtue. (50, 115)

The fact that "Fairy Tale of the Natchez Trace" was collected by Eudora Welty in *The Eye of the Story*, does perhaps explain the absence of one of my favorites, but it was no real consolation at the time. Fortunately Pearl McHaney's useful collection *Eudora Welty: Occasions* (2009) includes the three essays that I missed, but now the second one appears as "On Fairy Tales." I see new titles as a specific problem in Welty scholarship, the reference here is still to the year 1963, but the critic is forced to think: who changed the title? And the critic has to go back to the original "And They All Lived Happily Ever After" to see what else has been changed since the first publication of the essay, and wonder: by whom?

The publication of *Occasions* was a necessary and most welcome step toward better-informed Welty scholarship in the future. Its publication brings home the point that for thirty-one years Welty critics have had to rely primarily on the selection of non-fiction anthologized in *The Eye of the Story*; unless the scholar or critic had the time and the resources to find and collect the many excellent but uncollected non-fiction texts by Welty. It is difficult to estimate the resulting effect the potential damage to Welty scholarship during the three decades in between the two collections.

Over the years it has become clear to me that the advantage of having a book of non-fiction collected by the author herself is somewhat tempered by the obvious lack of scholarly notes. My first interview with Miss Welty was recorded in February and June of 1978, and although there

are comments on *The Eye of the Story* at the end of the published version (Gretlund 255-56), I deleted one question from the interview. I also asked the following: "Have you revised any of the essays for the collection?" Miss Welty answered:

No, I don't think that's really fair. I did the best I could when I wrote them. I *have* cut some of them. There was "Place in Fiction," which I worked the hardest on. I really think it is probably the best. I cut out a part in there that is dated, about a certain kind of novel that was being written back in the 50s, which is not being written now. I think I called it "the Isle of Capri novel," a sort of escape fiction.

This statement is true in a general sense; but I took it out, because it does not allow for changes that the literary scholar will notice. Changes worth noticing are that the essay "The Radiance of Jane Austen" had been expanded and improved since it first appeared as "A Note on Jane Austen" in the *Shenandoah*, in the spring of 1969, and that the comparison with William Faulkner was cut from the essay "Henry Green: Novelist of the Imagination," which had first appeared in the *Texas Quarterly* in the Fall of 1961. Originally the essay on Henry Green had a provoking and insightful twelve-sentence comparison with Faulkner's achievement that also illuminates his excellence. So even though Welty warns against fishing sentences out of context, let me quote three sentences that are too good to consign to permanent oblivion from the last-paragraph-but-one of this very essay. Sentences that were not collected in *The Eye of the Story* version:

With all their differences, it is with William Faulkner that I see him [Henry Green] holding anything at all in common today. Each of these born romantic writers has back of an intensely personal and complex style an intimate, firm, and uninhibiting knowledge of the complicated social structure he is part of and writes in, and an unquestioned fidelity to it, the ear for its speech, the eye for its landscape. Each takes over by poetic means his tract of the physical world. (255)

What Miss Welty often did was, of course, to move material such as the comments on Faulkner from essay to essay, and now her various comments

on the other great Mississippian writer have been collected in one volume.<sup>1</sup> So it is not that Welty's observations are lost, often they are just no longer in the present version of the essay or review where they first appeared. What the Welty critic needs is a scholarly edition of *The Eye of the Story* that clearly indicates deletions, additions, and rewritings of the texts, and above all the dates of the changes. A writer has the right and almost the obligation to change her mind on some topics over the years, and *it makes a difference* whether we are reading Welty's comments and opinions from the 1930-40s or from the 1980-90s.

The reader of *The Eye of the Story* probably does not know that "A Pageant of Birds," dated 1943 in the collection, is actually a revised version from December 1974, when it was published separately. Similarly, we are not told that the review of Isak Dinesen's *Last Tales* is a cut and revised version of the *NYTBR* review, which was titled "A Touch That's Magic." The title was probably dropped to make it easier to identify the review; but not all revisions can be seen as improvements and the changes should have been indicated. Today's reader may well *not* know the original December 1957 ending of "A Sweet Devouring," which in *Mademoiselle* reads: "And then I found it was nice to come home and read *A Christmas Carol*." In the collected version Welty goes home to read Mark Twain, and she is happy that his twenty-four volumes are not a series. The original choice of Charles Dickens made sense for a Christmas publication, and Welty certainly had the right to exchange *A Christmas Carol* with volumes by Mark Twain; but the reader should be told and the critic needs to know the fact. The pit-fall for the critic caught in the web of many published versions of the same—but now changed—essay, is that he will be referring to the year of its first publication, even though he is actually reading and writing about a changed version from some other year.

*The Eye of the Story* demonstrates that among Welty's favorite writers were William Faulkner, E. M. Forster, Elizabeth Bowen, Virginia Woolf, Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), S. J. Perelman, and Anton Chekhov, — not necessarily in that order. Welty had written several reviews of books

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<sup>1</sup> Eudora Welty, *Eudora Welty on William Faulkner*. Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2003.

by Virginia Woolf, and for the collection she had to drop some; such as her review of Woolf's *A Haunted House, and Other Short Stories* (1944),<sup>2</sup> which was so dear to Welty that she only cut it at the proof reading stage. A good number of Welty's book reviews remain uncollected; it would be helpful for the Welty scholar to have all her original book reviews, *in their original state*, in one collection. The writers Welty chose to review often set the standard against which Welty measured other writers. In her 1977 essay on Chekhov, she wrote: "The depth of Chekhov's feeling for man is the very element out of which his stories spring, out of which they draw their life" (*Eye* 78). This is what drew her to the Russian writer, and it is not surprising for the same can be said about her own fiction. Welty celebrated her literary heroes and was deeply concerned about their reputations. In her 1973 review of E. M. Forster's *The Life to Come, and Other Stories*, Welty took a stand against the tendency to rewrite critical history in the light of posthumous information about Forster's sexual inclination: "It will be sad if the aspect of homosexuality, which kept Forster's stories from reaching print in his own day, turns out to be their only focus of interest for today's readers" (*Eye* 232).

Eudora Welty demanded that a critic who approaches a writer and his or her work has feelings and imagination. She felt qualified to review other writers, she told me, because she had a fellow feeling for fiction writers:

I'm really trying to get at what I think they are trying to do. I am not trying to take something there and put it here, I am trying to understand what *they* did. I like it when someone writes that way about me, which many critics do. On the whole, I feel that I really do approach other fiction writers with the feeling of a fiction writer, instead of the feeling of a critic. I like to write about the processes of writing that I have discovered through my work, and what I think I have learned reading others. (Gretlund 255)

The section "On Writing" is the durable part of *The Eye of the Story*. There is the plea *not* to reduce fiction to propaganda in "Must the Novelist

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<sup>2</sup> "Mirrors for Reality," *New York Times Book Review*, 16 April, 1944, p. 3.

Crusade?" (1965) that sports the statement: "fiction is stone-deaf to argument," which seems paradoxical considering "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" and other Welty stories (*Eye* 149). A humorous essay titled "Is Phoenix Jackson's Grandson Really Dead?" (1974), refers to Welty's own short story "A Worn Path," and is one of only two essays in the collection in which she discusses her own work. "Writing and Analyzing a Story" is the other, which discusses her short story "No Place for You, My Love." The essay was originally titled "How I Write" (1955) and was, as were most of the essays in this section, thoroughly rewritten for the collection (though it still has '1955' as the date of composition). "Place in Fiction" has also been reworked; the praise of Faulkner's sense of place has been strengthened, the comments on "the stranger within the gates" have been expanded, and Welty has labored lovingly on the ending of her most famous essay.

To illustrate the instability of a text, it will make sense to look at the career of one her short texts. I have chosen to focus on Welty's important little book on *Short Stories* from 1950 to see it in relation to *The Eye of the Story*, with the idea of studying the history and the development of this text between 1950 and 1978. The essay reads almost as a blueprint for a course on the development of the short story. It was first delivered as a talk by Welty at the University of Washington in July 1947, and its first title was "Some Views on the Reading and Writing of Short Stories." The essay was first published as "The Reading and Writing of Short Stories" and appeared in two issues of the *Atlantic* in February and March, 1949; it was about seven pages long. But in January of 1950 the expanded and further rewritten essay was given separate publication as *Short Stories*, from Harcourt, Brace and Company, and at that time it was fifty short pages long. Then it was collected, greatly revised and appeared as "The Short Story" in *Three Papers* from Smith College in 1962, where it takes up about twenty pages. Its final publication, so far, is in the collection *The Eye of the Story*, where it appears as "Looking at Short Stories," again heavily revised by Welty.

If we focus on the 1950 version, *Short Stories*, we will see that Welty's favorite writers are present, but there are also others. What interests Welty is the communication, the exchanges, between author and readers. It is obvious that she is looking for a continuing reevaluation of interpretive

assumptions. The sequence of the short stories is the following: Ernest Hemingway's "Indian Camp" for its "famous use of conversation"; S. J. Perelman's "Idol's Eye" for his gorgeous humor; Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" for its playful plot; Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill" for the fact that it has *one* character in *one* situation; Anton Chekhov's "The Darling" for boundless and minute perception; D. H. Lawrence's narrative for its "unmitigated shapelessness," and in "The Fox" for his appeal to the senses; Virginia Woolf's "Searchlight" in which the light is the main character; William Faulkner's "The Bear" for achieving "the startling reality and nearness of the outside world"; Henry James' "The Real Thing" for the disparity between integrity and plausibility. It is worth noting that Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, and especially William Faulkner get considerably more space than the other writers.

If we consider the revised contents of the 1978 essay "Looking at Short Stories," it quickly becomes obvious that there are essential changes and cuts. Ernest Hemingway is still in the text, whereas S. J. Perelman has been taken out. The Stephen Crane section has been shortened and Katherine Mansfield's presence has been noticeably reduced. Virginia Woolf has about a page. Anton Chekhov, D. H. Lawrence, and William Faulkner are present and still dominate the essay; but Henry James has been removed entirely.

The only reason why I bother to sum up these facts is that they imply an answer to my initial question: does it matter what edition of a text we read? I hope the above demonstrates that it makes a world of difference. And this is the reason why we should not refer to a text by Eudora Welty without indicating exactly what version we are reading, which can be done quite simply by adding the correct year of publication. It is *not* enough, and only confusing, to merely offer the year of the publication of the very first version of a given Welty text. And we should dismiss our foolish notion that the collected version of an essay is necessarily the best. Often it is not.

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**ABSTRACT**

With the publication history of Eudora Welty's non-fiction, it is demonstrated how important it is to refer to the actual year of publication and not just the year of the first version of a given text. In fact, most published texts exist in numerous versions; furthermore this editorial option results in poor scholarship, creates much unnecessary confusion, and deprives readers of the version of the text they want.

**KEYWORDS**

Eudora Welty; Publication Year; Versions of a Text; Non-fiction.

**RESUMO**

Com a publicação dos ensaios de Eudora Welty, fica demonstrada a importância de se referir o ano exato de publicação e não apenas o ano da primeira versão de um dado texto. De facto, muitos dos textos publicados existem em diversas versões; para mais, esta opção editorial origina uma investigação pouco cuidada, cria confusão desnecessária e priva os leitores da versão do texto que procuram.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Eudora Welty; Ano de Publicação; Versões de um Texto; Escrita Não-Ficcional.

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# Definitely not a snapshot. On Welty's *Helena Arden*

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## Definitely not a snapshot. On Welty's *Helena Arden*

**E**udora Welty's photographs depicting the American South, its faces, bodies, lines, spaces, and atmospheres, have been celebrated and acknowledged as snapshots, a sign that carries a deep ambiguity because it simultaneously highlights casualness and conceals an ethic attitude and an aesthetic concept.

Francis O'Connor ponders on this word and unveils its meaning vis-à-vis the artist's relationship with the object (sitter?): 'Welty always referred to her photographs as 'snapshots.' This term was not a self-effacing assessment. It was, instead, a statement of high intention. She valued the unpredictability of the moment.' (O'Connor 36). In order to confirm her statement she quotes the author on this topic:

They [the snapshots] were taken spontaneously — to catch something as I came upon it, something that spoke of the life going around me. A snapshot's now or never...

The human face and the human body are eloquent in themselves, and stubborn and wayward, and a snapshot is a moment's glimpse (as a story may be a long look, a growing contemplation) into what never stops moving, never ceases to express for itself something of our common feeling. (36)

Welty's emphasis on the importance of capturing the fleeing, transient instant derives from the decorous relationship that she maintains with her object. Hers actually is an attitude of respect that refuses to explore the social and political pathos of the Depression. Although the snapshot reveals a tension, in my view this tension lies within the axis photographer-sitter, not within the axis sitter-beholder. This is the reason why Sandra S. Phillips claims that Welty 'used the word "snapshot" to confirm a personal record, for her eyes and mind only, like a private conversation or a sharing secret' (Phillips 77).

Bearing in mind Roland Barthes' distinction between *studium* and *punctum*, we come to the conclusion that instead of exploring the impact of the social and cultural codes which are summoned by the *studium*, Welty plays with the '*punctum* effects which perturb the scope of their *studium*,' because they 'are poignant, moving and/or striking.' (Chouard 21) Her deep involvement — should we say personal projection? — with her object(s) somehow turns her absence from the captured scene into a poignant presence. And the secret of this presence lies in the *punctum*.

Maybe with this personal investment in mind Danièle Pitavy-Souques 'insist[s] ... on identifying the images she took of others as a series of self-portraits of the artist, in a way — and Welty knew it instinctively — those photographs into which she put so much of herself were the fragments of a deconstructed self-portrait.' (Pitavy-Souques [2] 108) The investigation on the author's projection (personal investment) on her works may be very challenging but my aim is a different one.

Having reached a stage where the notion of self-portrait stands out in connection with the snapshot and within the axis photographer-sitter, I will approach now *Helena Arden*, a singular and marginal photograph within Welty's photographic work. Hopefully I will show how her choice of an explicit self-portrait meant an emphasis on a different axis, the axis sitter-beholder, and eventually a refusal of the snapshot as she usually conceived it.

In *Helena Arden* Welty exposes herself draped in a sheet, looking sideways, maybe towards a mirror, and *applying* with a tooth brush what is supposed to be some kind of cosmetics. In front of her stands a row of cans: NU Shine Black, Flit, Sunbrite Cleanser, Campbells Pea Soup, Irradol Malt. Under this row Helena Arden, the title, so to speak, appears in a kind of mosaic made up by single letters.

The artist herself reveals the personal and Historical context within which this photograph was conceived:

During the Depression we made our own entertainment and one of our entertainments was to take funny pictures. We dressed up a lot, something to do at night. Even when we had little dinner parties for each other with four or six people, we wore long dresses. And everybody came, you know, we came as somebody, like parties in Vanity Fair, people like Lady

Adby, and the Lunts, all the people that Cecil Beaton photographed doing things at parties. We were doing our version of that. We didn't take ourselves seriously.' (Welty xxi)

Welty makes clear that these photographs had no artistic intentions whatsoever; although they were meant as satire, there was no subliminal political scope or agenda.

While mimicking the fashion world, the artist recognized and echoed a change that was taking place in American society; a change that meant the emergence 'of what the French theoretician Guy Debord would call in 1967 "the society of the spectacle", a culture in which the "simulacrum", the representation of the thing, would gradually displace the thing itself as the most powerful generator of desire.' (Orvell 184) Eventually, "[w]here everything is transformed into images," as Roland Barthes wrote, "only images exist and are produced and consumed." (192)

I shall be back to this topic, meanwhile we must bear in mind that advertising and the society of the spectacle conceived of women within very specific (social) roles. For instance [in the Roaring Twenties], the 'women shown in the ads were always bright and eager typists making a good impression in the office, or capable mothers running a neat and caring home.' (Goodrum 38) On the other hand publicity received a powerful support from a new emerging art, cinema. Both publicity and the Hollywood industry interacted and contributed to the building of an imaginary anchored in the idea of success.

In Oscar Wilde's vein, we may conclude that life seemed to imitate art, the charming and alluring visual stereotypes that it was massively divulging. Inevitably women were framed within these seductive and successful signs:

[After the first World War]... the advertisers found that it was easier to follow the images of the most successful movie stars than try to show the customers how they should look and which cosmetics would achieve the end they sought. Thus the adds showed the Clara Bow look, then the Jean Harlow and Claudette Colbert image, and finally the Norma Shearer and Madeleine Carroll open-faced, with teeth and large-mouth style — with pale lips but flaming fingernails. (Goodrum 129)

Life definitely imitated art, and *Helena Arden*, Welty's syncretic title metonymically summoning both products (signs, industries) Helena Rubinstein/ Elizabeth Arden, definitely figures this new contemporary reality.

Both those characters and the imaginary that they summon belong to a different social background from the one that Welty captured in her snapshots. Deborah Willis rightly states that '[t]he women she photographed were not bound to traditional roles found in the American imaginary.' (Willis 82-3) These were women that stood on edges of the American Dream. These were indeed women whose presence reminded how fragile that Dream and the imaginary that provided its subtext were. Thus, her work 'bring[s] into focus perspectives that should not go unseen, to expose myths and misconceptions, smugness and self-deception.' (Pollack and Mars 224) But, as I mentioned above, this is not the reality and the imaginary that she exposed in *Helena Arden*.

In order to fully understand the meaning of this photograph within the context of the visual arts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we must recall the dialogue between advertising photos and painting. As Fernando Guerreiro has shown, during the first decades of the previous century photography mimicked painting, and above all a special genre, the portrait (33). Visual aesthetic apart, painting lent photography specific rules of dramatization that eventually determined the photograph's aesthetic impact. Before moving ahead we must bear in mind that dramatization stands at the centre of all advertising photos.

Dramatization demands a dynamic dialogue between sign and beholder; on the one hand it presupposes a suspension in time, a stasis (staging and/or representation) inherent to the sitter's pose; on the other hand it reveals an extra value both in the photograph and in its sign(s) (35) — since the beholder is ostensibly required to be an active reader (player) of the microcosm, s/he definitely must unfold the photograph's aesthetic anchorage in a specific social and cultural context. One does not have to look further for an explanation of this context since Welty clarifies it when she says that *Helena Arden* is a satire of the 1930s advertising game in a time when people were still allowed to make fun of advertising (Pitavy-Souques [1] 31). The jazz age mundane microcosms depicting an idealized American Dream provided the aesthetic background for the satire made by her 'funny pictures'. Here she played with a society that was mimicking



an Idea of beauty and success. Besides, as Pitavy-Souques rightly remarks, she was also building a deeper criticism of photography's social function: instead of being a reliable source of daily reality, when it allowed itself to be a mere vehicle of an hypnotizing discourse, photography became a debased mimicry of its previous noble function (31-32). The mask had become the real presence in the emerging society of the spectacle, and photography lied at the center of a whole new deceiving process. Spectacle, theatricality, mask, game, all become structuring vectors in the dialogue between sign and beholder, and eventually in the way the beholder conceives his/her identity.

Despite the power of the image to reveal a political discourse, *Helena Arden*'s satire lies deep in a strange (alien) presence, the word. In his analysis of Magritte's *This Is Not a Pipe*, Michel Foucault reminds that between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western painting consecrated 'the separation between plastic representation (which implies resemblance) and linguistic reference (which excludes it)' (Foucault 32). This separation also meant a relationship of subordination between the two systems, and hence an order that 'hierarchizes them, running from the figure to discourse or from discourse to the figure.' (33) In line with painters such as Magritte, Welty breaks with this tradition (gap) in *Helena Arden* and requires the beholder to be (literally) a reader, a semiotic traveller floating between the figure (the self-portrait) and the word, the referential system unveiling the early 20<sup>th</sup> century consumer society and the role middle-class women play within it. As I mentioned above the photograph's title, *Helena Arden*, reminds a mosaic. The word eventually is conceived of as a kind of figure; a figure that is assembled as if in a game (scrabble?). Dramatization thus widens its sphere involving different (antagonistic) components of the visual sign.

As Fernando Guerreiro has shown, one of the main aspects of this dramatic strategy derives from a specific dimension of the pictorial tradition, the self-portrait. Biographical data inform us that Welty '... studied painting when a child because she wanted to become a painter' (Pitavy-Souques [2] 90), and that latter her 'interest in painting was broadened and deepened as she regularly visited art galleries and discovered avant-garde European painting...' (91). Critics such as McHaney have pointed out how this contact hopefully echoed in her snapshots, namely in its '... line, shadow, curve, complexity, foreground and distancing — elements she learned from

her deliberate study and practice of painting...' (3). All these dimensions eventually merge in Welty's "organic visual composition" (O'Connor 74). Needless to remind at this stage *Helena Arden's* syncretic status as satire of an era (the society of spectacle), of a medium (photography) of the interaction between image and word, of the dialogue between sign and beholder, and of the artist herself.

This aspect gains a new light when we summon the pictorial tradition of the self-portrait, a relevant pictorial tradition in advertising in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guerreiro 30-32). Though briefly we must unveil the way this tradition relies on a sense of theatricality. In her study of the self-portrait in painting Laura Cumming writes that already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century 'painters in particular tend to have a very strong sense of self-portraiture precisely as a form of theatre' (Cumming 155), since they 'must admit that some kind of show is involved, [they] must acknowledge their audience...' (156). The beholder definitely becomes part of a whole process of representation that goes beyond the mere confinement of the canvas and of its historical setting. On the other hand, even in its natural appearance the sitter assumes a mask (the pose) that enhances a specific dialogue with the beholder, and even, in some cases, a whole theatrical system, such as Joseph Ducreux's, when he '... painted "character" self-portraits in which he puts on a variety show of expressions' (162). With the rising of the spectacle society the theatricality inherent to the self-portrait is naturalized, namely with the help of '...all those other professions that specialize in appearances — hairdressing, make-up fashion, the styling of the photographic shoot ' (165). Like in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the mask invades the subject and eventually assumes (takes control of) his/her own identity.

In *Helena Arden* Welty builds a syntheses of all the aspects mentioned above. With the society of the spectacle as background she exposes the theatricality inherent to its advertising iconic masks. Besides, she exposes (plays with) the process of building the mask while stressing the game with the beholder; a game that is enhanced by the presence of the product's names and by the title itself (the mosaic, a kind of figure). Eventually when she chooses to emphasize her own presence (the self-portrait) and the axis sitter-beholder, she makes clear her aesthetic option: *Helena Arden* is definitely not a snapshot.

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**ABSTRACT**

This essay considers the photograph *Helena Arden* as a humoristic exercise that parodies and deconstructs the conventions of the advertising industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This self-portrait by Eudora Welty points towards the referential system of consumer society and the role middle-class women play within it. Based on the interaction between image and word and foregrounding the dialogue between sign and beholder, *Helena Arden* is a political satire of an era, an artistic medium, and of the artist herself.

**KEYWORDS**

Eudora Welty; Photography; Self-portrait; Advertising.

**RESUMO**

Este ensaio considera a fotografia *Helena Arden* como um exercício humorístico que parodia e desconstrói as convenções da indústria publicitária no início do séc. XX. Este auto-retrato de Eudora Welty aponta para o sistema referencial da sociedade de consumo e para o papel nele desempenhado pelas mulheres da classe média. Baseada na interação entre imagem e palavra e sublinhando o diálogo entre signo e observador, *Helena Arden* faz a sátira política de uma era, de um *medium* artístico e da própria artista.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Eudora Welty; Fotografia; Auto-retrato; Publicidade.

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**ESSAYS**  
**ESTUDOS**



# Pathways Into the Irish Short Story

*Nuala Ní Chonchúir*





## Pathways Into the Irish Short Story<sup>1</sup>

In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom states, "A nation is the same people living in the same place." If geography is all that binds people as a nation, why is it that Irish writers are so often expected to promote and expound upon their Irishness in their writing?

Of course place isn't all that binds us. There is the question of the national personality, those easy, and not so easy to define traits that represent a nation, however accurate or inaccurate. And what are these in Ireland? Are we as a nation gregarious, insincere, relaxed? Is Anne Enright correct when she wonders if shame is a particularly Irish trait? What of optimism? Are we not pessimists at heart, are we not a nation with horribly low self-esteem? Are the Irish an envious, begrudging people? Are we resolute individualists obsessed by land and the owning of it? Working towards a definition of Irishness is difficult. For Irish writers there is difficulty in the perceived requirement that they represent their Irishness in their writing always.

