ARS AETERNA

Word and Image in Contemporary Culture

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARS AETERNA

The power of a word, the energy of an image

Simona Hevešiová

"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."
- Rudyard Kipling

The fascination with words is as old as language itself. Their power to conjure vivid mental images in our minds represents the very essence of literature. It is precisely what draws readers to books and their fictional worlds: the unexplored space of human imagination that the authors open up for us and guide us through. From Hugo's vivid descriptions of 19th-century Paris to Emily Dickinson's lyrical evocations of the Here and Now or Hemingway's colourful visions of Spanish fiestas, literature can transport us both in place and time. The connection between word and image thus obviously represents a fundamental part of literary writing. And since the visual dimension of literature has shifted through time, with pictures becoming a more and more dominant part of fictional narratives, it is fascinating to watch artists playing with their creative potential.

Even a superficial glance at contemporary culture and art makes it quite clear that the boundaries between words and images are more or less blurred, in some cases even dissolved completely. We are witnessing a production of hybrids which operate both in visual and textual codes. Moreover, one talks ever so frequently about the immense influence of visual media, communication tools and technologies which seem to have moved the written word into the background. The image is, it seems, omnipresent, pushed forward insistently and we are relying on it more than ever before. Therefore, it seems relevant, especially today, to take a closer look at the relationship between these two systems and their interconnections.

This issue of *Ars Aeterna*, examining the intimate relationship between words and images from different perspectives, covers a wide range of issues. It outlines the gradual evolution of the relationship and its creative possibilities as explored by writers and artists across continents and centuries. The focus of the papers moves from questions of textual representation (Marcin, Sriratana) to visual expressions captured in the form of paintings or theatrical works (Otrísalová, Lacko), films (Starovecká, Janecová) and photographs. What follows is indeed a true interdisciplinary overview of manifold artistic creations

embracing the potential of these two elements.

The issue opens with a paper from Jaroslav Marcin, who introduces the American Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet, through her poem *Contemplations*, as an artist that is "our contemporary at heart". Pointing to her non-conformist mode of expression, Marcin contrasts Bradstreet's imagery ranging from "beautifully-clad scenery" to sinister, even ominous, references to the fall of Adam and Eve or Cain's fratricide. The diversity and variety in imagery, tone and style within a single piece of art is so uncharacteristic for that age that Bradstreet obviously "breaks away from [the] norms". Combining "the orthodox with the unexpected", Anne Bradstreet's poetry succeeds in conjuring images with words that remain deeply ingrained in her readers' minds.

Similarly, Verita Sriratana's paper, entitled *That Alluring Land (Tá zem vábna) Which They Both Have Never Seen: Imaging and Imagining America in the Words of Timrava and Virginia Woolf*, focuses on the power of the written word to create vivid images in one's mind even of places never seen. Comparing two authors of different background and origin, namely the British modernist icon Virginia Woolf and her Slovak contemporary Božena Slančíková-Timrava, Sriratana points to the similarities in their writing. Both authors, who had never visited the United States, allude to the place in their selected essays, thus conjuring the image of the place based solely on imagination. Basing her paper on Heidegger's concept of technology,

Sriratana argues that both authors present America as a result of "constant negotiations between the concrete place of the senses" and "the abstract place of the imagination".

"Holes that Open Inward": Landscape Paintings in Margaret Atwood's Death by Landscape by Lucia Otrísalová marks a slight shift in our exploration of the word-image relation, since it interprets the imagery of the Group of Seven paintings as used in Atwood's short story. The paintings, though described in words only, represent a powerful visual medium which sustains the memories, as well as the trauma, of the protagonist. There is a sense of ambiguity at the centre of the short story that is supported by the visual representation of the landscape in the paintings. The mutual dependency between the text and the pictures, thus, forces the reader to consult both mediums for a better understanding.

Winfried Georg Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, which is discussed in the piece written by Dagmar Blight, explores the relationship between words and images in literature from yet another perspective. Here, it is not only words which create mental visual images: the images themselves become an integral part of the story. By inserting black-and-white photographs of places, people and various objects into his novel, Sebald, as Blight suggests, works with two semiotic worlds in his narrative— that of pictures and that of the written word. In the protagonist's search for his roots, the pictures, as we realize much later, function as a complement to his multi-layered story. Austerlitz, the hero

of the novel, "accumulates photographs to document his life, and to reconstruct his "buried existence", which resulted from a gap in his memory. The lack of evidence concerning his personal story is thus sharply contrasted with his passion to document things from his present. The reader thus has to consult both semiotic worlds in order to put all the pieces of the puzzle together.

Naturally, comics and graphic narratives, which represent an increasingly popular trend in current literature, could not be left out of this issue; both Michał Szawerna and Simona Hevešiová discuss them in their papers. Michał Szawerna's article is rather theoretical in its nature; it provides a fascinating, in-depth insight into the inner workings of comics with the focus placed on the characterization of visual signs. His research is informed by semiotics and based on Peirce's conception of the sign. As the author suggests in his introductory paragraphs, the aim of his paper "is to formulate a Peircean characterization of a broad array of visual signs commonly found in comics in terms of their indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity." By comparing these concepts and his understanding of them to those of other well-known theoreticians, Szawerna presents a "comprehensive semiotic characterization of the relations between a broad array of visual signs found in comics and the multiple referents they relate to."