Borges wrote in *Atlas*, "For me Ireland is a land of essentially benevolent and naturally Christian people carried away by the curious passion to be incessantly Irish." Whatever about the Christianity, certain

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<sup>1</sup> The following text was delivered as the Embassy of Ireland Lecture 2012, hosted by the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, on 7 December 2012, and was followed by a reading and discussion of Nuala Ní Chonchúir's short story "Cri de Coeur" from her latest short story collection *Mother America* (2012). Nuala Ní Chonchúir's work includes three poetry collections, *Tattoo: Tatú* (2007), *Portrait of the Artist with a Red Car* (2009), and *The Juno Charm* (2011); one novel, *You* (2010); and four collections of short fiction: *The Wind Across the Grass* (2004), *To The World of Men, Welcome* (2005), *Nude* (2009), and *Mother America* (2012).

critics, it seems to me, still want Irish writers to be “incessantly Irish”. They want us to analyse who we are as a nation through the lens of fiction and poetry. As an Irish writer, you are *meant to* represent your country in your writing. I am Irish and I feel very Irish but I don’t always want to write about Ireland or Irish people. I also feel European; and I love America, North and South. I love to travel and inevitably the results of observing other cultures comes out in my writing. I like to make use of other locations in my stories and often I drop an Irish character into a foreign land, a device which can encourage, in Anne Fogarty’s words “a bifurcated, comparativist view of Irish society”. By showing how an Irish person copes with the idiosyncrasies of another culture, their Irish mindset and tics are explored.

Irish writers should not be required or obliged to portray Ireland in any particular way; Ireland is many things and our short stories need to reflect that. The writer Claire Keegan stated: “You must write exactly as you please. The artist must be critical of their society.”<sup>2</sup>

Like everywhere else, the short story in Ireland has a mixed reputation. As a reader, writer and lover of the form I seem to be continually defending it and extolling its merits to unconvinced novel readers. I think readers come to all fiction with hopes and expectations and, in a way, they have to be trained to expect a different “hit” from the various forms. The punch of a short-short story (flash) is different to the experience after reading a longer short story, which is different to the feeling after finishing a novel. Short stories often deliver a similar gut reaction and illumination to that given by a poem.

Many Irish short stories concern the shifting of power, stories such as Mary Lavin’s “Lilacs” where power jumps from husband to wife to daughter to sister. In Julia Ó Faoláin’s “Melancholy Baby”, the power jumps back and forth between Gwennie and her aunt — one of them always has the upper hand, there is rarely a sense of equality. Maybe that’s what happens in a postcolonial society — people become power hungry, power obsessed.

The Irish obsession with place comes to the fore in short stories. We are resolutely regional in Ireland — the next parish is often seen as a

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Keegan, Unpublished Interview at the Irish Writers Month, Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith, London, June 9, 2012.

foreign, mistrustful land. In a recent *New Yorker* interview, Kevin Barry said, “... one of my fundamental beliefs as a writer is that human feeling doesn’t just reside in humans but it settles into places, too. Often it’s a bad feeling — a melancholy, or paranoia, or fearfulness. Different places have different resonances” (Barry 2012). In Ireland because of colonialism, occupation, famine and mass emigration, there is a preoccupation with land and ownership of it that is proving difficult to abandon. In Irish short stories, the place often looms as large as the characters who people it, and the setting is usually clarified early on in the narrative. Take, for example, a story like John McGahern’s “Strandhill, The Sea” which concerns the various pompous residents at a guest house in Strandhill in Sligo; the landscape of the area opens the story and consumes its pages: “The sky filled over Sligo Bay, the darkness moving across the links and church, one clear strip of blue between Parkes Guest House and Knocknarea...” (McGahern 2006: 39).

I came to writing through language. I had a bilingual childhood — English at home, Irish (Gaelic) at school, so I have always been steeped in language and asking questions of it. Language is hugely important to me as both writer and reader — I admire those who take risks with language, I love stylists like John Banville and Kevin Barry, two writers working at opposite ends of the scale of Irishness and Hiberno-English. Barry is doing great things with Irish-English and his stories are funny, headlong and sparky; he uses ramped-up language to portray a pumped-up Ireland. Banville on the other hand uses a high register of English, peculiar to himself; one of his hallmarks is his unusual and obscure vocabulary.

I came to short fiction through poetry. My first stories were very concerned with language and telling things lyrically. I am still concerned with that but I may have learned to simplify a bit.

Arts journalist Chris Power has said: “Short-story writers are often talented phrasemakers, but only the best ensure each phrase is as hardworking as it is attractive” (Power 2012). For my own writing, I like to use interesting language for its richness. Having said that, plain language — like Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s — can be equally rich. In essence, I value writers who take great care with words.

My own positive relationship with short fiction began, I feel, with three stories; three that made a huge impact on me: Seán Ó Faoláin’s “The

Trout”, Oscar Wilde’s “The Happy Prince” and Brendan Behan’s “The Confirmation Suit”.

Ó Faoláin’s “The Trout” concerns a little girl who finds a “panting” trout in a secluded well. The landscape of the story is an old laurel walk “a lofty midnight tunnel of smooth, sinewy branches” and is identical to a place I grew up near in my home place in County Dublin; we called this place “the Sleeping Beauty passage”. I must have been about 10 when I first read “The Trout” but at some point I wove this story into my own memories and thought that *I* was the girl; I adapted Ó Faoláin’s fiction into my own mythology. So much so that when I re-read “The Trout” as an adult it felt like I was reading my own history, which was bizarre.

As a child, I was profoundly moved by “The Happy Prince”, Oscar Wilde’s melancholic morality tale of an off-beat friendship. It had all the story elements that both child and adult require: gorgeous language, recurring motifs, beautiful sadness, a crescendo, and a definitive ending. “The Happy Prince” alerted me to the power of fiction, to its beauty and its ability to move and make you, the reader, think about other lives, other possibilities, other places.

Different in tone entirely is Brendan Behan’s “The Confirmation Suit”; it tells the story of a young boy whose Confirmation suit is made by an old woman who mostly makes habits for the dead. The suit is not the suit he had hoped for — it has “little lapels and big buttons”. The narrative is from the child’s point of view, and is related in lively Dublin English. As a youngster I loved that this was a funny story, told in the language of my home place, but that ultimately Behan was able to trick me by ending the story on a poignant note. This is the sort of surprise the reader hopes for from short stories.

I had a happy introduction to Irish literature in general — my parents are both lovers of books and collectors of them too. In our home we had volumes of short stories by writers including Frank O’Connor, Mary Lavin, Elizabeth Bowen, Edna O’Brien, John McGahern and James Joyce. At school, from the age of 12, the short story was part of our formal studies. We read Irish short story writers like Seán Ó Faoláin, Mary Lavin, Frank O’Connor and Brendan Behan, as well as Saki, Somerset Maugham and Katherine Mansfield.

In the Irish language we read and studied the writers Liam Ó

Flatharta, Pádraic Ó Conaire and Peig Sayers, whose book *Peig*, though in essence a memoir, is essentially a series of linked short stories.

Later, when my short fiction choices were less prescribed, I found myself drawn to women writers, writers not much older than myself who were doing interesting things with the form. They brought a late 20<sup>th</sup> century, wry sensibility to Irish short fiction which was very welcome to me. I began to enjoy these writers boldness and humour as much as I treasured Edna O'Brien's melancholy. I read Mary Morrissy's *A Lazy Eye* and was amazed by the title story in which the narrator, Bella, suffers a messy period in the sleeper-car on a train and is ejected as a direct result of that. Here was matter-of-fact bodily and sensual honesty.

I read Anne Enright's collection *The Portable Virgin* and was delighted by her depictions of relationships, broken and flawed. Here was a truly fresh look at what it meant to be Irish. I read *Big Mouth* by Blánaid McKinney; I read Evelyn Conlon, Emma Donoghue, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne. I delighted in their use of language, their tackling of women's issues, their humour. Of course my reading of short stories was confined to neither women nor Irish writers: I read and enjoyed Colum McCann, Ernest Hemingway, Claire Keegan, Mike McCormack, Michèle Roberts, Annie Proulx, Chekhov, Flannery O'Connor, Seán O'Reilly and Alice Munro, amongst others.

And what did I find in all this work that interested me and delighted me so much? Well, I found what every reader goes in search of when they pick up a short story to read, what Alison MacLeod has described as "an intense concentration on an urgent question" (MacLeod). Short stories are, by their nature, compressed and they rely on implication and suggestion. The short story is focussed and the spotlight on the ending distinguishes it as a form. Heather Ingman says in her book *The Irish Short Story*, "everything in the short story has to be selected and controlled in preparation for the conclusion" (Ingman 2009: 7). The way you end your story says to the reader, "This is the last thing I want you to see", something Joyce was well aware of with the circular close to his masterpiece "The Dead". To paraphrase the American writer Elizabeth Gilbert, the ending of a story should bend over backwards and kiss the beginning. The short story is a series of tricks: you have to enter and exit it in the right place; and you have to make suggestions that in turn suggest other things; it is a genre of

deft sleights of hand because all of its tricks have to be somewhat invisible to the naked eye. But, at the same time, at its best, the short story is seamless.

Stories possess an intensity that is just not possible in the vast space of the novel. They often contain a delicious surprise — they are beautifully unpredictable when done well. Lovers of the short story hope to be moved in some way by what happens in stories — they want the hairs on their neck to stand on end with the unknowable yet perfect beauty of the story they are reading. Readers of literary short fiction do not mind discomfort and they enjoy characters who are mavericks — many Irish short stories feature loners and individuals, members of Frank O'Connor's "submerged populations" and John McGahern's "fragmented communities".

The short story is, at its heart, about difficulty. As I heard author Claire Keegan say, "If the writer chooses a piece of troubled time, something will happen." The short story is an urgent, concise form — it cannot be about nothing in particular. A story usually centres on a small number of characters who are wading their way through some sort of difficulty. Something happens to one or all of them; that event brings about a shift in circumstances or outlook. As Frank O'Connor said, "A good short story must be news (quoted in Power 2012a).

The short story is a personal form in the same way that poetry is — it deals, often, with the individual passions of the writer. As writers we all have our themes which are based, usually, on our personal obsessions. Mine re-appear in all of my writing: I write a lot about women's lives, about love and sex, about art and about the breakdown of relationships. My recent poetry deals a lot with fertility issues and pregnancy — my poetry tends to reflect my personal life. My fiction is more invented, but I do write a lot about mothers and mothering. I realised recently that in fiction writing I have space to be less controlled than I am in other parts of my life, more free — that was a revelation. Maybe that's why I love writing fiction so much.

In her introduction to *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story* Anne Enright talks about "the problem of the family" which, she says, "is the fundamental (perhaps only) unit of Irish culture" (Enright 2011: xv). John McGahern, for his part, spoke about "the republic of the family". Younger or newer Irish writers are looking beyond the family unit in

their stories; stories of present-day emigration are cropping up, stories concerning drug-taking among groups of friends.

Kevin Barry, who writes an exaggerated version of rural Ireland says of his story “Ox Mountain Death Song”: “The story is essentially a re-tooled Western, a kind of nouveau West-of-Ireland Western with a peculiar occult haze at its edges ... I don’t quite operate within the realist mode. I kind of push the stories out towards the cusp of believability — that’s the area of interest for me” (Barry 2012).

For myself, I write about difficult things not to affirm them but to explore them. Rightly or wrongly the reader does not enter my mind until I am editing a story and aiming for clarity. It doesn’t concern me whether the reader will like or dislike my characters or their actions.

I couldn’t say that there was just one story that made me want to write short fiction. My writing grew out of my reading. I started to write short stories because poetry wasn’t enough for me and the early novels I was attempting never went anywhere. I’ve always loved the way short stories pan out — the motifs, the tension. It’s like watching someone dive into a dark pool. They go under, you see the ripples fan out and fade, but you know the diver has to come up for air at some point, so you wait for that. I fell head over heels with Enright’s *Portable Virgin* around the time I was starting to write stories myself so, as a collection, I would say it egged me on; it showed me the possibilities of what a young Irish woman writer could do.

I mentioned before the deep impact of three stories on me as a reader. If I were to think of stories that influenced me as a writer, it would be difficult to pick one writer or one story. Annie Proulx makes me brave with naming characters; Claire Keegan teaches me to slow my pace; I love Emma Donoghue’s language and energy; Michèle Roberts has a delicate touch that I would like to master. American writer Amy Bloom teaches me the importance of getting my reader to *care* about my characters.

But I do remember being directly influenced by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s story “Midwife to the Fairies” — it gave me the idea to use a folk tale in my story “One Hare’s Foot”. I’ve come around to the idea that influence is a good thing, having resisted (or misunderstood it?) for a while. I love seeing what other writers are doing with the form and what I can learn from them. I have already mentioned many favourite story writers; others

I enjoy include Tess Gallagher, Rose Tremain, Yiyun Li, Manuel Munoz and Anthony Doerr. Valerie Trueblood is another writer I admire, her stories have an absolute humanity; they are layered, learned, insightful, moving and witty. I wish I could write like her.

Writing short stories is a short, sharp balancing act. When I write, I don't start out with a plan or an idea as such, usually a story starts as a meeting of character, situation and atmosphere in my head (very difficult to describe — I heard John Banville call it a “mood” once). That all launches forward from an opening sentence that may have been swirling in my brain for weeks. My fiction is generally based on invented events that resemble the truth, though sometimes I'll use a real life happening from the media or history to base my fiction on. In the *Paris Review* Ann Beattie described the process of putting together a story: “Because I don't work with an outline, writing a story is like crossing a stream, now I'm on this rock, now I'm on this rock, now I'm on this rock” (Beattie).

Short story writing is fairly instinctive, mostly you don't need to plot and plan meticulously. To paraphrase Haruki Murakami, if you plan everything in a short story it will never find its own way. Many writers — Claire Keegan and Flannery O'Connor among them — start to write and don't know where things are going. They write their way into the story — for me I am telling the story to myself — to see what my characters get up to. I aim for some sort of tension. I want to seduce the reader; to have her believe in the small world I have created.

What makes a short story succeed? For me, it's an avoidance of the mundane. Ordinary things happening to ordinary people rarely make interesting reading. Like poems, the best short stories have something surprising in them. Short fiction protagonists say, “I am different.”

Each part of a short story must fit with the rest: so the tone fits with the language which also fits with what happens to the characters. This creates a unity within the story that is like the unity within a poem: everything works together to create a pleasing whole. Words and intent and content should meld together perfectly.

The short story should resonate emotionally with the reader and will ideally have the power to smack her with its truthfulness. Flannery O'Connor said that stories should be “short but deep”, so the something that happens in the story will ideally illuminate the human condition in



some way. Just because short stories are short doesn't mean that they can't be profound or make a deep impact — you can say a lot in a handful of pages.

The Irish story is not one definable thing; sometimes it is not even set in Ireland. Irish academic Anne Fogarty has said the short story is “elusive and malleable” as a form (Fogarty 2003: ix). Perhaps it's this elusiveness that makes it an exciting genre, ripe with possibility. There are still those Irish writers who write in traditional ways — stories with typical Irish subjects of rurality, land and greed. And there are those who explore the modern Ireland of lapsed Catholicism, immigration, recession, drugs and urban life. There are also those, like Bucharest dweller Philip Ó Ceallaigh, who set most of their short fiction outside of Ireland.

The Irish short story is evolving and its writers do not feel the urgency that critics seem to feel around always expressing our nationhood in our stories. And, as the New Irish — the immigrants from Africa, Russia, Brazil, Poland and elsewhere — begin to publish their fiction, who knows how Irishness, or the notion of nationhood, will be defined or evolve in the Irish short story of the future.

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# British Literature in Portuguese Literary Education during the *Estado Novo*

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# British Literature in Portuguese Literary Education during the *Estado Novo*

## 1. Introduction: Corpus and Reasons for Research

The present study is part of my doctoral research funded by the University of Aveiro, which aimed to examine the role attached to British literature in the Portuguese political and cultural field during the *Estado Novo* era by comparing it to the Communist Hungarian reception. A particular novelty of the research was that the scope of investigation also included the analysis of literature textbooks published in the two countries.

Books related to literature education, in fact, are seldom objects of scholarship in literary history or reception studies. Due to their didactic and age-specific character, literary scholars normally refuse to investigate their role in the canon formation process. A unique and notable exception to this rule is the research conducted by the members of the project “História literária e traduções. Representações do Outro na cultura portuguesa,” who, among others, examined the presence of foreign authors in school manuals and literary histories published during the *Estado Novo*.<sup>1</sup> The major findings of this survey were also published in Seruya and Moniz, 2001, which served as invaluable source material as well as a model for the present study.

Seruya and Moniz’s paper mainly focuses on literary histories. However, I also included other types of textbooks such as school anthologies,

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<sup>1</sup> The project was housed at the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (Catholic University of Portugal) and functioned between 1998 and 2005 under the direction of Teresa Seruya. For more information on the project, see <http://www.ucp.pt/site/custom/template/ucprtplminisite.asp?SSPAGEID=3690&lang=1&artigoID=4074> (last accessed 17/04/2013).

compendiums, and reading-books in the investigation in search for further possible references to British literary authors and texts.<sup>2</sup> Textbooks which were authorised or recommended by the authorities or possibly used by schoolteachers of the time were consulted. Altogether 116 literature textbooks were investigated, but the corpus of works containing comments on British literature consists of only twenty-one textbooks.

Contrary to Hungarian literature education, for instance, Portuguese literature classes concentrated mainly on national literature, while world literature as such had never been systematically taught. Some foreign authors were mentioned if they were considered to be relevant in the course of national literary history or in providing students with an international context for the Portuguese literary movements and tendencies.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding this, since diplomatic and economic relations between England and Portugal date back as early as the thirteenth century and the fact that several members of the British social and literary elite visited or lived in Portugal throughout the centuries, the initial assumption that Portuguese literature textbooks would contain relatively more references on these or other prominent literary figures of British origin seemed to be reasonable.

## 2. Education during the *Estado Novo* (1932-1974)

António Oliveira de Salazar (1889-1970) recognized — very soon after the establishment of his rule — the importance of education in preserving the longevity of his dictatorship. Besides the press and other propaganda agencies, education appeared to be instrumental in legitimising the regime's new political and social programmes, and thus it effectuated far-reaching changes in the structure and practices of the educational system.

The creation of mass organisations such as the *Mocidade Portuguesa* (Portuguese Youth), and *Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina* (Portuguese

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<sup>2</sup> I will use 'textbook' as a cover term to refer to all types of schoolbooks and manuals related to literature education.

<sup>3</sup> The lack of international literature in literature education is a widely acknowledged phenomenon in other countries as well. For more information, cf., among others, Gordon Györi.

Feminine Youth) where membership was compulsory for boys and girls aged seven and upwards was aimed to supervise and overlook children and young people's extracurricular activities in the spirit of state propaganda (Torgal *Estados Novos*, 215-217). The introduction of the subject *Educação Moral e Cívica* (Moral and Civic Education) in the primary and secondary school curriculum was also intended to disseminate nationalist ideology and to mould the Portuguese character at a young age. Moreover, dissident thinkers or people considered to be politically unreliable were removed or forced to resign from their teaching positions at secondary and university level as well so as to guarantee that the opposition would not challenge the ruling ideology on a wider platform. Indeed, Salazar blacklisted and persecuted several outstanding scholars, among others, Agostinho da Silva, Adolfo Casais Monteiro, António Sérgio, António José Saraiva, and António Henriques de Oliveira Marques (Rendeiro 46).

Nonetheless, the *Estado Novo* showed a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the education of the general public. For instance, Salazar strongly believed that the constitution of elites was more important than the need to teach people how to read (Ameal 259).<sup>4</sup> Thus most people should receive only a basic form of education, enabling them to perform their daily working routine, while secondary and higher education was naturally available only to the upper classes (Rendeiro 38).

The Portuguese regime's attitude towards illiteracy is also noteworthy. Certain important figures inside the *Estado Novo* even glorified illiteracy, seeing in it traces of genuine Portuguese qualities. One reactionary deputy, for example, argued that the Portuguese nation's proudest achievements such as the Reconquest, the Discoveries, and the Restoration had been accomplished by illiterate heroes (Mónica 99). Salazar's attitude towards general literacy also leaves much to be desired. In one of his speeches, Salazar quoted a Swedish journalist who — when he heard that the government would start teaching the Portuguese to read — exclaimed “in Sweden, it was exactly this that made people unhappy” (Nóvoa 474).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Considero até mais urgente a constituição de vastas elites do que ensinar o povo a ler.*

<sup>5</sup> “Na Suécia foi isso que fez o povo infeliz.”

Despite the government's campaign pledges to diminish illiteracy rate, which was far higher in Portugal than in most other European countries of the time,<sup>6</sup> compulsory education was reduced from five to four years in 1928, which was hardly calculated to combat illiteracy either. Indeed, it was only in 1964 that compulsory education was extended to six years, and finally in 1973 two additional years were added (Rendeiro 40).

Moreover, even though the *Estado Novo* was concerned with education, modernisation of its educational system was not a priority in policy making. As António Costa Pinto points out, "instead of promoting the modernisation of the school system, the *Estado Novo* controlled what it inherited" (35). It is also important to note that the Portuguese government's spending on education remained stagnant from 1930 to 1960 (Pinto 35). These tendencies also reflect the degree of importance attached by the government to education during the era.

The history of literature teaching during the *Estado Novo* can be divided into three phases. According to António Nóvoa, the first period (1930-1936) was characterised by the demolition and restructuring of the Republican school system, while the second (1936-1947) is described as the constitution of a new nationalist educational system, where the state, backed by mass student and parent organisations and with the introduction of the *livro único* (single textbook) attempted more determinedly to employ education as an instrument for indoctrination. The third post-war period was marked by campaigns against illiteracy and also by a certain depoliticisation of the Portuguese educational system (457-461). With these periods in mind, the next sections will attempt to analyse the role and representation of British literature in the Portuguese textbooks.

## 2. Portuguese Literature Textbooks

Portugal's isolation from the rest of Europe had a profound impact on its educational policy as well. It also enabled the regime to curb access to

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<sup>6</sup> In 1930 61.8% of the Portuguese population was illiterate, while in 1940 the illiteracy rate was still 49,0%, in 1950 40,4%, and in 1960 31,1% (Nóvoa 476). According to a UNESCO study, for example, in the 1940s in Belgium only 3,3%, in France 3,6%, in Hungary 4,7% of the population could not read and write (UNESCO 33).



information about the world's events. Neutrality during the Second World War may have spared Portugal famine, death, and destruction, but it also precluded the possibility of any political challenge to the state's official ideology. Thus the *Estado Novo* resisted reforms and progress and built up an image of Portugal in its textbooks that did not reflect many aspects of the country at all. Basically, Portuguese education pivoted on the same principles from 1933 until the end of the regime in 1974 (Rendeiro 45-46).

In Portugal, an educational decree issued in 1936 defined the goal of literature education as "to develop nationalist feelings and mould the character of the student (Seruya and Moniz 3)."<sup>7</sup> Literature textbooks also echoed Salazar's three-part doctrine of *Deus* (God), *Pátria* (Fatherland), and *Família* (Family), and celebrated the virtues of rural life as an inherently national reality associated with physical and mental health and happiness. The authors and editors of school manuals and anthologies selected literary texts which they believed to be the best conveyors of the political ideology in force. The majority of the writers represented had lived in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Teachers presented them as the masters and milestones of Portuguese literature (Rendeiro 43-44).

The textbooks praised João de Deus's, Augusto Gil's, and Júlio Dinis's spontaneous talent and the simplicity of their works along with Almeida Garrett's nationalistic choice of subject in his plays, while António Sardinha was a nationalist poet with a genuine patriotic talent, and António Corrêa d'Oliveira was a "true poet of the land and patriotism" (Fialho 189).<sup>8</sup> It is intriguing that the small corpus of contemporary Portuguese authors did not necessarily encompass supporters of the *Estado Novo*. Selected texts by Afonso Lopes Vieira, advocate of the right-wing movement *Integralismo Lusitano*, and by leftist sympathisers such as Alves Redol and Miguel Torga were included in several school manuals and anthologies. Their political positions were evidently ignored. Additionally, although several novels by Eça de Queirós were blacklisted, and expelled from Portuguese school libraries for their severe social criticism and anti-religious

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<sup>7</sup> "desenvolver o sentimento nacional e a formação moral do aluno."

<sup>8</sup> "[...] é um verdadeiro poeta da terra e dos sentimentos nacionais."

content (works such as *O Crime do Padre Amaro*, *O Primo Basílio*, *Os Maias*, and *A Capital*) textbooks glorified the ideologically more suitable novel *A Cidade e as Serras* or the short story “O Suave Milagre” instead (Melo 151-154).

### 3. British Literature in Portuguese Literature Textbooks

#### 3. 1. The Consolidating Years in Portugal (1930-1947)

Quoting political leaders in literature textbooks was an established custom in Salazar’s Portugal, especially in the initial years of the *Estado Novo*. On 18 March 1932, a decree published in *Diário do Governo* presented a list of 113 maxims, which were to be inserted in literature textbooks. The list contained proverbs as well as quotations from literary authors, philosophers, historians, and also by politicians such as Mussolini, Salazar, and Sidónio Pais. According to another decree dated 20 December 1932, a few quotations selected from the previous list, along with others, had to be displayed on the walls of all Portuguese classrooms and school libraries (Carvalho 738-739).

The majority of the maxims were used to implant obedience and respect for authority in the pupils. “Do not envy your superiors, because they have responsibilities and obligations you are not aware of”<sup>9</sup> or “If you knew what it means to rule, you would rather obey all your life”<sup>10</sup> provide representative examples. Interestingly, several proverbs were of foreign origin such as the English proverb: “Doing nothing is doing ill”,<sup>11</sup> and one also finds a great number of quotations from foreign authors such as Ovid, Leonardo da Vinci, Dante, Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, La Fontaine, Molière, Rodin, and English-language authors such as the Anglican cleric Sydney Smith, Samuel Smiles, Alexander Pope, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and Benjamin Franklin (Carvalho 126).

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<sup>9</sup> “Não invejes os que te são superiores, porque estes têm responsabilidades e deveres que tu ignoras.”

<sup>10</sup> “Se tu soubesses o que custa mandar, gostarias mais de obedecer toda a vida.”

<sup>11</sup> “Nada fazer é fazer mal.”

Besides these quotations, it is quite difficult to find any reference to British literature in Portuguese literature textbooks published in the early 1930s, if one does not count António Feliciano de Castilho<sup>12</sup> as the translator of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Sequeira and Neves 291). Published in 1936, the *História da Literatura Portuguesa* by Agostinho Fortes and Albino Forjaz de Sampaio already includes more on British literature than only one sentence. The book deals with the Arthurian Cycle at length, and Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Walter Scott, Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mill are also mentioned.

In the 1940s, one of the few books containing references to British literary authors is the *História da Literatura Portuguesa* by Augusto Dias (1939), and another is *A Língua e Literatura Portuguesa* by Arlindo Ribeiro da Cunha (1941). Both books were authorised as school manuals shortly after the new educational decree of 1936 was issued.<sup>13</sup> The novelty of the books is that besides the chapters on Portuguese literature, they contain separate sections on parallel foreign literary tendencies under the title *Sincronismo literário* (literary synchronism). Augusto Dias's manual is apparently a less professionally written book. Apart from the spelling mistakes in the foreign authors' names, biographical notes are normally limited only to minimal information. Besides the authors' names, birth and death dates, the only piece of information on Chaucer is that he is the father of English poetry, on Byron that he is the most famous poet after Shakespeare, and on Dryden that he is the most celebrated poet in the period after Milton. Exceptionally, Dias devoted two paragraphs to Shakespeare. Nevertheless, no further information is revealed except for the fact that the playwright's authorship is still debated, and that it was Bacon who might have been the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Swift, Defoe, and Pope are only mentioned in passing.

Padre (Father) Cunha's work reveals much more sophisticated scholarship. He even devotes a passage to the origin of the English language,

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<sup>12</sup> António Feliciano de Castilho (1800 -1875) was a poet and translator. Although he lost his eyesight at an early age, he became a classical scholar. Besides Shakespeare, he translated Goethe, Anacreon, Ovid, and Virgil.

<sup>13</sup> The terms 'literary history' and 'manual' are used interchangeably throughout this study.

and besides Chaucer, mentions John Gower (47). Padre Cunha also pays special attention to the English and Portuguese cultural relations wherever possible, including Walter Scott's influence on Garrett<sup>14</sup> and Herculano (429),<sup>15</sup> and Byron's visit to Sintra (409). In most cases, Cunha also indicates the Portuguese translator's name as in Dom Luís's translations of Shakespeare,<sup>16</sup> António de Araújo e Azevedo's translation of Dryden,<sup>17</sup> or José Anastácio da Cunha's<sup>18</sup> and the Marquesa de Alorna's renderings of Pope (356).<sup>19</sup>

Joaquim Ferreira in his manual, which was first published in 1939, also mentions British authors who were considered to be relevant in the context of Portuguese literature either because their works were translated into Portuguese by famous Portuguese literary figures or because they themselves represented a profound influence on Portuguese writers, referring, in the case of Byron, Walter Scott, James Thomson, and Macpherson. However, Ferreira's work appears to be ideologically far more committed to the

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<sup>14</sup> Almeida Garrett (1799-1854) was a Portuguese poet, novelist, playwright, reformer of the National Theatre and founder of Portuguese Romanticism. In 1823 he was forced into political exile in England, where he meticulously studied the works of Shakespeare and Scott. His famous poem "Camões" was also published in London, heralding the birth of Portuguese Romanticism.

<sup>15</sup> Alexandre Herculano (1810-1877) was a Portuguese novelist and historian, who also lived in political exile for a shorter period in England. He is also considered to be a leading figure in the Portuguese Romantic movement.

<sup>16</sup> Dom Luís I (1838-1889) was the king of Portugal from 1861 until his death. Besides being a monarch, he was also a man of letters and translated four plays by Shakespeare: *Hamlet* in 1877, *The Merchant of Venice* in 1879, *Richard III* in 1880, and *Othello* in 1885.

<sup>17</sup> António de Araújo e Azevedo (1754-1817) was a Portuguese diplomat, politician and scientist.

<sup>18</sup> José Anastácio da Cunha (1744-1787) was a Portuguese mathematician as well as a talented poet and translator.

<sup>19</sup> Leonor de Almeida Portugal, 4th Marquise of Alorna (1750-1839) was a Portuguese noblewoman and poet, also known by her pen name Alcipe. Her poetry, translations, and letters were published in the six-volume *Obras poéticas* only five years after her death.

regime than, for example, the republican Agostinho Fortes's textbook. Ferreira states, for instance, that Camões's genius exceeded the talent of all the poets of the Peninsula, and only the sublime spirit of Byron was able to understand his poetry more profoundly (350).

### 3. 2. The Reform Years (1947-1974)

In spite of the fact that the *livro único* was introduced as early as 1936 in secondary and vocational school education, it came into force only in 1947 along with the post-war educational reforms. However, as Luís Reis Torgal also notes, teaching in the secondary school classroom mostly depended on the teacher, and not on the school manual in force ("Antero" 129). In truth, most of the teachers disregarded the *livro único*, and used textbooks published during the Republic, other unofficial manuals, compendiums, or did not use any books at all (129).

Moreover, a comparison between the school manuals published before and after 1947 reveals no significant difference (Fialho 57). Thus the list of British authors and works presented in the Portuguese textbooks published after 1947 is very similar to the one before. The textbook writers normally mention only those authors in English who are regarded to be relevant to the course of Portuguese literary history: the Marquesa de Alorna translated poems by Macpherson, Pope, and Thomson, Almeida Garrett read works by Walter Scott and Byron. The Arthurian cycle of prose romances also appears to be a recurring subject of the Portuguese textbooks, and, in fact, the only one that is discussed at length. This is mainly due to the fact the Lancelot-Grail cycle along with other Arthurian legends had a major impact on the Portuguese cultural context as early as the thirteenth century (for more information, see Dover).

Nevertheless, despite Shakespeare's long-lasting influence on certain Portuguese literary figures, the playwright did not receive any particular attention from the textbook authors. Shakespeare is mentioned in only eight of 116 literature textbooks under investigation, and none of them discuss his oeuvre. Also, Robert Southey and Henry Fielding, in spite of the fact that they visited and lived in the country — indeed, Fielding died in Lisbon — are mentioned only once. Although the English Romantic and Pre-Romantic poets enjoyed a relatively well-respected position in the

Portuguese textbook corpus, alongside the Lake poet Robert Southey as mentioned above, Keats and Shelley receive little attention. Keats's name also appears only in one textbook, while Shelley's name occurs twice.

As far as English drama is concerned, apart from Shakespeare, the only playwright who is mentioned on a more frequent basis is Oliver Goldsmith, but he is mostly represented as a poet and novelist, not as a playwright, which again can be explained by the available Portuguese translations of his works. Even Shaw's name occurs only in one textbook, the *Breve História da Literatura Portuguesa* by Óscar Lopes and Júlio Martins (1945).

With reference to the British novel, Walter Scott appears to dominate the literary corpus of the textbooks, while Swift, Defoe, Sterne, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot are only touched upon in passing. In fact, except for Óscar Lopes's works, contemporary British authors are not represented by any literature textbooks, if we do not count Padre António José Barreiros's strange comparison between Graham Greene and Herculano in the chapter on Herculano's novel *O Monge do Cister*. According to Barreiros, "as opposed to modern writers such as [Georges] Bernanos and Graham Greene, our writer [Herculano] is only interested in the human side of clergymen" (Barreiros 336).<sup>20</sup>

Besides the elevated number of British literary authors, Óscar Lopes and Júlio Martins's book contains several references to further foreign literatures as well as other artistic and cultural phenomena such as the British Pre-Raphaelites, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, or the French Impressionists such as Monet, Manet, Degas, Renoir, and Cézanne, or Post-Impressionists such as Van Gogh and Gauguin. The book also attempts to familiarise students with the most significant literary tendencies, representing the three genres of poetry, drama, and fiction wherever possible throughout the different periods of literary history. Uniquely, it also introduces contemporary British authors such as James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot, George Bernard Shaw, and D. H. Lawrence.

Óscar Lopes and António Saraiva's outstanding and renowned *História da Literatura Portuguesa* was first published in 1955, when, in

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<sup>20</sup> "Ao contrário dos modernos Bernanos e Graham Greene, o nosso escritor só vê no sacerdote o homem."

fact, Óscar Lopes was arrested for political reasons. Another paradoxical fact is that despite being banned in Portuguese classrooms (Vieira and Silva 365), the book was still one of the most emblematic works of its sort during the *Estado Novo*, and even after the change of the regime (Seruya and Moniz 1).

#### 4. Conclusion

In spite of the fact that education was used to indoctrinate the nation's youth, the lack of progressive change with regard to the Portuguese textbooks throughout the long years of the *Estado Novo* is quite suggestive. Portuguese authorities did not seem to express any major concern that secondary teachers might have used textbooks dating back to the First Republic, as many new official schoolbooks published in the 1930s also heavily drew on these old manuals.<sup>21</sup> As illustrated, the Portuguese authorities did not devote an immense effort to developing a radically new educational concept.

Finally, a great number of British authors and works referred to were included in the Portuguese textbooks because of their specific cultural relevance to the Portuguese literary sphere. However, several crucial British literary figures who could also be connected to Portugal's cultural life or its literary history such as Fielding and Southey were not given attention by the textbook writers. The main reason for this may lie in the fact that these authors also got little or no critical response in Portugal at the time of their appearance, nor did they receive recognition during the *Estado Novo* period. Also, the almost complete absence of contemporary British authors in the textbooks, in part, can be put down to the regime's old-school and conservative attitude, which would indeed hardly welcome any authors in the educational canon whose reputation might not have been established yet or were still in a state of flux as opposed to the "tried-and-trusted" classic writers.

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<sup>21</sup> In contrast, in Hungary after the Communist takeover several textbooks published under the previous regime were banned and even pulped. Moreover, the single-textbook system was introduced without any delay.

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the position of British literature versus national literature in literary education during the *Estado Novo* through the analysis of literature textbooks published at the time. The scope of the investigation, however, also includes a limited number of textbooks which may not have been officially authorised as a *livro único* (single textbook), but were used by schoolteachers in Salazar's Portugal. Based on the corpus of these books, it seems that the vast majority of Portuguese textbook writers relied more on national literary texts and authors rather than on world literature to legitimise the nationalist ideology of the regime. Nevertheless, a very small number of British authors were included in the course books, if they were considered relevant to the national literary history.

### KEYWORDS

Literature education; textbooks; British literature; *Estado Novo*; state propaganda.

### RESUMO

Este estudo tem como objetivo investigar a posição da literatura britânica versus a literatura portuguesa na educação literária durante o Estado Novo, através da análise dos livros escolares. O âmbito do inquérito também inclui um número limitado dos livros que podem não ter sido oficialmente autorizados como “livro único”, mas foram usados pelos professores nesta era. Com base no corpus desses manuais escolares, parece que a grande maioria dos autores dos livros didáticos portugueses confiaram mais em textos e autores literários nacionais, em detrimento de literatura mundial para legitimar a ideologia nacionalista do regime. Todavia, um número muito reduzido de autores britânicos foram incluídos nos livros escolares, por serem considerados relevantes para o ensino da história literária nacional.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ensino da Literatura; Livros Escolares, Literatura Britânica, Estado Novo, Propaganda.

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*The Mists of Avalon:*  
Re-Writing a Siblings' Bond

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## *The Mists of Avalon: Re-Writing a Siblings' Bond*\*

### **From the Mists of Legend: Arthur and Morgan**

For the past centuries, Arthurian legends have remained a source of never-ending curiosity both for the academia and a worldwide audience. Having originated in Britain, the tales of Arthur and his brave Knights of the Round Table travelled across Europe becoming some of the most popular narratives read in the Middle Ages. Today, Arthurian characters are a part of our cultural inheritance and imagination, which might be why their adventures have been continuously re-written throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The most recent TV adaptation *Merlin* by BBC (2008-2012) proves there is still room to further explore the Matter of Britain<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly characters who received little attention during the Middle Ages are now increasingly popular, especially the women of Arthurian legend.

During the medieval period female roles in romance (and other literary forms) were often reduced to stereotypes that vented society's misogynist<sup>2</sup> view of women. In fact, throughout the Middle Ages, there

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\* A publicação deste artigo no presente número da *Anglo-Saxonica* visa corrigir um lamentável lapso: a sua não integração no volume de homenagem a João de Almeida Flor, *A Scholar for All Seasons* (Lisboa, 2013) para o qual fora oportunamente enviado.

<sup>1</sup> The tales of King Arthur were taken to French territory by *conteurs* (descendants from the Celts) who escaped from Britain after the Anglo-Saxon invasion. The term "Matter of Britain", however, is due to Jean Bodel, a 12<sup>th</sup> century French poet.

<sup>2</sup> According to R. Howard Bloch in *Medieval Mysogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, misogyny "is a way of speaking about, as distinct from doing to, women, though speech can be a form of action and even of social practice, or at least its ideological component. (...) I propose, then, a definition of misogyny as a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term (...)" (4).

were essentially two opposing visions of women: they were either sinners, as Eve, or virgins, like Mary. In addition, women were regarded as inferior or weaker and usually viewed as “deformed’ or ‘defective’ male[s], one who could not reach the male standard of perfection” (Blamires 2). Thus, women in Arthurian literature were generally depicted as the virtuous and chaste damsels in distress (such as Guinevere), the terrifying, and often seductive, villains (like Morgan le Fay) or they could perform a mother role<sup>3</sup> (as for instance Igraine, Arthur and Morgan’s mother). Consequently, it should not be a surprise that, when compared to their male counterparts, female characters played significantly smaller roles in medieval narratives, often acting as a support to the hero(s). Notwithstanding, women and their actions could also be the driving force in the storyline, like the poem *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* (SGGK) in which it is Morgan le Fay who sends the Green Knight/Bertilak to King Arthur’s court. Today the sorceress Morgan, also known as Morgana or Morgaine, has been placed at the centre of many texts devoted to the retelling of Arthurian legends. These modern narratives shift the adventures’ focus, positioning women at the heart of centuries-old tales. As a result of her new found fame, numerous studies have been published about Morgan, her role in medieval and modern texts, and her relationships with other characters, namely Lancelot, Guinevere, Gawain and, of course, Arthur. However, of all the material published and debated upon, very few studies have paid attention to the emotional connection between the enchantress and her half-brother, namely in the famous work *Le Morte D’Arthur* (1470).

Written by Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D’Arthur* is a unique text in the reference it makes to Morgan le Fay’s affection for Arthur. After Arthur’s war against his son and nephew Mordred, the enchantress, accompanied by other fair ladies, appears on a barge on the lake into which Excalibur has been thrown and receives the fatally wounded King in her arms. As she does so, Morgan expresses sincere sorrow and concern for her brother, crying “A, my dere brothir, why have ye taryed so longe frome

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<sup>3</sup> The term “mother role” does not necessarily refer to the male hero’s birth mother as it can include any female character that raises, helps or guides him throughout his adventures.

me? Alas, thys wounde on youre hede hath caught overmuch coulde (...)" (Malory 688-689). Such a reaction, though, is both unexpected and problematic as it stands in complete opposition to her determination to undermine Arthur's kingship throughout the narrative and the fratricidal character the sorceress is identified with by Malory. The above-mentioned episode effectively suggests the possibility of love between the two — a concept hardly ever discussed in Arthurian studies. Interestingly, although initially disregarded or frowned upon, the idea that Morgan and Arthur might have an affectionate brotherly bond has been a source for modern fantasy novels that explore the love-hate motif of their relationship.

In the 1950s, the Middle Ages started being reinvented by historians who "decided the Dark Ages were not so dark after all" (Henthorne 2004: 73). This new view on medieval societies quickly transformed not only the academia, but also popular culture. By the 70s and 80s neomedievalism had already become a part of mainstream culture and was present in movies, books, magazines, graphic novels, and so forth, which is particularly noticeable in the USA where restaurants, such as Round Table pizza parlour and White Castle hamburger, still common. Tom Henthorne, in the article "Boys to Men: Medievalism and Masculinity in *Star Wars* and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*" claims that neomedievalism can be understood as a reaction to the social transformations that followed World War II. At a time when conventional moral values were being questioned, the Middle Ages were idealised as a time when peace, order and harmony prevailed:

(...) this new medievalism tended to affirm the existing social order by idealizing the Middle Ages as a period of peace and order, when both convention and authority were respected. It also promoted supposedly chivalric values — faith, loyalty, courage, and, for women at least, chastity (...). (73-74)

Simultaneously, women's rights were taking shape, a fact that tremendously contributed to how female characters were portrayed in general, but especially so in medieval-based romances. Such changes deeply affected the women of Arthurian tales, but none more than Morgan le Fay who now occupies a central position in the contemporary Arthurian pantheon. According to Elizabeth S. Sklar's article "Thoroughly Modern Morgan: Morgan le Fay in the Twentieth-Century Popular Arthuriana", the reasons

why the enchantress has gained such importance are connected not only with the changes in women's role in society, but also with the rediscovery of the character by modern fantasy writers. Today, Sklar claims, we are faced with two Morgans, both reflexes of the same cultural phenomenon; they are:

(...) the Morgan of fantasy fiction, where feminist ideology accords her varying degrees of sympathy; and the Morgan of texts designated for mass audiences — films, comic books, and role-playing games — a Morgan who, as the very embodiment of evil dedicated to the subversion of all forms of governance, expresses the fears that inevitably accompany the sort of radical cultural change represented by the social realities and ideological imperatives of escalating female power during this century. (25)

The first one is our subject here because Morgan's love-hate relationship with Arthur has been particularly explored by fantasy writers who often see the sorceress as an incarnation of Celtic goddesses, namely The Morrigan or the Welsh Modron. Considering the amount of work produced around the Arthurian legend, we shall analyse King Arthur's and his half-sister's bond in one specific fantasy novel: the acclaimed fiction of *The Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley.

First published in 1983, the collection *The Mists of Avalon* is divided into four books, *Mistress of Magic*, *The High Queen*, *The King Stag* and *The Prisoner in the Oak*, and has been pointed out as "the most complex and satisfying revisioning of this tantalizing paradoxical fay [Morgan]" (Spivack 21). Each work pays special attention to specific female characters but, as a whole, the story is told from Morgan Le Fay's / Morgaine's<sup>4</sup> point of view:

As I tell this tale I will speak at times of things that befell when I was too young to understand them, or of things which befell when I was not by; and my hearer will draw away, perhaps,

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Mists of Avalon*, Morgan le Fay is named Morgaine by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Therefore, from this point onwards, we shall use the second name when referring to the character in this particular narrative.



and say: This is her magic. But I have always held the gift of the Sight, and of looking within the minds of men and women; and in all this time I have been close to all of them. And so, at times, all that they thought was known to me in one way or another. And so I will tell this tale. (Bradley x)

On the first pages of Bradley's novel, readers are immediately aware that, although the adventures might remain the same, this account will be told from a different perspective — one which has so far remained hidden. Additionally, by addressing the audience, Bradley recognizes the popularity of Arthurian legends while, at the same time, she creates empathy between her narrator and those who will read or listen to the sorceress' words. Thus, from the very beginning, Morgaine, who has grown to become one of the most feared villains of the Arthurian world, is turned into a woman of mystical knowledge and insight whose behaviour might just have been misinterpreted (or not). In doing so, Marion Zimmer Bradley reshapes our perception of how the story goes by voicing the unheard female voices of medieval narratives, which is why the studies focused on *The Mists of Avalon* have been usually devoted to the author's redefinition of women's roles in Arthurian tales. The present research, though, hopes to show that Bradley's work, besides its acknowledged quality and merit in uplifting the role of Arthurian female characters, is also ground-breaking when it comes to portraying Morgaine and Arthur's relationship and, in particular, their sibling bond.

### **“I'll take care of you, brother”: On Sibling Love**

In the first book of the collection, *Mistress of Magic*, Marion Zimmer Bradley starts off by redefining Morgaine and Arthur's mother, Igraine. While mostly described as a worthy and passive queen, first married to the Duke of Cornwall and, then, conquered by force by Uther Pendragon, in Bradley's work, Lady Igraine descends from a line of holy women (and men for she is Taliesin's daughter, the Merlin of Britain). She is sister to the Lady of the Lake, Vivienne, was raised in Avalon and has the gift of foresight, emerging as a force to be reckoned with. In addition, unlike in most previous versions, Igraine unites herself to Uther out of love, betraying her husband, Gorlois, Morgaine's father, and rebelling against the poised role

of a good Christian wife. Her affection for Uther is described as an all-consuming passion that it is in fact deeper than any other, surpassing even her care for her children. Consequently, when she becomes his spouse, Igraine discards her connection to Avalon as well as her duties towards her young daughter and infant son:

I screamed for my mother, but she was on her way to the King, and she called back angrily, 'Morgaine, I told you, look after the baby,' and hurried on.  
 I picked him up, bawling, and wiped his chin with my veil. (...) I sat down with him in my lap, and he put up his little arms around my neck and buried his face in my tunic and after a time he sobbed himself to sleep (...)  
 'Don't cry,' I said, 'I'll take you to nurse.'  
 'Mother,' he whimpered.  
 'Mother's gone, she's with the King,' I said, 'but I'll take care of you, brother.' (Bradley 126-127)

Interestingly, Igraine's indifference seems to be the trigger for Morgaine's affection, who initially claims to hate Arthur, but ends up by becoming his caretaker, effectively taking on Igraine's role as his mother. The emotional bond between the two, thus, appears to result both from the time Morgaine and Arthur spent together as children and from the neglect they suffered. What is more, their young age also contributes to the development of a deep, and almost primordial, attachment that none of them can break, which is why even though Morgaine and Arthur are separated at an early age — Arthur is taken to live with one of Uther's trusted men and Morgaine leaves to be trained at the holy isle of Avalon — the affection between them is in no way diminished.

In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Morgan le Fay and Arthur remain close friends until the sorceress betrays him by sending her lover, Sir Accolon, to fight Arthur to death. Once defeated, Accolon discloses he did not even know he was fighting his king and blames the whole scheme on Morgan,

(...) Morgan le Fay, Kyng Uryence wyff, sente hit me yestirday by a dwarfe to the entente to sle Kynge Arthure, hir brothir — for ye shall undirstonde that Kynge Arthur ys the man in the worlde that she hatyth moste, because he is moste

of worship and of prouesse of ony of hir bloode. And she lovyth me oute of mesure as paramour — and I hir agayne — and if she myght bryng hit aboute to sle Arthure by hir crauftis, she wolde sle hir husbonde Kynge Uryence lyghtly. And than had she devysed to have me kynge in this londe, and so to reigne, and she be my quene. (Malory 90)

In *The Mists of Avalon*'s last book, *The Prisoner in the Oak*, the same events are re-enacted but Morgaine's attempt to murder Arthur is justified by her brother's failure to keep his loyalty and oath to Avalon<sup>5</sup>. In Bradley's version of the events, Morgaine, as a priestess of the holy island, feels it is her duty to punish Arthur and end his reign. Nevertheless, she is unable to kill her brother. Haunted by Igraine's words, when given the chance the enchantress seems incapable of murdering Arthur herself and ends up stealing the mystical scabbard she had made for him instead:

She had killed before this. (...) ... he who lay sleeping before her was the greater traitor, surely. One stroke, swift and quiet... ah, but this was the child Igraine had placed in her arms, her first love, the father of her son, the Horned God, the King... *Strike, fool! For this you came here!*  
No. There had been too much death. (...) knowing she moved at the very edge of madness, she heard Igraine calling impatiently, *Morgaine, I told you to take care of the baby...*" (Bradley 862)

Arthur too is unable (and unwilling) to forget his love for his sister. He trusts her when he has no reasons to do so, "I have always trusted you, dear sister" (Bradley 840), and refrains from pursuing the sorceress when the enmity between the two is set. Furthermore, Arthur's affection for Morgaine, Bradley seems to suggest, is of a different nature for he is also shown to be in love with her — an unexpected twist, indeed. In medieval

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<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of his reign, Arthur promises the Lady of the Lake and high-priestess of Avalon, his aunt Vivienne, to allow all people and creeds to live in peace within his kingdom — a pledge he fails to keep once he refrains from taking the Pendragon's flag (a symbol of Avalon) into battle and embraces Christianity as the sole religion of his court.

(and modern) society such feelings among siblings were (are) certainly not socially acceptable so how does the author make them so?

By re-reading *The Mists of Avalon*, one realizes there are several points that substantiate Arthur's un-brotherly love for Morgaine. First, they grow up separately, leading completely different lives as teenagers and young adults, which means they neither share the same space (home) nor dwell with the same family. In fact, due to his young age, Arthur does not even properly remember Morgaine, mistaking her for his mother, ““(…) — is Igraine our mother much like you?’ ‘No, she is tall, red-haired,’ Morgaine said. Arthur sighed. ‘Then I suppose I do not remember her at all. For in my dreams it was someone like you — it was you-’” (Bradley 232). Second, when they finally reunite, it is during a symbolic fertility ritual.

As a priestess of Avalon, it is Morgaine who is given the responsibility of performing the role of the Virgin Huntress at Arthur's crowing with the oldest Tribes of Britain. At this magical moment Arthur must fight and defeat the King Stag<sup>6</sup>, a symbol of strength, speed and the forest, in order to take his role as king, protector of the land and ruler of the fairy folk. However, Arthur is only able to slay the King Stag if he has the help (and strength) of the Virgin Huntress, the living incarnation of the land and of the Mother-Goddess. The fertility ritual described by Bradley seems to invoke elements of the Celtic worship of an all-powerful great Mother-Goddess who was the incarnation of the land itself. The Goddess could appear cold, heartless and ugly, like winter, or lovely, warm and beautiful, like spring, for she represented nature and life. To ensure prosperity and fertility, it was believed there had to be harmony between the Goddess and the land's male monarch; otherwise a period of destruction and death would begin. As a result, the king was often ritually married to the Great

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<sup>6</sup> The King Stag has been associated to the Celtic god Cernunnos. According to Thierry Bordas, Cernunnos, “the god of the stag wood” (28), was half man, half animal and ruled over the animal world. Nowadays, Cernunnos is worshipped by the Wiccan as a god of prosperity and abundance, but also death. Cernunnos is the companion of the Great Goddess who could have two (or three) forms, maiden and mother (and crone). This divinity is a fertility goddess, mother to all living beings; she is responsible for life and its end. Cernunnos and the Goddess are, therefore, gods of creation and destruction — the makers of the universe.

Goddess. While he promised to protect the realm and its people, the Goddess gave him gifts that would enable the sovereign to keep his oath. In addition, the author was also inspired by Wiccan<sup>7</sup> beliefs, namely as promoted by Starhawk (Miriam Simos), writer of *The Spiral Dance*. According to Starhawk, the Earth is a representation of the Great Goddess, a life force that embodies the waters, the air, the land, and all living things — a belief Marion Zimmer Bradley admittedly used as a source of inspiration<sup>8</sup> when portraying Avalon's religious practices.

Considering this perspective, Arthur and Morgaine's union is much more than intercourse — it stands for the alliance between the king (Arthur) and the great Mother-Goddess (Morgaine). During the sexual encounter, Arthur is, then, symbolically seeding the land so that the realm can prosper and bear fruits (life). Since they are both possessed by supernatural forces, the intentional or evil-mindedness of the incestuous act is re-evaluated and, to all purposes, erased. Moreover, because they grew up separately, Arthur and Morgaine do not recognise each other right away which is why they end up making love once again, this time as man and woman:

This time in full awareness she could savor it, the softness and hardness, the strong young hands and the surprising gentleness behind his bold approach. She laughed in delight at the unexpected pleasure, fully open to him, sensing his enjoyment as her own. She had never been so happy in her life. Spent, they lay, limbs twined, caressing each other in pleasant fatigue. (Bradley 208)

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<sup>7</sup> The Wicca religion began in the first decades of the 20th century, a period during which there was increasing curiosity about old pagan rites. Wicca spread quickly throughout England, especially after the Witchcraft Act (which condemned any citizen caught pretending to have magical powers to pay a fine or even go to jail) was abolished in 1951. In 1954, Gerald Gardner, today considered the father of Wicca, published *Witchcraft Today*, an extremely influential book which would eventually lead to the development of Gardnerian Wicca.

<sup>8</sup> In the “Acknowledgments”, Bradley states that *The Spiral Dance* was “invaluable to me in helping deduce much about the training of a priestess” (viii).

While Morgaine sees their first union as a ritual in which they were not themselves but avatars to a higher power, the events of the next morning come as a shock. Even though she was brought up in Avalon, where blood ties are not considered relevant, the priestess cannot disregard the social (and Christian) norms she received during her childhood years in Tintagel and at Uther's court:

*With my brother, my brother. It did not matter when we were priest and priestess, God and Goddess joining under the power of ritual. But in the morning, when we awakened and were man and woman together... that was real, that was sin...* (Bradley 219)

Horrified, but aware of her aunt Vivienne's manipulation, whose goal is the birth of a child of the royal line of Avalon, Morgaine leaves Avalon, renounces her role as a priestess of the Goddess and goes to Orkney. There she gives birth to Mordred. Although Morgaine loves her half-brother, their union and the child born out of it are seen as a cruel outcome of what is hinted to be Vivienne's political manoeuvring as Lady of Avalon. Nevertheless, Morgaine's devotion to the Great Goddess, whose worship she strives to uphold, does not end with her departure from Avalon.

Throughout the narrative, it becomes clear that there are two main religious forces at conflict, the Catholic Church and the pagan religion of the Goddess. These two are symbolised by several characters, but their strong opposition is more clearly shown in Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar (Guinevere). A high-priestess of Avalon, Morgaine stands for a society in which women are the keepers of knowledge, thus rejecting any connection between the female gender and sin. On the contrary, like most of the female characters, Gwenhwyfar is Christian. Raised in a monastery, Arthur's Queen is obedient, humble, chaste and silent — all the virtues of a good Christian woman. By following the Church's dogma without questioning, Gwenhwyfar often misjudges others and cannot accept alternative viewpoints. Nonetheless, the queen is divided; she hesitates between her moral code and her love for Lancelot, with whom she has an affair. While both characters' opinion as to religion and women's role in society differ, they share a common trait: they are equally blinded by their faith. Gwenhwyfar cannot come to terms with her feelings for Lancelot and the Church's teachings, but Morgaine is likewise unable to see beyond Avalon's

cause and soon becomes merciless and kills those who stand in her path. Perhaps this is why the priestess can only see the advantages of her union to Arthur when she becomes older.

Arthur too is appalled to find out it was his sister whom he made love to, but he is incapable of forgetting she was his first love and seems less concerned with the sinful implications of their union: "I think of you all the time. I cannot help myself. It was true what I said, Morgaine — that all my life I shall remember you because you were the first, and I shall always think of you and love you —" (Bradley 232). His love for Morgaine is so deep-seated that even after being betrayed and nearly killed at her orders, Arthur still nurtures a strong affection for the enchantress. Such emotional ties are acknowledged by the author, not through Arthur himself, but through his wife, "Gwenhwyfar knew, with her sure instinct, what he did not want to say out loud that he loved Morgaine still and that he missed her" (Bradley 899). The fact that Morgaine is Arthur's mother figure and first love serves to explain why he finds it so difficult to reject all ties. Furthermore, Arthur Pendragon, who embodies the benevolent king, develops a personality that fits his kingdom's needs but is unwilling to deal with the problems of his personal life. When confronted with Gwenhwyfar's interest in Lancelet, for instance, Arthur turns a blind eye to their affair, choosing the difficult path of trying to make everyone happy. It is only when Mordred's hatred has spread through Camelot, revealing the Queen's infidelity with her husband's best friend and noblest knight, that Arthur is forced into battle.

Closely following medieval Arthurian legend, at the end of *The Prisoner in the Oak* the final battle between Arthur and Modred ensues, leading to their death at each other's hands, and ultimately to the downfall of Camelot. The sword Excalibur is returned to the lake and the King is freed from his responsibilities as a leader and he no longer needs to worry about the well-being of the people. What is more, Arthur may openly reattach his relationship with Morgaine, his sister and mother to his only son. As Arthur lies dying, Morgaine appears; no longer restrained by their former roles, they may now be at peace. The final scenes of *The Mists of Avalon* are particularly relevant for they confirm the love ties between the siblings:

His head was heavy on my breast, heavy as the child in my own childish arms, heavy as the King Stag who had come to me in triumph. Morgaine, my mother had called impatiently, take care of the baby... and all my life I had borne him with me. I held him close and wiped away his tears with my veil, and he reached up and caught at my hand with his own. 'But it is really you,' he murmured, 'it is you, Morgaine... you have come back to me... and you are so young and fair... I will always see the Goddess with your face... Morgaine, you will not leave me again, will you?' 'I will never leave you again, my brother, my baby, my love,' I whispered to him, and I kissed his eyes. (Bradley 1000)

Morgaine's love for Arthur appears to be a sister's affection, or perhaps one might say it is a mother's love, since even more than Mordred, Arthur is her baby. According to Raymond Thompson in "The First and Last Love: Morgan le Fay and Arthur", a love bond between Arthur and Morgan le Fay emerged as a new trend within Arthurian tradition mostly in the 1980s. The author suggests different reasons to justify this. First, an empathy for Arthur who is betrayed by his wife and best friend; second, the increased interest in pagan religion and the occult; third, most of the modern writers of Arthurian novels are women with a particular interest in a romance between Arthur and Morgan<sup>9</sup>; and, finally, the impact of the medieval image depicting the King resting on his sister's lap when travelling to Avalon. In fact, the scene in which the enchantress arrives to take her brother to Avalon has been repeated throughout the centuries and might well be, as Thompson claims, the source of modern views of an un-brotherly affection between Arthur and Morgan. Whether one accepts this view or not, it is undeniable that Marion Zimmer Bradley's extraordinary collection has helped reshape our view of both Morgaine/Morgan le Fay and Arthur and the ties that bind them.

On the one hand, Bradley rewrote Morgan le Fay's role in Arthurian legends and, even though she is still commonly portrayed as a villain, *The*

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<sup>9</sup> In his article, though, Raymon Thompson fails to explain why these female authors are so fascinated by such a romance.



*Mists of Avalon* doubtlessly shed a new light on the sorceress' erratic behaviour. Bradley's Morgaine may not be a hero, and is sometimes rather cold-hearted, but she can be hardly regarded as a villain. Above all else, the sorceress is human and that is why readers (and TV viewers<sup>10</sup>) find her such a compelling character — she makes mistakes and tries to mend them, as we all do. By providing a voice to one who is today regarded as one of Arthur's greatest opponents, Marion Zimmer Bradley also paved the way to rebuilding the brothers' relationship and explored the possibility of there being more than sibling affection between the two. On the other hand, Arthur is also seen from a different angle. Trying to mediate two opposing and conflicting religious views (Christian and pagan), Arthur comes across as a generous, beneficent king who strives to keep all his subjects happy. King Arthur's connection to his sister is, in Bradley's retelling, genuine and strong so when he meets her again as an adult, he is unable to resist its pull. Seeing as they did not grow up together and lost their virginity to each other, their relationship grows into unforeseen territory and, while Morgaine cannot refrain from protecting Arthur even when she resents him the most, he is not able to stop loving her.

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<sup>10</sup> In 2001 the collection *The Mists of Avalon* was adapted, as a mini-series with the same name, by American cable channel TNT. Directed by Uli Edel, the series' cast included Julianne Margulies as Morgaine, Angelica Houston playing the Lady of the Lake, Vivienne, and Caroline Goodall portraying Igraine.

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**ABSTRACT**

The tales of King Arthur and his brave Knights of the Round Table were possibly the most popular narratives read in the Middle Ages and have remained a source of never-ending curiosity both for the academia and a worldwide audience. However, of the numerous articles published on the Matter of Britain, very few studies have paid attention to the emotional connection between two of its best-known characters: King Arthur and his half-sister, the sorceress commonly known as Morgan le Fay. Therefore, our goal is to analyse the sibling bond between the two. First, we will take a closer look at their representation during the medieval period, namely in the work of Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1420). Second, we shall focus on how Arthur and Morgan/Morgaine's relationship is depicted in the internationally acclaimed collection *The Mists of Avalon* (1983), by Marion Zimmer Bradley.

This paper aims to show how Bradley's retelling has not only helped redefine women's role in Arthurian tales, but has also shed a new light when it comes to portraying Morgan le Fay/Morgaine and Arthur's relationship and, in particular, the love ties that bind them as sister and brother, mother and son, and as lovers.

**KEYWORDS**

Arthurian Legend; Modern Retellings; Arthur; Morgan le Fay.

**RESUMO**

As histórias sobre o Rei Artur e os corajosos Cavaleiros da Távola Redonda foram, provavelmente, as narrativas mais populares na Idade Média e desde então continuam a ser uma fonte de inesgotável curiosidade tanto para a academia, como para o público em geral. Contudo, de entre os inúmeros artigos publicados sobre a Matéria da Bretanha, poucos dedicaram qualquer atenção à ligação emocional entre duas das personagens mais conhecidas: o Rei Artur e a sua irmã, a feiticeira conhecida como Morgan le Fay. Assim, o nosso objectivo neste estudo é analisar o vínculo afectivo estabelecido entre os dois enquanto irmãos. Primeiro, iremos

começar por olhar mais atentamente para a representação destas personagens durante o período medieval, nomeadamente no trabalho de Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1470). Em segundo lugar, iremos focar-nos na aclamada colecção *The Mists of Avalon* (1983), de Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Este artigo pretende demonstrar como a reinterpretação feita por Bradley não só ajudou a redefinir o papel da mulher nos contos Arturianos, como também contribuiu para o desenvolver de uma nova visão quando se trata de narrar a relação entre Morgan le Fay/Morgaine e Artur e, em particular, o amor que os une enquanto irmãos, mãe e filho e como amantes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Lenda Arturiana; Reinterpretações Contemporâneas; Artur; Morgan le Fay.

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# Early Modern Women's Concept of Woman: the Weak Body and the Heroic Inner Self

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## Early Modern Women's Concept of Woman: the Weak Body and the Heroic Inner Self<sup>1</sup>

“**F**railty, thy name is woman!” (Shakespeare 41). Hamlet’s words to his mother encapsulate the dominant and enduring belief regarding the condition of womankind, shared by men and women likewise: women are frail or “the weaker vessel”, according to Saint Peter (The First Epistle of Peter 3:7). Moreover, their weak bodies shelter their weak characters serving as the visible confirmation of the inner-self reality of every woman since Eve. This alleged weakness, or frailty, inherited from mothers to daughters, was perceived in the Early Modern context as inescapable, the result of God’s punishment upon Eve for her responsibility in the original sin that ultimately led humankind to fall: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16).

God’s sentence upon Eve was, therefore, also physical: sorrow, pain, desire. Eve’s body would carry the sign of God’s wrath, and she would pass on that sign to the following generations, as Tertullian acknowledged: “And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too” (4).

Eve, along with all Eve’s daughters throughout the ages, would also experience another of God’s original punishments: they would live under men’s rule — fathers, brothers, husbands — and consequently they should

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the international conference “Corps Héroïque, corps de chair dans le récits de vie de la première modernité” / “Heroic Bodies, Bodies of Flesh: Representing the Body in Early Modern Life Narratives”, in the University of Rheims Champagne-Ardenne, France, June 2012.

maintain a submissive role in society.<sup>2</sup> Women should, therefore, be obedient and silent, as those were the requirements established both by the Greek philosophy and the Jewish-Christian Bible, and postulated by the exegesis of the Fathers of the Church and Scholasticism.

Notwithstanding the epistemological changes that took place in the Early Modern age, dialogues of continuity with former accepted ideologies were perceived, including Galen's theory of humours, which also emphasised women's physical and psychological weakness. Since the theory of bodily humours explained mental and psychological traits, women's specific physical characteristics — like menstruation and womb diseases, fat hips and narrow shoulders — were justified by this sex connection to colder and moister humours. The theory of bodily humours further elucidated women's psychological and mental characteristics, like their propensity to lunacy, as Ian Maclean observed in his analysis on the notion of Early Modern women (28-46).

Early Modern men and women were, therefore, the holders of solid ideologies prescribed by the various fields of knowledge, which asserted an identical frame of thought regarding the concept of women. In this context of continuity, however, our attention is drawn to the emergence of two important contributions that would alter the established condition of women. Both the Humanist movement and the emphasis on the private reading of the Bible underlined by the Reformation enabled women to become increasingly more educated — in fact a small minority who belonged to the aristocracy. Thus, women progressively held important roles as patronesses of the Arts, and they would eventually become writers, as well. Focusing on women's literary production, especially with reference to diaries and autobiographical writings, how did women perspective themselves, physically and psychologically? Bringing 'embodiment' into question, when, how and where does the body become visible in women's narratives? I would like to argue that the references to the physical and socio-political body in English Early Modern women's autobiographical

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<sup>2</sup> As Saint Paul emphasised: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjugation. For Adam was first formed, than Eve. And Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (First Epistle to Timothy 2: 11-14).



writings echo the discourses that labelled women as weak and frail.

When approaching an autobiographical writing, one bears in mind a wide set of theories which deal with the “subject” of the narrative: Louis Althusser argued that the ‘subject’ is a subject of ideology (127-188); Carl Jung developed the concept of the “collective unconscious”, defending that racial memory is based on mythic or archetypal models (42-53); Michel Foucault observed that there is no “outside” to power (141); Pierre Lejeune acknowledged that “autobiography is individual and subjective and claims to speak the truth” (“A Plea for a Guide in Autobiographical Europe”). The list could go on but the key point is that the subject of the autobiographical writings — in the present case, women in Early Modern England — tells her life story according to the cultural, ideological, political and religious dynamics available to her in a specific moment in History, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson noticed in their work.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is no wonder that the references to the body are so rare or none at all, just as Smith and Watson have acknowledged:

Respectable women up through the nineteenth century could not, and would not, tell explicitly... stories about their bodies because the cultural meanings assigned to these bodies had to do with myths of the corrupt nature of female sexuality (51).

It is also my purpose to argue that weak bodies accommodate, quite frequently, heroic inner-selves, as a combination of two antagonistic selves, negotiated as the female author engages in her autobiographical narrative. In this regard, Anne Clifford’s and Margaret Cavendish’s autobiographical texts offer two stimulating and representative examples for analysis.

Lady Anne Clifford’s diaries consist of the records in day-by-day books dating from 1603 to 1676, although this paper focuses exclusively on “The Knole Diary”, which covers the period from 1603 to 1619.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives: Reading Autobiography*.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Sackville-West published *The Diary of the Lady Anne Clifford*, with an introductory note in 1923. There is a more recent edition of Lady Anne’s diaries by a member of the Clifford’s family, David J. H. Clifford, entitled *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford*, published in 1990 by Sutton Publishing and with later re-editions

In this series of notes, the reader becomes familiar with Anne's life 'quest'. Being a woman, Anne saw the family properties pass to her uncle on her father's death, when she was aged 15. However, it was Anne's belief that she was the rightful heir to the family's estates, regardless of her father's will, her husbands' beliefs, the king's pressures, and numerous lawyers' and churchmen's arguments. Anne would spend forty-one years fighting against the "combined patriarchal forces" (the expression is used by the editors of *Her own life*, 35) never renouncing her rights, until the day she finally won her family's estates back; Anne was then 56 years old. Bringing into consideration the excerpts of her diary of 1616 and 1617, she frequently uses the phrase "the business", as a reference to this legal fight, and although remarkably silent in what concerns her female body, bodily issues and psychological considerations, she mentions how this 'business', or 'matters' affected her life. Anne's first husband, Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset, pressured Anne vehemently, so that she would accept a cash settlement in return for her renouncement over the family properties. The pressure was both psychological and physical, as confirmed in numerous records: on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1616, Anne observes "I came from London to Knole, where I had but a 'cold' welcome from my lord" (40); on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May, Anne refers to the message sent from her husband threatening her that it would be 'the last time she would ever see him again', followed by an entry a week later, stating that her husband had decided to 'take their 2-year-old daughter away from Anne' (41); on the 13<sup>th</sup> May, Anne writes about her husband's message: "to persuade me to yield to my lord's desire in this business at this time, or else I was undone forever" (42); on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1617, Anne comments: "this night my lord should have lain with me, but he and I fell out about matters" (48). These are but a few of the numerous accounts regarding the psychological unkindness Anne suffered

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(1992, 2003). Lady Anne's diaries are not original manuscripts, but fragmented 18<sup>th</sup> century- transcripts, scattered at different locations. "The Knole Diary" is held at the Kent Country Archives, in Maidstone. All references in this paper to Anne Clifford's "The Knole Diary" will be made from the sourcebook *Her Own Life: Autobiographical writings by seventeenth-century Englishwomen*, eds. Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox.

throughout her married life, which also extended to the conjugal bed, since her husband would not seek Anne's body on account of their "falling outs" over 'the business'.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this much troubled period in Anne's life, she wrote one single direct comment about her inner-self: "So as I may truly say, I am like an owl in the desert" (42). Using the biblical metaphor described in the Book of Psalms<sup>6</sup>, she presents a unique 'audible' clamour in her narrative, a "cry" from an afflicted inner-self, who suffers most of her life in silence. From the outside, concerning Anne's physical identity — or rather, the body which accommodates her inner-self — her strength is only perceived by the registers about her choices of clothing. On several occasions and despite the "falling outs" and "ill offices" towards her, she decides to wear her "white satin gown" and her "white waistcoat", or the "green flannel gown" and the "taffety waistcoat" (46, 48). Anne's heroic inner-self would be perceptible through her dress and adornment choices, regardless of her weak body and fragile family condition.

Yet, Anne Clifford's body becomes more openly visible in her other sort of "autobiographical text" — according to Hilary Hinds and Helen Wilcox (35) — the *Great Picture* — a triptych she commissioned the Dutch artist Jan van Belcamp, in 1646.<sup>7</sup> The first painting shows Anne Clifford, aged 15, the pivotal year of her life when the legal fight over her family properties began and it portrays a young aristocratic woman, dressed in rich clothing and embellished with fine-looking adornments. Apart from the central figure, significant secondary elements emerge from the painting: the books<sup>8</sup> and the musical instruments that draw one's attention to Anne's education and stress her role as a dedicated patroness and writer.

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<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that this pressure reached the highest ranks conceivable, since Anne records, in the entries of January 1617, how the king himself used "foul means" to persuade her into accepting the settlement (45).

<sup>6</sup> Psalms 102:6.

<sup>7</sup> The triptych *The Great Picture* is now at the Abbot Hall Art Gallery, in Cumbria. <<http://www.abbothall.org.uk/great-picture>>. Appendix 1.

<sup>8</sup> Including titles by Ovid, Chaucer, Cervantes, Spenser, among others.

The central painting depicts Anne's closer relatives: her parents and her two brothers.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that the portraits on the back wall represent Anne's aunts, not uncles — family women, not the men with whom she struggled so much throughout her life. Although Anne is not portrayed in this panel, her mother's finger pointing to her womb may indicate Anne's presence *in utero*, as Heidi Brayman Hackel noticed (225), whereas the hand pointing to the two boys probably suggests that, in spite of the Clifford two male heirs, it would eventually be a woman to become the family legal heiress. Thus, although Anne's body is not depicted in the central panel, her physical absence is, in fact, filled by her concealed presence.

The right side panel depicts Ann, aged 56, precisely when she won her legal fight over her estates. Once again, Anne appears surrounded by books. The pattern of portraits hanging on the back wall is maintained, this time representing her two husbands.<sup>10</sup> Anne complied with the patriarchal conventions, since her husbands were depicted on her pictorial autobiography, although they merely assumed a secondary part.

This “biographical” triptych is highly representative, since it embodies Anne's most important life expedition and final accomplishment. Anne Clifford's life narratives exemplify the submission of women to the patriarchal conventions, although they ultimately confirm how heroic the inner-self can be, despite being sheltered in a “weak vessel”. Anne's body becomes evident in her written narrative when she mentions how her husband's pressure was also physical and when her body is dressed in fashionable and bright colours, so that her confidence and strength would be perceived from the outside. The fact that Anne decided to complement her written life narrative with a pictorial text is also very meaningful: her body became visible. She associated her body representation with her sophisticated upbringing and notorious education, assuming an observable

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<sup>9</sup> Anne's parents were Margaret Russel and George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland; her brothers were Francis and Robert, who died in their childhood. For Anne Clifford's biography, see George Williamson (1922).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset, who died in 1624 and Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, whom she married in 1630.

presence in two of the three panels and maintaining a concealed appearance in the central painting. In the end, Anne's body holds a significant message: her body ages in the paintings, emphasising not only the inescapable course of time, but also how the heroic inner-self was permanent in spite of the impermanence of time.

Margaret Cavendish's *A true Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life*<sup>11</sup> — abbreviating the 12-lines title — was first published in 1656 as part of the *Nature's Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life*.<sup>12</sup> Two significant factors must be considered when analysing the visibility of the body in Cavendish's autobiographical writings. First, her singularity, as the editors of *Her Own Life* observed:

It comes as no surprise that Cavendish, 'singular' though she was in personality and written style, found it impossible to create an image of herself without reference to those masculine forces which, by contradiction, defined her (89).

Physically, and bearing in mind the Derridean notion of *différance*, one is a woman in opposition to being a man. However, in terms of gender, in Early Modern times one was a woman within the ideological frame of patriarchal forces that defined women as frail and weak, regardless of their singularity, creativity, social and cultural achievements. Moreover, if a biographical act should be analysed according to its moment in time and in place, then another significant factor emerges from Cavendish's life narrative. In fact, Cavendish's autobiographical text was written when she was living in exile, in Antwerp (Anna Battigelli 1-10).<sup>13</sup> As Smith and Watson admitted, "the site of narration is also a moment in history, a sociopolitical space" which contributes to the 'self-definition', 'self-recon-

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<sup>11</sup> All references to Margaret Cavendish's diary will be made from the sourcebook *Her Own Life*.

<sup>12</sup> The author specifically mentioned in the title: "And a true story at the latter end, wherein there is no feignings." Therefore, right from the beginning and inscribed in the very title, Margaret Cavendish claimed to have recorded the truth about her life story. A copy of this work is held in the British Library.

<sup>13</sup> The political context of the Interregnum led many royalists to foreign lands, as happened to the Cavendish couple, who lived in Paris, Rotterdam, and Antwerp.

struction' and 'self-determination' of the narrator (69, 70). Consequently, Cavendish's autobiographical narrative was written during a period of her life when the 'historical I' — the person producing the text<sup>14</sup> — was subject to political, economic and societal forces that certainly shaped the 'I' in the narrative. One may conclude that Cavendish was, therefore, subject to two different discourses of power which certainly influenced her autobiographical writing: the one regarding gender and patriarchal ideologies, and the one concerning the political and economic circumstances that forced her out of her comfort zone — her country.

In contrast to Anne Clifford, Margaret Cavendish writes extensively about her inner-self: "As for my humour, I was from childhood given to contemplation, being more taken or delighted with thoughts than in conversation with a society" (95). Later, she affirms: "As for my disposition, it is more inclining to be melancholy than merry, but not crabbed or peevishly melancholy, but soft, melting, solitary and contemplating melancholy" (96).

Cavendish further discloses her inner-self to her addressees, giving embodiment to interiority with phrases such as "lazy nature"; "chaste, both in nature and education"; "seldom angry"; "a great emulator"; "proud"; "bashful"; "naturally a coward, in other cases very valiant" (94, 97, 98).

Particular elements on the subject of the (physical) body emerge in her autobiographical narrative, specifically when she mentions her singularity in matters of "dressing and fashions, especially such fashions as I did invent myself" (96). She further tells her readers about her diet, her fasting and her little exercise, the latter being justified so that the motions of her mind are not hindered by the motions of the body (94, 95). That Cavendish elevates the mind over the body is additionally enhanced when she observes: "and it were an injustice to prefer a fainter affection, or to esteem the body more than the mind" (97). All in all, Cavendish's autobiographical narrative is, as Bowerbank and Mendelson recognised, "a candid paper-body reproduction of the vulnerabilities of Cavendish's own physical and

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<sup>14</sup> Smith and Watson elaborate on the concept of 'I' or 'I's in the context of autobiographical productions. The authors differentiate the "real" or historical 'I', the narrating 'I', the narrated 'I' and the ideological 'I' (71-88).

psychological body" (12). Yet, writing about her physical and psychological vulnerabilities and qualities was most certainly Cavendish's self-analysis mechanism to achieve a self-definition understanding. Suggestively, she states that if any of her readers "scornfully" asks why she has written about her humor or disposition, the answer would be that the purpose of this disclosure was to the "authoress", not to the readers, revealing Cavendish intended a self-analysis which would eventually lead to a self-definition, a self-understanding through writing (98, 99).

Within the context of autobiographical writings, Early Modern English women writers may then have been the object of different ideologies of power: the religious, cultural, social and familial discourses which substantiated the scholastic and medieval traditions and postulated women's submission. Nevertheless, as the 'subject' of their life narratives, women negotiated those ideologies that framed them and labeled them as weak and frail. Thus, they refused to engage in a 'minoratised discourse' and their "weak" bodies became visible in multiple and varied occasions, emphasising their heroic inner-selves.

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## Appendix



Jan van Belcamp. c. 1646. *The Great Picture*. Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Cumbria. Reproduced by permission of Abbot Hall Art Gallery.

### ABSTRACT

“Frailty, thy name is woman!” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I. ii. 146). Hamlet’s words to his mother encapsulate the dominant and enduring belief regarding the condition of womankind, shared by men and women likewise: women are frail or “the weaker vessel”. Moreover, their weak bodies shelter their weak characters serving as the visible confirmation of the inner-self reality of every woman since Eve. This alleged weakness, or frailty, inherited from mothers to daughters, was perceived in the Early Modern context as inescapable, the result of God’s punishment upon Eve for her responsibility in the original sin that ultimately led humankind to fall.

Focusing on women’s literary production, especially with reference to diaries and autobiographical writings, how did Early Modern women perspective themselves, physically and psychologically? Bringing ‘embodiment’ into question, when, how and where does the body become visible in women’s narratives? I would like to argue that the references to the physical and socio-political body in English Early Modern women’s autobiographical writings echo the discourses that labelled women as weak and frail. It is also my purpose to argue that weak bodies accommodate, quite frequently, heroic inner-selves. In this regard, Anne Clifford’s and Margaret Cavendish’s autobiographical texts offer two stimulating and representative examples for analysis.

### KEYWORDS

Early Modern England; women; autobiography; body; inner-self.

### RÉSUMÉ

“Frailty, thy name is woman!” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I. ii.). Les paroles de Hamlet à sa mère condensent la croyance dominante et constante concernant la condition de la femme, partagée par les hommes et les femmes de la même façon: les femmes sont fragiles ou « le sexe faible ». De plus, leurs faibles corps protègent leurs faibles caractères serviles aussi confirmant la réalité de l’être

intérieur de toutes les femmes depuis Ève. Ces présumées faiblesses ou fragilité, transmises de mère en fille, ont été perçues dans le contexte du début de la Première Modernité comme qu'inéluctables, comme résultat du châtement de Dieu envers Ève par sa responsabilité du péché original, qui en fin de compte entraîna l'humanité vers la chute.

Lorsque l'on se centre sur la production littéraire féminine, surtout en ayant pour référence les journaux intimes et écrits autobiographiques, on s'interroge sur la façon dont les femmes au début de la Première Modernité se voyaient elles-mêmes, physiquement et psychologiquement. Je soutiendrais que les références au corps physique et socio-politique dans les écrits autobiographiques des femmes du début de la Première Modernité Anglais reflètent les discours qui ont étiquetés les femmes en tant que faibles et fragiles. Mon but est aussi de prouver que des corps faibles accueillent, bien souvent, des êtres intérieurs héroïques. À cet égard, les textes autobiographiques d'Anne Clifford et Margaret Cavendish nous fournissent deux exemples stimulants et représentatifs à analyser.

#### MOTS-CLÉS

Angleterre des débuts de la Première Modernité; femmes; autobiographie; corps; être intérieur.

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A Villain and a Monster –  
The Literary Portrait of Richard III  
by Thomas More and  
William Shakespeare

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# A Villain and a Monster — The Literary Portrait of Richard III by Thomas More and William Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>

Richard III from the House of York has become the embodiment of distortion, wickedness and tyranny throughout the centuries, by means of an immensity of works that forms the largest bibliography ever written on an English monarch. When approaching medieval and early modern times, one must naturally bear in mind the concept of history, the nature of historiography and the specificities of biographical writings, then called *Lives* because the word ‘biography’ had not yet been coined.<sup>2</sup> However, the way the figure of Richard III has been depicted both in historiography and in literature is so extraordinary that one wonders where factuality ends and fiction begins.

The process of vilification started at the end of the 15th century and grew steadily until the 20th century, when new, more objective approaches were finally set in motion, in an effort to expose incongruities, exaggerations and implausible elements, mostly based on rumour, especially because, among several factors, hardly any official records of Richard III’s reign have survived. Legend, myth and speculation could thus easily bloom, while fact and fiction became inextricably intertwined. But, as Francis Bacon put it in one of his essays,<sup>3</sup> “What is Truth? *said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer*” (Bacon 377).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of an extensive research on Renaissance *Lives*, and was delivered at the international conference “Heroic Bodies, Bodies of Flesh: Representing the Body in Early Modern Life Narratives” / “Corps Héroïque, Corps de Chair dans les Récits de Vie de la Première Modernité”, University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne (30 May-1 June, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* registered it for the first time in 1683.

<sup>3</sup> “Of Truth”.

After the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, where Richard perished, a well-planned policy of Tudor propaganda was set in motion by Henry VII himself. The monarch commissioned a series of historiographical writings, mainly aiming at the solidification of the newly founded dynasty and the consequent, definitive annihilation of the last Plantagenet king of England, whose defeat and death on the battlefield should not by any means transform him into the victimised York hero of the Wars of the Roses. Therefore, among others, Bernard André,<sup>4</sup> Pietro Carmeliano,<sup>5</sup> John Rous<sup>6</sup> and Polydore Vergil,<sup>7</sup> each one responsible for adding further notes of improbability, delineated Richard of Gloucester as a vile, wicked, monstrous creature.<sup>8</sup>

The hyperbolic process of vituperation would reach its climax later, with two major early modern authors, whose literary works on the king may be considered the epitomes of the tradition that has forever shaped him as a monster: around 1514, Thomas More wrote *The History of King Richard the Third*, and around 1591, William Shakespeare created *King Richard III*.<sup>9</sup> From then on Richard has been depicted as hunchbacked with a withered arm, reported as having been born with teeth and shoulder-length hair after two years of gestation in his mother's womb, and delineated as a usurper and a murderer. It is indeed hard to come across a more distorted, vicious character, whose outward appearance — an implausible body of flesh — faithfully mirrors the inner moral self, and whose deeds are, moreover, perfect analogies of his distorted physical traits.

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<sup>4</sup> *Historia regis Henrici Septimi*, ca. 1500.

<sup>5</sup> Carmeliano was a scholar in the courts of Richard III and Henry VII. His former eulogies to Richard were replaced by harsh vituperations during the first Tudor's reign (for example, the 1486 congratulatory poem on the birth of Prince Arthur).

<sup>6</sup> *Historia Regum Angliae*, known as *Rous Rolls*, written during Henry VII's reign.

<sup>7</sup> *Anglica Historia*, 1505-1513.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, R.S. Sylvester (lxxv-lxxx) and A.F. Pollard (228-229).

<sup>9</sup> Parts 2 and 3 of *King Henry VI*, centred on other historical figures, also contain important sketches for a thorough negative characterisation of the monarch.



In the unfinished *Life* by Thomas More, the introduction of the protagonist is accomplished through a complex rhetorical process, based on a literal antithesis and on a subtle prolepsis. The first five pages are focused on Richard's family, especially on his brother King Edward IV, whose reign is referred to as a golden time and whose encomiastic portrait is powerfully condensed in the following passage: "of visage louelye, of bodye mightie, stronge, and cleane made" (More 4). The antithesis is thus achieved, once every positive trait attributed to Edward IV will, sooner or later, meet its negative counterpart in Richard: first, as Duke of Gloucester, then as Lord Protector, eventually as proclaimed, crowned and anointed King of England. Moreover, the protagonist's appearance in the narrative is anticipated by three proleptic allusions to a forthcoming age of misrule, in a crescendo of causticity. The first one is vague but it already encapsulates the entire disruption awaiting England: "after his [Edward IV's] decease, by the crueltie, mischiefe, and trouble of the tempestious worlde that folowed" (More 4). The second allusion is less vague, and announces the most condemnable deed attributed to the future monarch: "withoutte anye respecte of Godde or the worlde, vnnaturallye contriued to bereue them [Edward's children], not onelye their dignitie, but also their liues" (More 6). As for the third, it is unequivocally a reference to his deep iniquity: "what maner of manne this was, that coulde fynde in his hearte, so muche mischiefe to conceiue" (More 6).

The formidable circumstances of his birth are told in a crude, violent way, openly announcing the implicit malevolence:

... his mother had so muche a doe in her trauaile, that shee could not bee deliuered of hym vncutte: ... hee came into the worlde with the feete forwarde, as menne bee borne outwarde ... also not vntothed ... (More 7)

The signs inferred since the moment he came into this world take then full shape when Gloucester is physically described:

... little of stature, ill fetured of limmes, croke backed, his left shoulder much higher then his right, hard fauoured of visage ... (More 7)

The corrosion of his image is underlined by More's insistence on expressions like "It is for trouth reported"; "as the fame runneth"; "as menne constantly

saye”; “as menne demed” (More 7-8). Although they emphasise the nature of the history, historiography and literature of those times, as well as the usual confidence in oral, spurious sources, such expressions result odd, as if the author was seeking some kind of justification for the extraordinary things he was telling. Be that as it may, Thomas More develops a substantial set of caustic insinuations before he literally introduces Gloucester in the narrative.

William Shakespeare’s rhetorical process is diametrically opposed to More’s, although the ultimate result is the same. The play starts by bluntly exhibiting Gloucester alone on the stage, vicious in body and in mind. In the powerful opening soliloquy, Richard uses epithets to underline his own deformities and, in direct speech, draws the symbiosis between his exteriority and his interiority, found in More’s narrative:

I that am rudely stamped ...  
 (...)
   
 I that am curtailed of this fair proportion,  
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
 Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time  
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up,  
 ... so lamely and unfashionable  
 (...)
   
 I am determinèd to prove a villain  
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days.  
 Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,  
 (...)
   
 ... I am subtle, false, and treacherous,  
 (Shakespeare, *R III* 52-53).

In another soliloquy (*King Henry VI*), another blatant self-portrait is drawn, according to the vituperative tradition:

She<sup>10</sup> did corrupt frail Nature with some bribe  
 To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub;  
 To make an envious mountain on my back  
 Where sits Deformity to mock my body;

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<sup>10</sup> The Duchess of York, his mother.

To shape my legs of an unequal size;  
 To disproportion me in every part,  
 Like to a chaos ...  
 (Shakespeare, *H VI* Part 3 139)

In the same work, Clifford's corrosive words about young Richard enclose the sense of disruption, inversion and iniquity, also anticipating his future complex behaviour ("Hence, heap of wrath, foul indigested lump, /As crooked in thy manners as thy shape." – Shakespeare, *H VI* Part 2 205-206).

The insistence on Richard's physical deformity seems to go beyond the intention of portraying him. In Thomas More's work, there is never the possibility of regeneration. The sense of inversion and distortion, introduced with "hee came into the worlde with the feet forward", will be continuously explored and expanded, and will assume different metaphorical angles that result in the shaping of a monster. The most determinant one is the correspondence between Richard's outer and inner features, which will prevail until the end of *Life*: "... malicious, wrathfull, enuious (...) close and secrete, a deepe dissimuler, lowlye of counteynaunce, arrogant of heart, ... dispitious and cruell ... (More 7-8).

The literary speeches are full of violence whenever Richard is mentioned, and, in the case of the play, literally shown. Every one of his decisions is said to be premeditated and to have a double meaning, while every one of his relationships is said to have a specific purpose, in an oriented crescendo leading to his ultimate destruction. Besides the capital crimes that are attributed to Richard III (the assassination of his young nephews<sup>11</sup> being the most hideous one), three of his actions may exemplify the cold premeditation and the deep ambition that characterise him. In a context of permanent cruelty, the annihilation of Hastings, the imprisonment of Jane Shore, the bastardisation of some members of his family, and the implicit accusation of the Duchess of York, his own mother, of adultery, for example, deepen the sense of monstrosity; in fact, these characters, together with the young Princes in the Tower, become distressed victims, no matter the circumstances of their own contingent faults. However, in such a brutal scenario, Richard III's paramount transgression manages to go far beyond

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<sup>11</sup> Edward IV's sons: Edward V and Richard Duke of York.

the hideous crimes he is literally accused of by More because his paramount transgression is the way he is, or, more accurately, the way More and Shakespeare tell he is.

According to ancient traditions, exterior negative traits are the manifestation of personality degenerations, as well as the sign of the connection to the so feared *maleficium*: "... beware of all persons that have default of members naturally, as of foot, hand, eye, or another member; one that is crippled ...".<sup>12</sup> Francis Bacon also registered several considerations on the traditional view:<sup>13</sup> "... as nature hath done ill by them [deformed persons], so do they by nature; (...) [they are] void of natural affection." (Bacon 480). In More's text, Richard's vile character corresponds to the misshapen physical portrait and is delineated through many derogatory attributes, among which the epithet "dissimuler" and the comparison to Judas are the most outstanding ones — "outwardly coumpinable where he inwardely hated, not letting to kisse whome hee thoughte to kyll" (More 8).

Concomitantly, Richard III's negative outer and inner traits are the antithetical correspondents of the saints' marks, i.e. of the visible manifestations of clarity and positivity received from God, so frequently referred to in hagiographies. As Francis Bacon also mentioned,<sup>14</sup> "virtue is best in a body that is comely ... as if nature were rather busy not to err, that in labour to produce excellency." (Bacon 478-479). Moreover, the saints' marks have a correspondence in the royal thaumaturgical capacity, within the theory of the divine origin of the royal power. Such origin may be materialised in the healing capacity of the monarch, whose power comes from God and whose nature consists of two entities — the terrene and the mystic. Richard's alleged physical deformities, the totality of his exteriority and the suffering inflicted to his mother when he was born are, contrariwise, powerful signs of darkness and malignity. Even the martial

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<sup>12</sup> *The Compost of Ptolomeus*, ca. 1600. Due to the impossibility of having access to this popular work that circulated in England at the end of the 16th century/beginning of the 17th (there is a copy in the British Museum), I quote this passage from Keith Thomas 677.

<sup>13</sup> "Of Deformity".

<sup>14</sup> "Of Beauty".

bravery and the military deeds recorded by the Tudor historiographers, difficult or even impossible to attribute to such a crippled character, are intentionally underestimated and distorted, even ignored, in More's text.

The emblematic, decisive Battle of Bosworth Field may then be seen as the providential instrument to cease chaos because, according to these views, the universe governed by the last Plantagenet king had become an aberration. The battle, vividly told by Shakespeare, closes the play and contains the protagonist's final, expected punishment, although the monarch is eventually allowed a dimension of brave warrior. Something totally different happens in Thomas More's *Life*. The strategic, paradoxical, somehow mysterious omission of the battle, together with the allusion to the king, brief but full of corrosion, have a devastating effect that coincides with the climax of vilification:

... Kinge Richarde ... slain in the fiede, hacked and hewed  
of his enemies handes, haryed on horseback dead, his here in  
despite torn and togged lyke a cur dogge. (More 87)

In fact, the mutilation inflicted on the king's corpse, meaning total opprobrium, deprives him of every sense of decency, integrity or respect, as if the reposition of order were thus rendered more effective. Richard III's defamation seems therefore to constitute the necessary epilogue in the two literary portraits imbued with the didactic dimension inherent to biographical texts since Antiquity:<sup>15</sup> this king has indeed become an *exemplum*, but not to be imitated or followed.

Evidence that Edward IV had trusted his brother Gloucester (in the form of rewards, appointments, lands and titles), the acknowledged military deeds, the confirmation by Parliament of the Lord Protector's title to the crown (the *Titulus Regius* of 1484) and his own motto ("Loyalty binds me", or "Loyaulté me lie") constitute some of the few surviving elements that, in one way or another, contradict the demolishing, prevailing tradition, as well as the inconsistencies in the written sources. On the other hand, beyond historical, circumstantial facts, beyond the way the sequence of

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<sup>15</sup> The *Lives* written by Plutarch and Suetonius. The medieval hagiographies contain a similar didactic intention.

events is organised by Thomas More and William Shakespeare, and despite the tight coincidence between the deformity of the body and the iniquity of the mind, other contradictions arise, ironically and paradoxically, both on the metaphorical stage of the narrative and on the literal stage of the play. In fact, the protagonist's distortions in the literary portraits are counterbalanced by his eloquent, brilliant speeches,<sup>16</sup> by the report of his successful plans,<sup>17</sup> and by the acknowledgement of his victorious achievements that ultimately led him to the throne.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the catastrophic consequences for almost everyone who surrounds him and eventually for himself, Richard III of England, villain and monstrous as he is, has simultaneously assumed a powerful, intriguing dimension because through the art of writing he was indeed made a masterful monster.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A few examples: "*The protectours oracion*" (More 25-27); "*The counsell in the tower*" (More 46-49); "*The kynges answer to his mother*" (More 63-64); the soliloquies (Shakespeare, *R III* 52-53, 198-199; *H VI* Part 3 137-141).

<sup>17</sup> "*Shores wife*" (More 54-56); the murder of Clarence (Shakespeare, *R III* 86-97).

<sup>18</sup> "*The protectours proclamacion*" (More 53-54); "*The mayers commynge to Baynardes castel*" (More 77-80); the king making strategy (Shakespeare, *R III* 136-152).

<sup>19</sup> On February 4, 2013, in a press conference broadcasted by *The Telegraph*, the University of Leicester confirmed, based on DNA analyses, that the skeleton exhumed at Greyfriars, Leicester, in August 2012 is Richard III. These constitute extremely relevant elements to complement and/or shed new light on the study of the king and his time.

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### ABSTRACT

The process of vilification of Richard III started at the end of the fifteenth century, when a well-planned policy of Tudor propaganda was set in motion by Henry VII himself, who commissioned a series of historiographical writings, mainly aiming at the solidification of the newly founded dynasty. One of the strategies, probably the major one, consisted in the definitive annihilation of the last Plantagenet king of England, whose defeat and death on the battlefield should not by any means transform him into the York victimised hero of the Wars of the Roses. Thus, various historiographers delineated Richard of Gloucester as a vile, wicked, monstrous creature. But the hyperbolic process of vilification undoubtedly reached its highest climax with two major early modern authors. The *Life* written by Thomas More – *The History of King Richard the Third* (ca. 1514) – and the play written by William Shakespeare – *King Richard III* (ca. 1591) – may be considered the epitomes of the tradition that has forever shaped the king as a monster.

In this text, I focus on the way More and Shakespeare exploit and amplify the vituperative historiographical tradition, though mostly based on rumour, uncertainties and legendary elements. Within this widely accepted tradition, both authors manage to shape a solid portrait of Richard III, an *exemplum* not to be imitated or followed, but whose performance, built through a set of powerful rhetorical devices, is masterful, both in the *Life* and in the play.

### KEYWORDS

Tudor historiography; biographical writings; vilification; *exemplum*.

### RESUMO

O processo de vilificação de Ricardo III teve início em finais do século XV, quando uma bem planeada política de propaganda Tudor foi posta em marcha pelo próprio Henrique VII, que encomendou uma série de escritos historiográficos com o objectivo primordial de cimentar a dinastia recentemente fundada. Uma das



estratégias, talvez mesmo a principal, consistiu na aniquilação definitiva do último rei Plantageneta de Inglaterra, cuja derrota e morte em campo de batalha jamais o poderia transformar no herói vitimizado das Guerras das Rosas. Assim, diversos autores delinearão Ricardo de Gloucester como uma criatura vil, malévola e monstruosa. Mas o processo hiperbólico de vilipêndio atingiu indubitavelmente o seu auge com dois autores maiores do período 'Early Modern. A *Vida* escrita por Thomas More – *The History of King Richard the Third* (ca. 1514) – e a peça escrita por William Shakespeare – *King Richard III* (ca. 1591) – podem ser consideradas os epítomes da tradição que moldou para sempre o rei como um monstro.

Este texto centra-se na forma como More e Shakespeare exploram e amplificam a tradição historiográfica vituperativa, a qual, no entanto, assenta sobretudo em rumores, incertezas e elementos lendários. No âmbito desta tradição amplamente aceite, ambos os autores conseguem moldar um retrato sólido de Ricardo III, um *exemplum* a não imitar ou seguir, mas cuja actuação, construída através de um conjunto de recursos retóricos poderosos, é magistral, tanto na *Vida* como na peça.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

historiografia Tudor; escritos biográficos; vilificação; *exemplum*.

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# Lessons from the Past: The Panic of 1893

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# Lessons from the Past: The Panic of 1893<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The historian, political commentator and essayist Henry Adams (1838-1918), one of the keenest observers of the American scene in the second half of the nineteenth century, writes in his third-person autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), that upon his arrival in Lucerne, Switzerland, on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1893, he “found letters from his brothers requesting his immediate return to Boston because the community was bankrupt and he was probably a beggar.” (321) Notwithstanding the exaggeration — after all, he belonged to one of the most prestigious political clans from Massachusetts, whose members over time had married into the wealthiest New England families — the fact is that Henry Adams heeded the call of his brothers, Charles and Brooks, sailed back to the U.S. immediately, and arrived in Quincy, Massachusetts, the family’s ancestral home, on August 7<sup>th</sup>. The reason for the urgent request of his return was none other than the worsening economic conditions in the country, stemming from what became known as the Panic of 1893, and its impact on the investments of the Adamases.

Adams’s non-fictional works are particularly illuminating in the context of the *postbellum* industrialization of the United States and of the development of financial capitalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. With ready access to the corridors of power in Washington, Adams’s observations in his autobiography, letters and essays on the

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<sup>1</sup> An abridged version of this paper was first delivered at the 33<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Portuguese Association for Anglo-American Studies (APEAA), “Authority *versus* Altery: The Return of Hegemony?”, held at the Catholic University of Portugal, 20-22 September 2012.

hegemonic impact of financial capitalism on the lives of individuals and nations provide us with plenty of food for thought these days. I wish to examine in this paper one of the most serious financial crisis to have affected the United States of America, the Panic of 1893, through the eyes of this most insightful, and often neglected, American author, so as to assess the extent to which financial crises may, or may not, impact upon individual and collective identities. Adams evidences misgivings in his works about the nature of financial capitalism as he criticizes the drive for economic supremacy and territorial expansion pursued by the U.S. at the time. Consequently, his personal narrative on the nature of financial capitalism may allow us to draw some important lessons to understand our current financial and political woes.

The Adamses were well-off but frugal landowners, of Puritan stock, imbued with a strong sense of dedication to public service. Adams's father, Charles Francis Adams, had married rich, into the family of Peter Chardon Brooks of Boston, and Adams himself into that of a prominent Boston physician, Dr. Robert William Hooper. Grandfather Brooks, as Adams refers to him in *Education*, had made his fortune as a merchant and subsequently in real estate and mortgage loans. When he died on Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1849 he left the largest estate in Boston, approximately two million dollars, to be shared among his seven surviving children. Adams often likes to refer in his autobiography to a "feud" between Quincy and State Street, to an inherent conflict between the frugal, disinterested values of the Adamses from Quincy, in contrast with the capitalistic, business-minded Brookses from Boston.

Ever since his wife's suicide in 1885, Adams had been spending a large part of his life travelling, to Japan and the South Seas in 1890 (Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji Is.), Australia, Ceylon and France in 1891. With his *magnum opus*, *History of the United States under the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (1889-1891), now in print, the year 1893 was to be no different for Adams: in May he visited the Chicago World Fair with Senator James Donald Cameron (1833-1918) and his family,<sup>2</sup> in early June he sailed for England, and from there, in mid-July, he travelled to

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<sup>2</sup> The Camerons were an influential family from Pennsylvania which Henry likes to contrast with the Adamses from Massachusetts for their different political stance and

Prangins, Chamonix and Zermatt, Switzerland. It was after crossing the Furka Pass, and upon his arrival in Lucerne, that he received the ill-omened letter from his brothers summoning him to Quincy to deal with the family's apparent dire financial affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Adams had had no major financial worries in his life up until 1893. His investments, which he derived from his inheritance, had provided him with sufficient income to live off comfortably and not to have to worry about gainful employment. In the period under consideration, it is estimated that Adams's annual income was between \$25,000 and \$30,000 dollars, at a time when the level of taxation was negligible. He had served as his father's secretary in Washington and in London, while the latter had held the post of congressman and ambassador, respectively, but that had been unpaid service. The only time Adams had actually had a regular income was the period in which he taught history at Harvard (from 1870 to 1877), his annual salary being at that time, \$2,000 dollars per year, less \$300 / \$400 for the rent on his rooms. Now at 55 years of age, though, he had to face the prospect of being poor.<sup>4</sup>

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activity. In *Education*, he observes: "The Camerons had what the Adamses thought the political vice of reaching their objects without much regard to their methods." *Ibidem*, p. 319. The Camerons were representative of an "American type," according to Adams, by which he meant they were pragmatic politicians who controlled the party machine in their native state, without any concern for principle, whereas the Adamses embodied the disinterested, independent politicians who placed the common good above party or self. On the issue of silver, as we will have opportunity to see, they shared similar views.

<sup>3</sup> Adams's famous ancestors were: Samuel Adams, one of the heroes of America's independence; John Adams, second president of the U.S. and the American minister to England who had helped to negotiate the Treaty of Paris, putting an end to the Revolutionary War; John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the U.S., minister to Russia, Secretary of State to James Monroe, known to posterity as "Old Man Eloquent" for his fierce anti-slavery stance in Congress; Charles Francis Adams, his father, founding member of the Free-Soil party, congressman from Massachusetts, minister to England during the Civil War.

<sup>4</sup> Adams still feared for his investments. He tells us in his autobiography that he was at a loss as to why he was on the verge of bankruptcy after he went to the bank to withdraw money and the cashier only let him have half of what he wanted (\$50 dollars). Like many Americans he, too, owed money to the banks, and now that money

## Part One: The Panic of 1893

Between 1850 and 1914, the United States established networks of trade, investment and the production of goods with other industrialized economies of the time, among which stood those of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, which paved the way for the globalized forms of capitalism we see today.<sup>5</sup> These developments were particularly noticeable throughout Henry Adams's lifetime. The Panic of 1893 was yet another cycle in the boom-bust type of crisis to which the American economy had been regularly subjected since its founding, all of which involved some form of speculation either in land, stocks, or the currency, resulting in widespread recession and bank failures across the country. Examples of these unsustainable booms in which some assets had become the object of a speculative bubble or mania were the Panic of 1819 (caused by ever growing issues of bank notes), the Panic of 1837 (due to land speculation and forced specie payments in gold or silver), the Panic of 1871 (provoked by a bubble in railway shares and a fall in the price of silver), the Panic of 1893, the subject of our paper (resulting from a bubble in railway stocks and a run on gold), not to mention the Great Wall Street Crash of 1929, the worst in modern history (caused by a bubble in stocks and bonds). And more recently, of course, the 2008 banking crisis, with which we are all familiar, provoked by the use of so-called sub-prime interest rates in the real estate sector.<sup>6</sup>

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had to be paid back. On the other hand, the situation was ironical, as he had for the first time "the banks in his power". *Ibidem*, p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of the present work, I have relied on the framework adopted by a number of scholars to describe and explain the historical patterns of globalization, namely, David Held, Anthony G. McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations – Politics, Economics and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999. In their study of the above-mentioned patterns, these authors identify four major epochs: a) a pre-modern period (9,000-11,000-1500); b) an early modern period (c. 1500-1850); c) a modern industrial era (c.1850-1945); d) a contemporary period (c.1945 to the present). For a detailed discussion of each of these periods, see p. 26 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Two earlier major financial crises in the world were the Tulip Bubble (1636-1670) and the South Sea Bubble (1720). In the case of the U.S. the Panic of 1819 was caused by the expansion of bank notes issues and the suspension of specie payments which had



The collapse of the London Banking House of Barings in 1891 signaled the beginning of financial difficulties in the world's most developed economies, setting off a recession throughout the world. Adams, who was in the South Seas at the time, observes in *Education* that the repercussions of the collapse of this important international financial institution were felt there:

Even the year before, in 1891, far off in the Pacific, one had met everywhere in the east a sort of stagnation — a creeping paralysis — complaints of shipping and producers — that spread throughout the whole southern hemisphere. Questions of exchange and silver-production loomed large. Credit was shaken, and a change of party-government might shake it even in Washington. (310)<sup>7</sup>

The 1893 crisis itself was triggered when the free coinage of silver stopped and investors rushed to buy gold, which had become a safer investment. On August 8, 1893 a few months after his inauguration, President Grover Cleveland, a democrat, sent a message to Congress recommending the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, passed three years earlier (July 14, 1890), during the administration of Benjamin Harrison, a republican president. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act had established parity between

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occurred in 1814 in the aftermath of the War of 1812. When the Second Bank of the U.S. suspended the issue of bank notes, it caused widespread bankruptcies, bank failures and runs, prices dropped and large scale unemployment ensued. The Panic of 1837 arose when American citizens began to accept payment only in specie (gold or silver coinage), believing that the government was selling land and accepting questionable state bank notes. As a result of this, banks failed, unemployment rose, and five-year depression took hold of the economy. The Panic of 1871, also known as the Long Depression, was caused by the fall in the value of silver internationally when Germany decided to abandon the silver standard after the Franco-Prussian War. Because the U.S. was a major supplier of silver, there was a drop in demand. Before that, the U.S. had backed its currency with both gold and silver, but with the Coinage Act of 1873, the country moved to the gold standard and stopped buying silver at a statutory price. The Panic of 1893 was the next major financial crisis.

<sup>7</sup> According to Jean Gooder, this first moment in the crisis did not affect Adams's finances greatly, as she writes in her notes to the *Education*, because his investments were not on the Stock Market. Cf. Jean Gooder, *Education*, p. 524, note 20.

gold and silver, requiring the U.S. government to buy 4,500,000 ounces of silver each month and to issue the equivalent in Treasury notes that could be redeemed either in gold or silver. Cleveland informed Congress that he would convene a special session to meet in September “to the end that through a wise and patriotic exercise of the legislative duty, with which they [the people’s representatives in Congress] solely are charged, present evils may be mitigated and dangers threatening the future may be averted.”<sup>8</sup> The legislation surrounding the Sherman Silver Purchase Act had been highly controversial and contentious and had thrown into opposite political camps those citizens who wanted to borrow money more freely and those deeply afraid of the impact of inflation on their personal finances. It had represented a sort of “truce”, according to Cleveland, “between the advocates of free silver coinage and those intending to be more conservative.”<sup>9</sup> The repeal of the legislation was a major setback for the debtor classes, with a long history of conflict with the moneyed interests of the country, ever since Shay’s rebellion, because it meant that they would not be able to borrow money easily and at reasonable interest rates for investment. It drove silver out of the international money system and made the gold standard the only acceptable means of payment in international transactions.

## Part Two: The Silver/Gold Standard

Whether the U.S. should adhere to the gold standard or shift to another currency standard, namely paper money or silver was one of the most

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1876-1900/grover-cleveland-message-on-the-repeal-of-the-sherman-silver-purchase-act-august-8-1893.php> (accessed January 21, 2012). A question that comes immediately to mind is why was the silver Act passed under a Republican President if the legislation benefitted creditor classes, and repealed under a Democratic one? One of the reasons may have to do with the fact that the Executive branch always favored gold because it believed to be thus placing the American economy on par with the most developed ones in the world. Another one may be connected with political patronage.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1876-1900/grover-cleveland-message-on-the-repeal-of-the-sherman-silver-purchase-act-august-8-1893.php> (accessed January 21, 2012).

important issues in American politics between 1865 and 1900. The Republican Party, which controlled the American presidency uninterrupted from the end of the Civil War to the eve of WWI, with the exception of the two administrations of Grover Cleveland, created the political framework and developmental policies behind America's industrialization. Its political program provided the foundational policies required for the expansion of America's industry, namely the gold standard, the protective tariff, and the national market: adherence to the gold standard provided the currency stability required to do business internationally, particularly with the United Kingdom, tariff protection allowed American manufacturing enterprises to do business without the hindrance of international competition, and finally, a growing and unregulated national market provided the economic space where American corporations could sell their products.<sup>10</sup> The gold standard was important in international transactions because it also provided the means whereby the stock markets of London and New York could be integrated and government bonds and shares in railway companies could more easily be bought and sold (Bensel 453). As the automatic adjustment mechanism that operated in the advanced economies of Europe and the United States up until World War I, it also permitted payments in international transactions and the control of inflation.<sup>11</sup>

It was the belief of the supporters of the Democratic Party, however, that a weaker currency based on silver only, or in combination with gold, would stimulate the economy and lead to economic growth by allowing small businessmen and landowners to borrow money from banks at lower interest rates. The currency question, thus, split voters into two groups in *postbellum* American politics: the interests of big capital converged in the

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed study of these questions, see Richard F. Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), chapter 6, "Political Administration and Defense of the Gold Standard".

<sup>11</sup> On the subject of the gold standard, Ernest Samuels observes the following in the introduction to his *Henry Adams – Selected Letters*: "According to liberal doctrine, the gold standard guaranteed a neutral pecuniary medium that served to keep corruption and error, chicanery and sentimentality, out of the fiscal process." *Ibidem*, p. xxi.

Republican Party whereas those of small businessmen were concentrated in the Democratic Party. Here is the lament of a Louisiana Democrat about the gold standard and high protective tariffs advocated by the Republican Party, to the effect that under “the gold standard and a high protective tariff, the twin fetishes of Republican ignorance and greed, the Southern cotton planter is between the upper and nether millstones of legislative oppression — by the one the value of his product is decreased, and by the other the articles which he must necessarily buy are increased in price” (qtd. in Bensel 429).

Gold was not neutral in nineteenth-century America: it had an inherent class and sectional side to it, benefitting the financial capitalists, the bankers and the capital-exporting North-East, to the detriment of the South and West, economically less developed and in need of capital to expand. During the Civil War the U.S. government had abandoned the gold standard, thus allowing this metal to fluctuate in value. It had printed paper money (greenbacks) to overcome the shortage of gold reserves and to pay for the war effort, an inflationary policy that reduced the purchasing power of the dollar to a portion of what it had been before the Civil War. From 1865 to 1879, the country pursued a deflationary policy to invert the situation, which had been caused by the excessive supply of paper money in the economy, but in 1879 it returned to the gold standard so as to stabilize the value of the dollar in foreign markets. From 1879 to the mid-1890s, the U.S. went through a period of deflation, as other countries joined the gold standard. This limited the supply of gold in world markets creating difficulties for those who wished to borrow money. Silver became an alternative currency standard because its supply was plentiful. In his *The Age of Reform* (1955), Richard Hofstadter singles out three major events that strengthened the silverite supporters in the early 1890s: the six new western states that joined the Union (Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington and Wyoming), the repeal of the Silver Purchase Act, alluded to before, and the beginning of the economic crisis (104). In general terms, the executive branch of the U.S. government opposed silver, whereas Congress varied in its support for a standard that would include silver, depending on its majorities in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1900, however, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the gold standard for the nation, putting an end

to an issue which had dominated American politics since the end of the Reconstruction period.

Adams had always felt very strongly about the power of capital over the body politic ever since he had uncovered the scandal surrounding the capitalists Jay Gould and Jim Fisk to corner the gold market in the early 1870s, which he detailed in his essay “The New York Gold Conspiracy” (1870). Jim Fisk and Jay Gould were two American capitalists of the time who were no amateurs when it came to market speculation. They had made a fortune by speculating in railway stock, thus having become the owners of the Erie Railway. The two men were examples of Americans’ propensity for material accumulation, which the end of the Civil War had exacerbated, to such an extent, as Adams remarks, that “almost every man who had money employed a part of his capital in the purchase of stocks or of gold, of copper, of petroleum, or of domestic produce, in the hope of a rise in prices, or staked money on the expectation of a fall” (“The New York Gold Conspiracy” 51-52). Moreover, it was a process that was no different from “*roulette or rouge-et-noir*” (52). Adams maintains in this essay that the Civil War had created a “speculative mania” the likes of which the U.S. had never seen before, which only stopped when the government stopped printing greenbacks and investors began switching to gold (“The New York Gold Conspiracy” 51). “Gamblers”, or “outsiders”, is how Adams labels Americans who were not professional investors (“stock-gambling” is another of Adams’s favorite terms to describe the speculative buying and selling of company shares), driven off the market with huge losses by investors like Cornelius Vanderbilt and Daniel Drew, who succeeded in creating huge monopolies for themselves (“The New York Gold Conspiracy” 53).<sup>12</sup> In “The New York Gold Conspiracy” Adams admonishes the American public about the dangers to the body politic of corporations such as the Erie Railway, which he sees as “a threat against the popular institutions spreading so rapidly over the whole world” (85). The Erie Railway — and other corporate bodies — “has shown its power for mischief and has proved itself

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<sup>12</sup> Jim Fisk and Jay Gould took control of the board of the Erie Railway after Daniel Drew retired from it with a massive profit. Vanderbilt had tried to take control of the stock of the company, but he had not been successful.

able to override and trample on law, custom, decency, and every restraint known to society, without scruple, and as yet without check" (84). It, "like all great railway corporations, was an empire within a republic" (56). The day will come, Adams suggests in the same essay, when these corporations will issue orders to governments.

In the collection of essays Henry Adams compiled with his brother Charles Francis Adams, Jr. entitled *Chapters of Erie, and Other Essays* (1871), discussing the great issues facing the nation in the aftermath of the Civil War, we can read about the orthodox economics of a young man who wishes to make a name for himself in the American press of the time. In the first essay, "The Bank of England Restriction", published in the October 1867 issue of the *North American Review*, Adams examines the difficulties faced by the British government when it began to redeem in specie (gold) the paper money it had issued during the Napoleonic Wars, in May 1821. Just like in America, so in Great Britain there was a party against gold, with which the Bank of England had to contend. Adams praises this institution because it did everything to preserve the country from the evils of "an inconvertible currency" ("The Bank of England Restriction" 229), as a paper currency should be a temporary measure, the type of restriction that may be introduced as "a war measure merely" ("The Bank of England Restriction" 263). His stance on gold is evident in the closing paragraphs of the essay we have been quoting from when he observes: "and after twenty-four years of an unredeemable paper currency, Great Britain returned smoothly and easily to its ancient standard, and redeemed its pledged honor" (267). In the second essay, "British Finance in 1816", first published in the April 1867 issue of *North American Review*, Adams details the financial situation of Great Britain after the Napoleonic Wars, focusing on the question of national debts (public deficit) and the currency. In it, he argues against the protective tariff applied to imported goods, a policy which England had embraced during the conflict with Napoleonic France (removed soon after the war ended), advocating the adoption of reforms in the financial system as well. Although these matters refer to events that had happened approximately a century before, Adams feels that they are "instructive" and that there are lessons to be learned by nations facing similar problems in the aftermath of major conflicts, most notably, governments must have sound finances

and beware of two evils: public debt and a paper currency. England was able to reform its financial system when it returned to the gold standard in 1817 and it is now time for the U.S. to do the same, this is the subtext for his readers.

### **Part Three: Gold-bugs**

The year 1893 was no ordinary year. It was the year of the “World’s Columbian Exposition”, marking four hundred years since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World, and which opened its doors in May 1893, in Chicago. It was also the year Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his acclaimed paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, announcing the closing of the western frontier, the disappearance of the line of unsettled land that had been “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (32), the loss of the single most important factor in the development of the U.S. as a nation.<sup>13</sup> And now, for the worst possible reasons, it was to become associated with the most severe financial crisis the U.S. had ever faced, following the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act.

When Adams realized that the gold standard was not a neutral medium of exchange in international transactions and that the new powers of industrial and financial capitalism — the gold-bugs, bankers and Jews — controlled the international financial system, he lashed out at them in his private correspondence.<sup>14</sup> (“Gold-bugs” is the label he chooses to use from this moment onwards when referring to the industrialists and financiers that had come to dominate the American economy.) His dislike

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<sup>13</sup> The paper was delivered before an audience of nearly two hundred historians who had gathered precisely at the above-mentioned Columbian Exposition, in Chicago.

<sup>14</sup> Adams followed the Dreyfus affair in France. He was convinced, like many Frenchmen, that those who came out in Dreyfus’s defense were part of a conspiracy which aimed to damage the reputation of the French army and the Catholic Church. A certain degree of anti-Semitism can be detected in Adams’s personal correspondence at the time. Like many, Adams believed Jewish financiers had the governments of some nations in their hands and were to be blamed for the disarray in international financial markets.

of bankers and capitalistic society, which had been a fact most of his life and stemmed from a suspicion of the impact of moneyed interests in the political life of the country, now figure prominently in his thought. His state of mind is evident in a famous passage in *Education* where he sums up his whole political stance as a citizen who had spent his life worrying about where his country was heading:

He had stood up for his eighteenth-century, his constitution of 1789, his George Washington, his Harvard College, his Quincy, and his Plymouth Pilgrims, as long as anyone would stand up with him. He had said it was hopeless twenty years before, but he had kept on, in the same old attitude, by habit and taste, until he had found himself altogether alone. He had hugged his antiquated dislike of Bankers and Capitalistic Society until he had become little better than a crank. (327-8)

In *Education* Adams confesses that, just like the majority of Americans, he was for silver, the great issue of the year 1893. Together with Senator Cameron (Adams may have helped him write his speech against the repeal of the Sherman Silver Act of 1890), his ally on the issue, Adams posits the question of silver in his autobiography as one that had to do with morality,<sup>15</sup> political morality, that is, even though morality, as he writes, “is a private and costly luxury” (320). On a personal plane, though, we should not forget that gold ensured that Adams’s assets would not lose value over time due to inflation and that his purchasing power would thus be maintained, as well as his income and investments. Consequently, as far as personal finances were concerned, his private interests lay (should lie) with gold, that is to say, with the banks and corporations he so despised.

Americans had decided for gold in the presidential elections held the year before (1892), unaware that the popular vote is invariably decided by interests. For Adams, Grover Cleveland’s second White House victory had meant the victory of the gold-bugs, the victory the interests of the few over the many. Its significance is evident in a letter to Elizabeth Cameron (Washington, 13 July 1894), the young wife of Senator Cameron who became one of his closest confidantes in the latter part of the century, in

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<sup>15</sup> E. L. Godkin, Adams’s ally in his reform days, and *The Evening Post*, were for gold.



which he observes: “Now that the gold-bug has drunk blood, and has seen that the government can safely use the army to shoot socialists, the wage question is as good as settled. Of course we silver men will be shot next, but for the moment, the working-men are worse off than we” (*Selected Letters* 300).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he asks Elizabeth if she has not heard of “that outrageous usurer”, King Midas, “who has typified the gold-bug for three thousand years?”, adding that “George M. Pullman and Andrew Carnegie and Grover Cleveland are our Crassus and Pompey and Caesar — our proud American triumvirate, the types of our national mind and ideals” (*Selected Letters* 300-1).<sup>17</sup>

But the currency issue was far from settled even though the legislation which had established its mandatory purchase by the state had been repealed. It came back again as a campaign issue in the 1896 presidential election. The platform of both candidates — William McKinley (1843-1901) for the Republicans and William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) for the Democrats — reflected the stance of their respective electorates: McKinley stood for gold, for territorial expansion and the interests of big money, whereas Bryan endorsed his ticket, silver and political reform. In a letter to William Hallett Phillips (1853-1897), his collaborator in the Cuban independence movement, Adams observes the following, *a-propos* the radicalization of the dispute between the advocates and the opponents of silver: “I am grimly entertained by the frantic howls and yells of the New York bankers and eastern money-lenders and silver” (*Selected Letters* 322).

At this point in time Adams and his younger brother Brooks had begun to collaborate on the study of the connections between economics, politics and global financial markets. They supported the nomination of the populist Bryan to the Democratic Party, unorthodox politics for members of the Adams clan, who had in most instances stood behind the nominees of the Republican Party. Like many Americans, Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech, with which he won the nomination of the Democratic Party, must have persuaded them that the gold-bugs were indeed running

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<sup>16</sup> There is a reference here to the Pullman strike, led by Eugene Debs, Cleveland’s defeated, Socialist opponent in the race for the White House.

<sup>17</sup> He tells her to read Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book 11, lines 90-190. *Ibidem*, p. 301.

the show. It is worth remembering here that Bryan had won the nomination with this widely acclaimed (and inflamed) speech which expressed the plight of those who felt that a currency standard based on gold only benefited the wealthier classes.<sup>18</sup> In it, he had been adamant to rich and powerful Americans: you “shall not press down upon the brow of labour this crown of thorns [the gold standard], you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold” (qtd. in Brogan 432). Still, Bryan lost the election to McKinley, having failed to secure the vote of America’s urban working class. On the subject of Bryan’s presidential bid, Adams remarks in one of his letters that “Bryan is American conservatism itself, as every movement must be that rests on small land-owners” (*Selected Letters* 323).

The fallout from the 1893 crisis persisted well into the closing years of the nineteenth century. Adams’s correspondence attests to the high level of political and economic turmoil since the great “spasm” of that year not just in the U.S. but in the rest of the world as well. He suspects that economic and political collapse might follow, noting in another letter to William Hallett Phillips that:

[...] all Europe is wondering what the devil is to be done to prevent a general convulsion which every government is doing its best to avoid, and which, even if avoided, is not escaped. The financiers are predicting collapse of inflated values and bubble joint-stock companies. The politicians are scared about Crete, Macedonia and Egypt. The manufacturers are scared

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<sup>18</sup> The speech was delivered at the 1896 Democratic Convention. Small farmers, small businessmen, and debtors in general, believed they were being victims of big capital, in particular of American banks. William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), who was a populist politician from Nebraska, had won the nomination from the Democratic Party for the 1896 presidential mandate. He “personified the agrarian values of individualism, equality, and Protestant morality in an urban-industrial era of deepening class and ethnic divisions.” Cf. Boyer, p. 89. He was against corporate power and overseas expansionism, including the Spanish-American War. Defeated by William McKinley twice in the presidential race, he was again the Democratic candidate in 1908, but lost to William Howard Taft. Bryan supported the fundamentalist movement in 1920s, and is best known for his testimony as a prosecution witness for the accusation at the Scopes trial.

about everything — competition, war, socialism, strikes, ruined markets, legislation and want of legislation. (*Selected Letters* 322-3)<sup>19</sup>

With the possibility of war in the air, whether in Cuba, South Africa or Turkey, European powers, Adams writes in the same letter, are unable, or unwilling, to act and meet the challenges: “War or rot! Rot or war! Europe turns from one to the other, and despair settles down all over it” (*Selected Letters* 324).<sup>20</sup> A state of unveiled anxiety and fear prevails, with everybody waiting for the next chasm, but not knowing when it will come.

The same tone of impending crisis can be found in a letter to Worthington Chauncey Ford (1858-1941), Adams’s friend and financial advisor, director of the Bureau of Statistics in the State Department. In it, he refers to the possibility of an all out trade war between the U.S. and Europe, his view being that some European countries cannot compete with the U.S. because their prices and respective currencies are too high. This state of affairs is causing a negative trade balance, contributing to a widespread drop in the prices of the products manufactured in Europe. As we can infer from the following passage, Adams was worried about the economic implications of it all:

[...] I see increasing uneasiness in nearly all the industrial circles of Europe and the bank statements of Russia and Germany, Austria and France show that a general and somewhat painful effort has been made for contraction, which must press their industries hard. I am at a loss to see how, under such conditions, at present prices, their industries can compete with ours. The whole of western Europe is already tributary to us. (*Selected Letters* 356)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Letter dated 26 July 1896.

<sup>20</sup> The major conflicts alluded to here are: The massacre of Armenians by the Turks (1894), the Spanish-American War (1898), the Boer War (1899), the Chinese Boxer Rebellion (1900). In the case of Turkey, Adams observes: “all Europe shuts its eyes with shame when it remembers Armenia.” Cf. *Selected Letters*, p. 322.

<sup>21</sup> Letter dated, Washington, 19 Dec. 1898.

It is a state of turmoil, incertitude, and imbalance in world markets that points, sadly, in the direction of the great conflict of 1914-1919.

In his private correspondence, Adams continues to express his dislike for the kind of financial control international bankers exert over governments, as the latter are forced to borrow money from major lending houses. The gold-bugs are now “squeezing” the governments of England and France, Adams writes in a letter to Elizabeth Cameron, forcing them to borrow more money from the U.S. He wonders if the Bank of England, for instance, will be able to pay back what it already owes. Adams envisages a future where the U.S. might “take at once the hegemony of the world — the head of the column, — the pride of the biggest purse — and all the Jews will emigrate to New York” (*Selected Letters* 343).<sup>22</sup>

As the nineteenth century came to a close, however, Adams was forced to concede defeat. The forces of capitalism which Americans loved and which America now commanded were too powerful to be defied. Adams and his friends set aside the silver issue (and with it the idea of a common interest) and accepted the inevitable, as he points out in *Education*: “the single gold standard and the capitalistic system with its methods; the protective tariff; the corporations and trusts; the trade unions and socialistic paternalism which necessarily made their complement; the whole mechanical consolidation of force, which ruthlessly stamped out the life of the class into which Adams was born, but created monopolies capable of controlling the new energies that America loved” (328-9).

## Conclusion

In the end, Adams’s finances were not greatly affected by the crisis of 1893, but what lessons can we learn from Adams’s personal narrative on the Panic of 1893? A number, for certain, but I would like to highlight in this paper one particularly relevant in today’s political and economic climate: markets cannot, must not override the needs of individuals and citizens. As Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer affirm in their book, *The Gardens of Democracy*, written as a reaction to the 2008 sub-prime crisis, American culture

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<sup>22</sup> Letter to Elizabeth Cameron, from Athens, dated April 10, 1898.

remains to this day a “greed-celebrating, and ambition-soaked culture” (27).<sup>23</sup> And, as economies are not “perfect, self-regulating machines” (78), as they point out as well,<sup>24</sup> so market regulation — which did not exist in the period under consideration — must be introduced to protect citizens from the financial imbalances which have taken hold of the economies of so many countries in the past few years. I would like to subscribe to their proposed model of public imagination, which they subsume under two general headings in this book: “Machinebrain” *versus* “Gardenbrain”. This new model of public imagination rests on the idea that the economy must be regarded as a garden to be tended and looked after, rather than a machine capable of finding by itself its own equilibrium levels. The economy of the nineteenth-century America did not possess the regulating mechanisms put in place during the New Deal, and so it makes no sense, in my view, to return to the obsolete laissez-faire economics, unregulated market practices, or rugged individualism that characterized the Gilded-Age America.

Adams believed that economics should not rule over politics, and although he was not the only American author to draw the attention of his fellow citizens to the inadequacies of a political system wholly dependent on the self-interest of its citizens (let us not forget also the admonitions of Thoreau, Whitman, and many other American sages), he was one of the most forceful ones in arguing for the need to place the

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<sup>23</sup> Income inequality may indeed be the cause of our economic woes. Liu and Hanauer write in *The Gardens of Democracy* that in the last 30 years (since Reagan’s 1980 election) the share of income the richest 1% earn went up from 8.5% to 24%; meanwhile the income of the bottom 50% of Americans fell from 18% to 12.5% (96). Economic collapse may occur if this trend continues, as wealth becomes ever more concentrated in the few. Moreover, only in the period before the Depression of the 1930s did we see this level of wealth concentration. The adoption of the gold standard, associated with the 1893 Panic, had a similar impact, with wealth being concentrated ever more in fewer and fewer hands.

<sup>24</sup> Policymakers did not anticipate the 2008 crisis. Liu and Hanauer note that Alan Greenspan himself, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board between 1987 and 2006, has admitted that the economic model in place in the U.S. was flawed as it did not take into account “human irrationality”. *Ibidem*, p. 10.

common good above personal interests, even when the two were not coincidental. Adams was well aware that self-interest was the driving force behind American capitalism, but I am convinced that he would have agreed with Liu and Hanauer when they write that “true self-interest is mutual interest”: if you defer your own self-interest, or what you can potentially gain from furthering your own interests, for the common good, you benefit society as a whole and yourself too, because human beings need other human beings and no one is an island (41).<sup>25</sup> Adams’s dislike of banks and corporations was real because these undermined individual and collective consciousness by taking away the capacity of citizens to make their own free choices. The issue of the gold/silver standard at the heart of the Panic of 1893 embodied for him, as I hope to have shown, the old dichotomy between the interests of the few *versus* those of the many, eroding confidence and self-worth in the face of impending crises, then as now, in America or in any another nation of the northern or southern hemisphere.

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<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as they put it, this change in our notion of self-interest can help us to “prepare for and or prevent — calamities like global financial meltdowns or catastrophic climate change or political gridlock.” Cf. Liu and Hanauer, p. 41.

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### ABSTRACT

Does financial bankruptcy on a national level imply failure on a personal plane? To what extent does national financial meltdown undermine individual identity and consciousness? Can personal loss of identity and confidence be transposed onto the national level? And what about one's self-worth, does it become a "valueless currency" as well? I wish to examine in this paper the Panic of 1893 through the eyes of Henry Adams (1838-1918), one of the most insightful observers of the American political scene in the second half of the nineteenth century. Adams's non-fiction works are particularly illuminating in the context of the *postbellum* industrialization of the United States and of the development of financial capitalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. His jeremiadical discourse on the subject of the 1893 financial meltdown of the U.S. economy and on the impact of financial bankruptcy on individuals and nations, provide us with plenty of food for thought these days. The author in question evidences misgivings in his works about the hegemonic impact of capitalism on the lives of both individuals and nations, criticizing the drive for economic supremacy and territorial expansion pursued by the United States at the time. What lessons can we draw from Adams's personal narrative (and from the past, for that matter) to understand our current financial and political woes is a question which will hold centre stage in this paper.

### KEYWORDS

American Autobiography; Gold Standard; Gold-bugs; Silver Standard; Panic of 1893.

### RESUMO

Até que ponto uma situação de bancarrota financeira a nível nacional poderá significar algo semelhante a nível pessoal? Em que medida o colapso financeiro de um país poderá afetar a identidade e a consciência individual de um cidadão? Poderá a perda de identidade e de confiança pessoal ser transposta para um nível



nacional? E que dizer em relação ao próprio sentido de valor que cada indivíduo possui acerca de si, será que este se pode transformar em moeda-corrente destituída de qualquer valia? Com este artigo pretende-se analisar o Pânico de 1893 através do olhar de Henry Adams (1838-1918), um dos mais perspicazes observadores da cena política dos Estados Unidos da América durante a segunda metade do século XIX. As suas obras de cariz não-ficcional são particularmente elucidativas no contexto da industrialização dos Estados Unidos no período pós-Guerra Civil e do desenvolvimento do capitalismo financeiro deste país nos finais de oitocentos. O seu discurso de características jeremíacas acerca do colapso financeiro da economia americana que ocorreu em 1893 e das consequências de uma bancarrota de natureza financeira sobre os indivíduos e as nações proporciona-nos ampla matéria para reflexão nos dias que correm. O autor em questão evidencia nos seus textos de não-ficção uma acentuada ambivalência no que diz respeito ao impacto hegemónico do capitalismo financeiro tanto na vida das pessoas como das nações, criticando a ambição dos Estados Unidos nesse momento da sua história por um modelo de supremacia económica e expansão territorial. Que lições se podem retirar da narrativa pessoal de Adams (bem como do passado, no seu todo) que nos permitam compreender as nossas dificuldades políticas e financeiras no momento presente é um dos assuntos centrais deste artigo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Autobiografia Americana; Especuladores Financeiros; Padrão-Ouro; Padrão-Prata; Pânico de 1893.

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Painting Myths With Literature:  
fantasy as (sub-)creation in “Leaf by  
Niggle” and in “On Fairy-Stories”,  
by J. R. R. Tolkien

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# Painting Myths With Literature: fantasy as (sub-)creation in “Leaf by Niggle” and in “On Fairy-Stories”, by J. R. R. Tolkien

I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much.

(Carpenter, *Letters* 288-89)

## 1. Finding Hope and Enchantment Through Art

Tolkien was always a man very much in love with the natural world. For him, the stars, the trees, the heavens, they all concealed mythological truths about the beginning of the world, a mystery still hidden away from the grasp of Mankind.<sup>1</sup> He thought that this separation between Mankind and

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<sup>1</sup> For Tolkien, language and myth were undeniably interwoven into each other. The primordial men who were still trying to understand and organise the original chaos that surrounded them thought of the world in animistic terms: “But the first men to talk of ‘trees’ and ‘stars’ saw things very differently. To them, the world was alive with mythological beings. They saw stars as living silver, bursting into flame in answer to the eternal music. They saw the sky as a jewelled tent, and the earth as the womb whence all living things have come. To them, the whole of creation was ‘myth-woven and elf-patterned’” (Carpenter, *The Inklings* 43). Tolkien believed that the original literal form of the first words created was closer to the reality of things and of nature than their later forms rich in metaphoric, multiple meanings. In that way, language becomes a sort of time portal that gives access to the world of gods and, through it, one can recover the long lost pieces of the world’s first mythological mysteries.

myth was greatly increased with The Discoveries that took place in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and that crushed, under the weight of Science and Reason, many of the enigmas of the old cosmogony. Suddenly, the world seemed “(...) too narrow to hold both men and elves (...)” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 111). Thus commenced what we consider to be the twilight of Mankind.

The tendency towards scientific and rational thought began its ascending journey, culminating with the highly mechanised world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with its two destructive wars. In a letter sent to to his son Christopher, Tolkien expresses his feelings about the pointlessness of war; illuding men by leading them to believe they have the power, war serves only the machines that lay triumphant over the bodies of both the dead and the living:

Well, the first War of the Machines seems to be drawing to its final inconclusive chapter — leaving, alas, everyone the poorer, many bereaved or maimed and millions dead, and only one thing triumphant: the Machines. As the servants of the Machines are becoming a privileged class, the machines are going to be enormously more powerful. (Carpenter, *Letters* 111)

Mankind was now farther from the natural world and from God as it had ever been, bereaved in a faithless world that took Science for its new master. Tolkien said that “‘The rawness and ugliness of modern European life is the sign of a biological inferiority, of an insufficient or false reaction to environment’” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 150).

It was essential that Humanity was brought closer to the divine, once more, and for Tolkien the answer to this imperative was to be found in art. Deriving his creations from the Primary World — the tangible world — that, according to Christian belief, was created by a Maker who also created Mankind to His likeness, the artist can only create, or rather, sub-create a Secondary World, a fictional world in accordance with the derivative patterns to which he is bound to. At the heart of this Secondary World stands Imagination, the core of the creative process.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Abrams (476-78)

Tolkien saw in literature's use of Imagination — and on the fairy-story, i.e., fantasy, its highest form of expression — an alternative to the anguish of the technocratic modern world. Fairy-stories, and most specifically those that draw on myth — and in “On Fairy-Stories” it is the Christian myth that is largely referred to — are the ones most fully capable of enchanting both characters and reader.<sup>3</sup>

Fairy-stories take place in the realm of *Faërie* that Tolkien describes thus:

*Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 113)

Enchantment is at the centre of the sub-creation of a Secondary World for it is the state we enter when we give ourselves in to the magic of *Faërie*. In order for this to take place, there has to be “literary belief”:<sup>4</sup>

He [the story-maker] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 132)

As such, the success of “literary belief” depends on the craftsmanship of the sub-creator which proves effective when he sub-creates a world free from the “(...) domination of observed ‘fact’ (...)” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 139),

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<sup>3</sup> Even though Tolkien's sub-creative literary theory draws extensively on the motifs of Christian myth, his works were also greatly influenced by myths and legends from other sources. For example, Tolkien alludes to the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, preserved in one single manuscript dated from circa 1000, to the *Völsunga saga*, an Icelandic saga dated from the 13<sup>th</sup> century; and to the Arthurian myth.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 132. The notion of belief is also central to the Christian myth, as it becomes clear in Jn. 20:24-29, for instance.

and uses the power of Imagination to give to its “(...) ideal creations the inner consistency of reality” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 138).<sup>5</sup> So long as the sub-created Secondary World remains coherent within its own limits — and these limits may or may not coincide with those of the Primary World, and usually they do not — there is enchantment as well as Recovery, Escape and Consolation.

## 2. We all need Recovery, Escape, Consolation

Recovery, Escape and Consolation seem to be the answer Tolkien found to the questions “What is the use of fairy-stories?”, “What is their function?”. Tolkien argues that one of the uses of fairy-stories is to bestow upon the reader the blessing of Recovery: the “(...) regaining of a clear view” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 146) of something that, due to appropriation and habit, has become trite or ordinary.<sup>6</sup> Recovery gives the reader the possibility — and the gift — of looking at his Primary World anew and suddenly contemplate with wonder and awe, as if for the first time, what has become familiar:

We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep and dogs and horses — and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 146)

Fairy-stories use Imagination to sub-create a Secondary World that derives its motifs from the Primary World, giving them the appearance of the new. It is this sublimated fictional reality that awakens the readers to the wonder of things that surround them, and by doing so, provides them with Escape.

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<sup>5</sup> One must not forget, at this point, that when the writer becomes a sub-creator, he is reenacting the Myth of Creation. This *renovatio* of the mythical pattern in the secular world is a cosmogonic reiteration that opens up to a sacred time when Mankind, God and Nature were as one. (Eliade 58)

<sup>6</sup> “They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them.” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 146)



Escape is, according to Tolkien, one of the main functions of fairy-stories<sup>7</sup> and instead of being mere alienation from reality, as some have argued, it is rather a form of enhancing it, very much in the semblance of Recovery. Tolkien stresses how important it is to distinguish “Escape” from “Flight”: the latter points to isolation from life, whereas the first, while implying a certain detachment from reality, still holds with it a fundamental bond, because the ultimate, “(...) wickeder face (...)” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 149) of Escapism is Reaction. Creative fantasy that offers Escape remains tied-in with the Primary World and, from a linguistic point of view, the use of the adjective is the sign of that bridge as well as of literary creativity.

The adjective, due to its qualitative grammatical nature, is the best example to illustrate “(...) the potency of words (...)” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 147) to create worlds anew. When the sub-creator envisages a centaur, he is relying on the reader’s ability to recognise the difference in the real world between a man and a horse. Only when we have the knowledge of the world that surrounds us, can we understand other worlds and its fantastic creations: “For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 144).

These fantastic creations are the translation of the fulfilment of ancient human desires, such as the desire to visit the deep sea, to talk to other living things or even the desire to escape from death; the satisfaction of these yearnings, allied to the predominantly optimistic tone of the fairy tale,<sup>8</sup> point towards what Tolkien calls Consolation.

The Consolation of the Happy Ending which Tolkien describes as the *eucaastrophe*, the good catastrophe, is the highest function of the fairy-story and all complete fairy-stories must have it. Tolkien coins the word *eucaastrophe* to illustrate the unexpected moment when Joy occurs in the tale:

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<sup>7</sup> “There are other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench, ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine. There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death.” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 151)

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bettelheim, (35-41)

(...) it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary for the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (Tolkien, "Fairy-Stories" 153)

Thus, Consolation is a gift that aims at the essential emotion of Christian Joy "(...) which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love" (Carpenter, *Letters* 100). When the sub-created universe proves to be successfully coherent within its own borders, the Joy that it presents the reader is like a glimpse of the "(...) underlying reality or truth" (Tolkien, "Fairy-Stories" 155) that illuminates both World and Humanity. This particular Joy is the proof of the presence of the *evangelium* in the Primary World.

According to Tolkien, the Christian Story is the greatest fairy-story ever to be written, seeing that the Birth of Christ is the *euclastrophe* of Mankind's history and the Resurrection, the *euclastrophe* of the Story of the Incarnation. By beginning and ending with Joy, the Christian Story, at the same time, guarantees the ultimate triumph of Good and rejects the idea of cosmogonic failure. This Story seems to have been written by the perfect craftsman who lent it that "inner consistency of reality" (Tolkien, "Fairy-Stories" 138), therefore allowing its transference from the Secondary World of fiction to the Primary World of reality where this Story is thought of as being 'primarily' true. However, for Tolkien, the Christian Story seemed to be more than a mere sub-creation of the secondary, fictional world. On a 1945 letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien refers to an essay written by C. S. Lewis where he shows "(...) of what great value the 'story-value' was, as mental nourishment — of the whole Chr. story (NT especially)" (Carpenter, *Letters* 109). According to Tolkien, the beauty of the Christian Story which, in its turn, assigns it its value, is closely, if not essentially intertwined with its truth, and here we might add the adjective "primary". *Fidelis* (Carpenter, *Letters* 109), thus arises when nourishment can be found both in the beauty of the Story, as well as its truth. As such, in Christian Story, beauty and truth, "Legend and History have met and

fused” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 156). Ergo, all fairy-stories, when the task of the sub-creator proves to be successful, may come True and that is certainly what we see happen in Tolkien’s “Leaf by Niggle”.

### 3. Painting Myths With Niggle

This is a poetic tale about an artist named Niggle who is about to venture on a journey. Being Mr. Parish’s only neighbour, Niggle finds himself being continually forced to procrastinate the painting of his picture to deal with Parish’s constant requests for help which he answers only because he must, because it is the law. Niggle’s picture has a very magical and poetic quality to it, despite the fact that Niggle is neither very successful, nor appreciated as a painter:

It had begun with a leaf caught in the wind, and it became a tree; and the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots. Strange birds came and settled on the twigs and had to be attended to. Then all round the Tree, and behind it, through the gaps in the leaves and boughs, a country began to open out; and there were glimpses of a forest marching over the land, and of mountains tipped with snow. (Tolkien, “Niggle” 122)

This Tree started as a leaf and is ever-expanding both inwardly and outwardly. On the one hand, it may be thought of as being a representation of the creative process which is, most of the times, organic, chaotic and unpredictable, always branching out, always seeking for the still uncharted mental landscapes of the world. On the other hand, this Tree also stands for the symbol of the new art form interpretation Tolkien proposed in his lecture “On Fairy-Stories”.<sup>9</sup>

When Niggle embarks on the much expected journey of his own consciousness, as we later come to perceive, he arrives at a purgatorial land

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<sup>9</sup> The thematic harmony that links both “On Fairy-Stories” — a 1938 lecture that was first published in 1947 — and “Leaf by Niggle” — a tale written around the same time — resulted in the joint publication of the two texts in the book *Tree and Leaf* (1964), which also included “Mythopoeia”, a poem that had never been published before.

where he will experience Escape, Recovery and, finally, Consolation.<sup>10</sup> It is in this other-land that he falls ill, seeing that the physical pain is but the external expression of a spiritual wound. In order to heal himself, Niggle first has to regain a view of how all human experiences are interrelated with one another.

While in the Infirmary, Niggle hears the Voices of his own mind discussing his life and the choices he made, concluding that perhaps he was not the best neighbour he could have been, that Mr. Parish was not such a nuisance after all and, most importantly, that he should have enjoyed himself more and finished his painting, rather than make up excuses for his inertia. In “On Fairy-Stories”, this lesson in perseverance is clear when Tolkien states that “We do not, or need not, despair of drawing because all lines must be either curved or straight, nor of painting because there are only three ‘primary’ colours” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 145).<sup>11</sup> These Voices bring Niggle a deeper understanding of the whole of the human experience and of how inner and outer life also depends on the endeavours of others. We must always create, thus enriching our world and that of those that surround us.<sup>12</sup> When Niggle recovers a new vision of life and finds himself healed, he proves to be ready to proceed on his journey of awareness.<sup>13</sup>

The next stage on his ascending journey towards the Mountains brings him to the landscape he had painted in his painting. Suddenly, Niggle’s sub-created world becomes a Primary World. Undoubtedly — and due to the skill of its maker —, this world is infused with that vital sap

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Carpenter (195)

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to point out the emphasis Tolkien endows the word “primary” with, thus alluding to a rich world where the three primary colours, via the creative power of Imagination, have the ability to extrapolate themselves and become all the ‘secondary’ colours one can possibly — and impossibly — fathom.

<sup>12</sup> At this point, one must not neglect Niggle’s Parish, a place where all who want to go over the Mountains must pass. This is a country which vital force now derives from both Niggle’s creativity and Parish’s skill. By working together, the two of them have sub-created a unique land.

<sup>13</sup> On the paramount importance of the recovery of health, cf. Tolkien, “Niggle” 134, and Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 146.

we have been calling “inner consistency of reality” (Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 138) which, nonetheless, accords with the laws of Imagination: “All the leaves he had ever laboured at were there, as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them” (Tolkien, “Niggle” 136). It is into this landscape that Niggle escapes, leaving behind an unfulfilling life. This seems to be a much more tellurian realm than the one in the painting: Niggle’s tree is finished and it has become alive; what once had been the surroundings, now was a detailed Forest you could walk into, “(...) new distances opened out” (Tolkien, “Niggle” 137). The Mountains, once the claustrophobic background and end of the painting, now seemed to be a beginning, perhaps the beginning of a new picture and a new country. These Mountains hint at what could be the presence of the *evangelium* in the world, of Christian Grace and Joy to be found in the Consolation.

There is no decisive moment of consolation in “Leaf by Niggle” as the one found in *The Lord of the Rings*, when the One Ring is destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom. Tolkien thought that untold stories were often more moving perhaps because they had that sense of endlessness and that mystery that is so characteristic of the transcendent.<sup>14</sup> In this tale, Consolation reaches us through hope in what country may lie beyond the Mountains, a place we may easily imagine to be similar to the Garden of Eden of the Christian myth, where Mankind can finally conquer eternal life and thus fulfil its desire to escape Death which is, as Tolkien calls it, the Great Escape.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Carpenter, *Letters* 110-11.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories” 153.

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### RESUMO

A tecnologia diminuiu as distâncias geográficas. Não negamos o papel cimeiro que a tecnologia tem desempenhado nos meios político, económico e cultural. Porém, reconhecemos igualmente ter sido a tecnologia a principal responsável pelo solucionar de grande parte dos mistérios que ainda restavam à Humanidade descobrir. Assim se inicia o que chamamos de crepúsculo da Humanidade. Com poucos mistérios ainda por revelar, o ser humano viu-se obrigado a enfrentar a extinção da sua fé e da sua crença.

Para Tolkien, a resposta para esta angústia poderia ser encontrada na literatura que evoca o mito. Deste modo, a literatura recupera pedaços de um mundo de mistério mitológico do início dos tempos, agora perdido. Tanto “Leaf by Niggle”, como “On Fairy-Stories” reiteram a descrição que Tolkien faz do processo creativo literário, comparando-o a um estado de fascínio contemplativo, a um acto divino. A literatura, no seu âmago, é um acto de (sub-)criação mitológica, uma vez que sub-cria um mundo onde a Recuperação, o Escape e a Consolação se tornam efectivamente reais.

Realçaremos como o mito, a fantasia e a literatura estão interligados organicamente e que é esta trindade que tem ajudado a Humanidade a sobreviver num mundo que se tornou árido de mistérios.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Mito; (Sub-)Criação literária; Contos-de-fadas; Niggle, Tolkien.

### ABSTRACT

Technology has shortened geographical distances. We do not deny the paramount position technology has occupied in the political, economical and cultural milieux. However, we likewise recognize that it has been the main reason responsible for the deciphering of the mysteries still left for Humanity to disclose. Thus begins what we will call the twilight of Mankind. With few secrets left to unravel, human beings have had to come up against the extinction of their faith and belief.

For Tolkien, the answer to this anguish could be found in the sort of fantastic literature that draws on myth. As such, literature brings back to Mankind pieces of the now lost mythological mystery of the beginning of times. Both “Leaf by Niggle” and “On Fairy Stories” emphasize Tolkien’s description of the literary creative process, comparing it to a contemplative state of awe, to a divine act. Literature, at its core, is an act of mythological (sub-)creation for it sub-creates a world where Recovery, Escape and Consolation become, in fact, real.

We aim to prove that myth, fantasy and literature are organically linked and that this trinity has been helping Mankind to survive in a world that is becoming void of mysteries.

#### KEYWORDS

Myth; Literary (sub-)creation; Fairy-Stories; Niggle; Tolkien.

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**REVIEWS**  
**RELEITURAS**



Francisco Cota Fagundes, Irene Maria F. Blayer, Teresa F. A. Alves, Teresa Cid (Eds.). *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora. Piecing Things Together*. New York, Washington, D.C/ Baltimore, Bern, Frankfurt, Berlin, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011

University English Departments — irrespective of their geographical location — are traditionally bastions of canonicity, but by expanding and extending their scope to include American Studies or Translation Studies among other disciplines, they seem to take on a new energy and become a space for innovative, pioneering work. In the case of Lisbon University and their Centre for English Studies, one research group in particular has singled out *American Studies: Interfacing Culture and Identities* as their special area of interest, leading among other activities to *Poe in Portugal* (2009), the *Mark Twain Centenary* (2010), the international event on *Women and the Arts: Dialogues in Female Creativity in the U.S. and Beyond* (2011), as well as the on-going PENPAL Project (Portuguese-English Platform of Anthologies of Literature in Translation) that brings together Translation and Diasporic Literature.

Throughout this period, in collaboration with colleagues in the USA, the same group of scholars (Research Group 3) have been engaged in a profound (re)appraisal of Portuguese-American Literature. This engagement led first to *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora (1928-2008): International Conference on Storytelling* (2008), and then the subsequent publication of selected, themed essays, *Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora. Piecing Things Together* (2011).

I use the term ‘Portuguese American’ advisedly: ‘American Portuguese’ shifts the focus from Lusophone heritage to the country of reception, and the label ‘Luso-American’ is perhaps a little too reminiscent of a funding body or institution, to do justice to the unfettered heterogeneity of this body of writing. Which prompts me to ask whether we need for a new vocabulary, with or without hyphens, to describe or explain this ‘new’ kind of writing, the fiction and accompanying criticism, where the distinction is drawn

between the emigrant experience and the ethnic experience, for example.

A year after Francis M. Rogers' article on 'The Contribution of Americans of Portuguese Descent in the U.S. Literary Scene' (1978), Nancy Baden asked: Is there a Portuguese American literature: Does it Exist?' This question was taken up by successive scholars, including Maria Angelina Duarte (1983) and Onésimo T. Almeida in his seminal article "Portuguese-American Literature? Some Thoughts and Questions" (2005). In the same year, Francisco Cota Fagundes explored the Portuguese immigrant experience as narrated in autobiographical writing. Now, in 2012, in the light of the irrefutable evidence provided by this new collection of essays, that question has been put to bed for once and for all.

*Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora* brings together essays and contributions by the recognised experts in different academic disciplines, thus covering an impressively wide range of subject areas — a veritable *Who's Who* of Portuguese American Scholarship and creativity. From the standpoint of a non specialist, I have to confess that not all of the names were familiar to me, some yes, because of their contribution to Portuguese Studies, others less so because of their particular field of study or activity. And so reading the volume has been a wonderful voyage of discovery. While there may be well-trodden paths, the essays considered as a whole become a treasure house of information, a sharing of *vivências*, and even a catharsis.

The volume has been organised in three parts, with twenty-one contributions. One of the first thoughts to occur to the reader, *avisado* or otherwise, is that this book criss-crosses boundaries in a true reflection, a metaphor, a celebration of the Portuguese American experience, a journey in all of its possible senses, a becoming. If the experience involves occupying an in-between space and 'assuming' hybridity, so does the book, on both the verbal and visual levels.

The book has benefitted considerable from what can only be described as masterly editing, due not only to the collective academic and professional experience of the editors, but because of their personal investment in a work that stands as an homage to their own roots and their not-so-imagined community. Through what must have been a challenging progress of negotiation and compromise, the editors have succeeded in imposing order, coherence and cohesion on the blend of scholarly essays, personal contributions and testimonies, and creative writing. The *fi*

*condutor* is the emigrant / ethnic experience, and this *fio* allows people to navigate the labyrinth, to borrow from Jorge de Sena, as discussed by Christopher Damien Aurretta in the essay that opens the volume.

Equally noteworthy is the fact that the authors have been allowed to write at the length their topics demand, thus developing their arguments and analysing their topics in greater depth than is often found in collected or themed essays.

I have already flagged up the diversity and inclusiveness of these essays, which encompass History, Ethnography, Sociology, Linguistics, Film Studies and traditional literary criticism. The socioeconomic essays may appeal to one specific readership, but they also explain the basis for the novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies and poems that are discussed elsewhere. Nor should the political go unremarked, found most strikingly in Pamila Gupta's disturbing account of 'learning to be white' under South Africa's apartheid regime. The volume contains illustrations — photographs — which also fulfil an important function in the book.

The Introduction establishes the broad context and provides a kind of diaspora lineage. There are useful facts — 4.5 million Luso-descendants, as compared with a population of 10 million in Continental Portugal, while the different motivations behind diaspora are also considered, as are those regions most affected.

Part 1, Reading Literary Identities within and without Borders, contains seven contributions. Part 2, Constructing/Constructed Extra-Literary Identities Home and Abroad, has eight, while the third and final Part 3, Literary Ethnic Voices from the North American Diaspora and Beyond: interview, Essays, Short Story, Poetry, has six items.

1. Christopher Damian Aurretta, "António Gedeão and Jorge de Sena: Myth, Tradition and the Poetics of Diaspora", explores the issue of internal and external exile. Aurretta coins his own terms, referring to Sena's 'exilic poems', in an essay so exquisitely crafted that it reads like poetry in its own right.

2. Francisco Cota Fagundes's essay, "Stories of forgotten "Gees": William S. Birge's *Senhor Antone: A Tale of the Portuguese Colony*", is at first sight an example of *deformação profissional*, where an academic on holiday in Cape Cod spends his summer vacation rummaging around public libraries. But the academic in question than finds treasure trove, a

little known book by William S. Birge, full of Portuguese stereotypes — “I have become intimately acquainted with the life and characteristics of these people, and find them as a class industrious, frugal and law abiding” (21) (I wonder how this compares with stereotypes of emigrant Scots). Fagundes deconstructs Anglo-Saxon racism and demonstrates the pernicious effects of representations of the Portuguese in Anglo-American literature.

3. Frank F. Sousa’s essay, “Alfred Lewis and the American Dream” draws on Gaston Bachelard and other critical theorists to analyse both the content of Lewis’s writing and the psychology of the emigrant who finds himself in the “fantasy space of wonder” (38), and also provides a helpful evaluation of his not inconsiderable literary achievements.

4. Reinaldo Silva, in “Her Story vs. His Story. Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora in the United States of America”, does not shrink from biographical fallacy, but rather embraces it. Referring to Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker, he argues that women are misrepresented in Portuguese American writing, and ascribes the imbalance in autobiographical writing, four autobiographies by women as opposed to nine written by men, to gender education politics. Perhaps in an attempt to redress the balance, Silva offers detailed descriptions of women-authored works.

5. Albert Braz’s essay, “The Homeless Patriot. Anthony De Sa and the Paradoxes of Immigration”, focuses on the Canadian Portuguese author’s book of short stories “Barnacle Love”, a collection that divides into two halves, and depicts the emigrant’s less than happy ‘before’ and ‘after’, coning some memorable lines along the way. For example, Manuel is described as a ‘bastardo de duas pátrias’ (73). Despite a very small corpus of writing, De Sa has entered the Canadian mainstream.

6. David Brookshaw brings his postcolonial expertise to bear on Brian Castro, the living embodiment of in-betweenness or hybridity. Brookshaw demonstrates how Castro explores his sense of deracination in the essay collection *Looking for Estrellita* (1999) and challenges essentialist categorisations of groups of people in the fictional autobiography *Shanghai Dancing* (2003). Like many of the contributors to the volume, Brookshaw comes up with a particularly evocative phrase when he talks about the character’s ‘sense of disinheritance’ as a ‘creative and liberating force’ (82).

7. In her article ‘A Poetics of Disquietude for Gaspar’s Tales of the Soul’, Teresa F. A. Alves offers an exceptionally perceptive analysis of the poems, intuitive as well as intellectual. This seminal essay is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand and appreciate Gaspar’s poetic production, and of course there is every opportunity to do so, since a selection of Gaspar’s poems is included, as contribution n. 20. Professor Alves follows the intertextual threads of Gaspar’s astonishing range of literary references, a pantheon of the world’s most canonical authors and works — Pessoa, Whitman, Dante, Milton, Blake, Shakespeare, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Eliot and Faulkner, further drawing our attention to the Koran, the Bible, Padre António Vieira for style and even Magical Realism for dreamlike experiences. She also singles out what is perhaps Gaspar’s main theme, compassion, and emphasises the importance of his “self reflexive creativity” (95) and “multiple heritage” (96).

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8. Memory Holliday’s “Home Away from Home. Visual Narratives of the Portuguese” is a wonderful account of the history and visual narratives of the Portuguese court in Brazil. This study of displacement and diaspora, public and private behaviour, hierarchies and the rules of polite behaviour in this “tropical Versailles” (103) should be obligatory reading for students of Brazilian history, and could usefully be read in conjunction with the satirical film *Carlota Joaquina – Princesa do Brasil* (1995).

9. Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, “Brothers or Strangers. The Construction of Identity Discourses in Contemporary Luso-Brazilian Co-productions with Portuguese Migrating Characters”, draws on Film Studies to engage with the question of Identity Discourses. This chapter is divided fairly evenly between dense theoretical discussion and close analysis, based on the necessary technical knowledge, of four co-productions that use Portuguese main characters who migrate for diverse reasons from Europe to Brazil: Manuel de Oliveira’s *Palavra e Utopia/Word and Utopia* (2002), Alain Fresnot’s *Desmundo* (2003), *A Selva/The Forest* by Leonel Vieira and *Diário de um Novo Mundo/ New World Diary* (2005) by Paulo Nascimento.

10. Orquídea Morais Ribeiro’s chapter, on “Representations of Portuguese-Speaking Immigrants in the United States: The Federal Writers”

Project and the Farmer Security Administration — Office of War Information Collection’ takes us into to realms of history, sociology and ethnography, all of which add up to cultural legacy. Through life histories, interviews, photographs and other materials, a unique and distinctive ethnic group has been documented, thus providing a rich source for future study. Moreover, some of the data that was gathered may well serve as a counterweight to the negative representations of the Portuguese found in some of the literature of the same period, the 1930s and 1940s.

11. Pamela Gupta, “‘Going for a Sunday Drive’. Angolan Decolonization, Learning Whiteness and the Portuguese Diaspora of South Africa”, sits at the interface of social and political history, ethnography and testimonial literature. While the terminology and the decolonization process are by no means unfamiliar, people are less aware of some of the human fallout of the Angolan decolonisation, theories of “cultural loss” (136) and the condition of being “doubly diasporic” (137). Interestingly, Gupta points out stereotypes like the “Madeiran shopkeeper type” as well as contradictions in the social labelling process, where a highly educated Portuguese Angolan is demoted down to working-class uneducated South African (143). Furthermore, fragmentation and fault lines tend to show up in the testimonies.

12. João Sardinha, “‘Neither Here Nor There?’ Conceptions of “Home,” Identity Construction, and the Transnational Lives of Second-Generation Luso-Canadians and Luso-French in Portugal’: again, an ethnographically focused essay, where testimonies allow us to a privileged insight into the processes and experiences of return. It is ironic that two of the terms used in this chapter, *reinserção* or re-entry are frequently associated with criminals returning to society after a prison sentence, or even astronauts coming back to earth after a mission in space or at the space station: second generation luso-descendants may experience similar feelings of exclusion or remoteness. Sardinha considers hybridity and hyphenated identities, dual allegiances, displacement, and disillusionment, or, in his own words, “ethno-cultural disenchantments” (170).

13. M. Glória de Sá, in “The Portuguese of the United States and Self-Employment. Ethnic and Class Resources or Opportunity Structure?”, studies the self employment of Portuguese in the USA, using socioeconomic data and relevant analytical tools, pie charts and graphs. However, the



article is more than just a dry discussion of numbers and statistics. Using empirical evidence, it sets out the reality behind the American dream.

14. Like the previous chapter, David Silva's study, "Language, Networks, and Identity in the Azorean Diaspora. One Family's Sociolinguistic Profile", falls firmly within the social sciences. This work clearly derives from a longer term academic project, in which Silva has gathered data on São Miguel Portuguese both in the island and in the diaspora. In this specific study, Silva conducts a meticulous analysis of his data, mainly from a sociolinguistic perspective but also drawing on phonetics, phonology and dialectology. Silva ends by acknowledging his personal debt to his informants, and articulating his sense of responsibility for explaining who the diaspora really are.

15. George Monteiro, "Portingale to Portugee—The Genesis and History of the Ethnic Slur". Known and respected on at least three continents for the thoroughness of his research, more often than not of the archaeological kind that requires serious excavation, Professor Monteiro studies the different names (epithets?) given to the Portuguese in folklore, literature, the press, on television and in the movies. While some of the quotations are far from politically correct, some are quite amusing: "Portugal is the only country in the world where a Portugee's mistress is uglier than his wife" (213). On a more serious note, one does wonder whether historically negative perceptions of the Portuguese date back to the reputedly subdued presence of Catherine of Bragança, her ladies-in-waiting and priests, at the rumbustious restoration court of Charles II.

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16. "I Write Nonfiction Fiction' An Interview with Charles Reis Felix. Conducted by Francisco Cota Fagundes". This 'virtual' interview with Charles Reis Felix is not only extremely interesting in its own right, but it also acts as a vital complement to the earlier essays that dealt with autobiographical writing, in particular Reinaldo Silva's contribution. What emerges most clearly is that we cannot separate the writers from their contexts, the burden or inspiration of their ethnicity.

17. Alexandre Quintanilha's "Crossing Diasporas" is a deeply personal and honest testimony of his life and Richard Zimmer's, involving hybridity and displacement, in what becomes a kind of joint diaspora.

18. In Julian Silva's "A Portuguese Heritage and Twice a Cousin. A Family Portrait", the complexities of diasporic society and family networks are closely observed as Silva narrates his family history, very self consciously aware of the power of language: "If this were a short story instead of the portrait of a real person, it would end here" (246).

19. Anthony De Sá's "Personal Reflection. The need to look back", should really be read in conjunction with chapter five, Albert Braz's analysis of *Barnacle Love*. Complementarity has become an essential element of the volume, and here we have the opportunity to hear the author's voice, unmediated, offering another perspective on essentially the same human experience.

20. Frank X. Gaspar's can be read either before or after Teresa Alves's sensitive commentaries, both regardless of the order, the two chapters fit together as seamlessly as is possible. The poems are well chosen and thought provoking, and the title "I Piece Things Together" has very appropriately informed the naming of the volume.

21. Finally, Ana Cristina Alves's "Meditation on Diaspora", takes us back the Introduction, where we were reminded that diaspora is not just synonymous with Portugal and the Portuguese, but is a more extensive phenomenon. In this final chapter, Alves compares the Portuguese and Chinese experiences and discusses the characters of the diaspora. It would be enriching to introduce another element into this mix, and introduce a reference to Cristina García's novel *Monkey Hunting*, which fictionalises the Chinese immigrant experience in Cuba.

## Final Remarks

Nowadays, when submitting a proposal for a publisher, it is normal to have to complete sections on (i) the prospective readership; (ii) competing books in the market and (iii) Key words. The readership for this book encompasses students and scholars of Portuguese American literature and culture or comparatists, sociolinguistics, ethnographers, scholars of film studies. As regards competing books, quite simply, there are none. Nor is there any shortage of key words for this volume. The problem is deciding which are not crucially relevant. In alphabetical order:

Autobiographical memory  
 Cross disciplinary  
 Diaspora  
 Displacement  
 Diversity  
 Emigration  
 Ethnic voices  
 Exile  
 Hybridity  
 Identity discourse  
 Inclusiveness  
 Interdisciplinarity  
 Racism  
 Representation  
 Saudade — a term which might baffle the publisher, but not the readers  
 Sociolinguistics  
 Stereotypes  
 Transdisciplinarity  
 And this list is by no means exhaustive.

*Narrating the Portuguese Diaspora. Piecing Things Together* could and should become a reader, but certainly not for undergraduates, given the sophistication of the papers, many of which derive from long running projects or a long period of profound reflection and analysis. The book demonstrates that there is infinite scope for further scholarship, the consolidated bibliography would feed an infinite number of master's dissertations and doctoral theses and together the set of essays offer multiple pathways into a plurality of disciplines.

One of the requirements of contemporary scholarship, at least in the UK system, is that mysterious, ill defined quality called 'impact'. In my own case, having read these essays, I am definitely inclined to include an American Portuguese writer on my students' reading lists. 'Burro velho não aprende línguas?' Not in this case.

As a final thought: perhaps I am falling into the essentialist trap, but one thing which emerges clearly from the essays, is that after centuries of discoveries, colonialism, postcolonialism and so forth, the diaspora is so

deeply ingrained in the Portuguese psyche that any diaspora narrative will resonate with readers, whether Portuguese or Portuguese American, and any author *que se preze* can at least approach the subject, from José Saramago, in *Levantado do Chão* to Katherine Vaz's *Saudade* (1994) or Erika Vasconcelos' *Meus Queridos Mortos* (1998).

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