On the other hand, *The Art of Remembering in Alison Bechdel's Fun Home* by Simona Hevešiová, is more interpretative and intuitive. It draws attention to the relatively new medium of graphic novels which have gained popularity ever since the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus.* As manifested by Hevešiová's paper, the dynamic combination of pictures and words provide great opportunities for storytelling, whether fictional or real. Bechdel's memoir draws on the strength of the format and discusses her own troubled past in order to come to terms with her present. The very structure of the graphic narrative enables the author to manipulate her story to such an extent that it puts the reader right in the centre of action. Moreover, the circular, fragmented nature of her narrative imitates the very process of remembering which stands at the very core of her book.

Zuzana Husárová moves the discussion to the next level by introducing the reader to experimental works of contemporary artists. Here, literary works take on an unusual form in their new, digital intermedial shape, which foregrounds the image first and reveals the text only by completing some basic operations with a computer mouse or some other technology. Discussing the works of Shelley Jackson, Serge Bouchardon, Kevin Carpentier, Stéphanie Spenlé and her own as well, Husárová's paper focuses on the sense of touch and the concept of tactility in relation to new media literature and presents the implications of the reading process in such a specific context.

Out of the Blue and into the Sewer: The Drip Painting of Jackson Pollock and the Devised Theatre of Stoka by Ivan Lacko examines the artistic expressivity of Jackson Pollock and the

Slovak theatre group Stoka, founded in 1991. His detailed comparative analysis uncovers some striking similarities in their creative methods, which, among other things, tend to accentuate the very process of artistic creation as well as stress the importance of recipients' response to the final product. While Pollock's drip technique, discussed at length in the paper, allowed him to "experiment with his own paths leading to his creating art freely, associatively", the refusal to use written scripts and the stress put on collaborative teamwork, as emphasized in the production of Stoka, gave way to a unique theatrical expressivity.

The last two papers of the issue move in the direction of filmic representation, although they vary in genres (and topics) discussed. Zuzana Starovecká analyses David Fincher's cinematic adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*, focusing primarily on the narrator of the book/film. Her paper scrutinizes the cinematic portrayal of the postmodern condition, as exemplified by the feelings of emptiness experienced by the unnamed narrator. As Starovecká argues, "*Fight Club* can be seen as a very graphic, visual dramatization of an individual's mental breakdown". The narrator's "feelings of entrapment, spurred by the modern society" eventually lead to "the dissociation of his personality". Fincher's cinematic rendition of the book focuses on the motif of split personality and provides an impressive visual spectacle.

Last but not least, the issue also covers the complexities of the translation process, particularly in the case of audiovisual translation where the relationship between word and image is, apparently, taken yet to another level. Emília Janecová's contribution seeks to examine the process of translating selected films produced by the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute which document the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. By providing numerous examples from her own work on the project, Janecová uncovers the gaps and difficulties of intercultural communication which complicate or even disable a successful transmission of the interconnected web of images and words.

With such a broad, yet in-depth, discussion on the matter, it is our hope that this issue of *Ars Aeterna* succeeds in providing some stimuli for further explorations of the entangled connections between words and images that pervade our daily reality.

Anne Bradstreet as a Contemporary Artist: "Contemplations" as an Expression of an Individual Aesthetic

Jaroslav Marcin

Jaroslav Marcin studied English and Aesthetics at Presov University, where he received his Master's degree in 2003, followed by a PhD. in linguistics in 2010. He has been Assistant Professor of American Studies at the Pavol Jozef Safarik University in Kosice since 2006, with a key interest in American religious history. He is currently also pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry at the Abilene Christian University.

Abstract:

In a time of strict conformity, America's first poet, Anne Bradstreet, proved to be an exceptionally talented artist. The vivid images of earthly paradise she paints in her "Contemplations" are at once Renaissance-like, and again Romantic, and Impressionist. Additionally, "Contemplations" paints gloomy images employing chiaroscuro but also Expressionist-like pictures of human mortality, thus effectively compiling an aesthetic of her own. In this manner, she becomes a contemporary artist, who prefers an individual aesthetic and expression over traditionally upheld norms.

Introduction

Aristotle claims in his *Poetics* that all forms of art share the common trait of imitation, which is, in fact, a natural human tendency (1997, pp. 1-6). In other words, human beings instinctively imitate the world around them and often do so creatively—whether by writing poetry, composing music, or, for instance, sculpture. And because they are all, in this Aristotelian view of art, different forms of imitation, they bear a certain resemblance to one another: poetry, for instance, shares with music a sense of rhythm and harmony, which can, in many instances also be found in visual arts (e.g. an op art painting) and architecture; and, paintings, poetry and music alike can be used to tell a story.

Similarly, all forms of art can evoke visual images, whether it is through graphic representation on a two-dimensional surface, a sequence and consonance of tones played on instruments with differing sound quality, or pictures created with words, phrases and sentences. That is, no doubt, the reason why Horace likens a poem to a painting in his famous quote:

ut pictura poesis—"a poem is like a painting" (n.d.). And it is for this reason that we need to take a look into art history before we can fully appreciate the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet as a contemporary artist.

The history of Western art has been, for the greater part, dominated by certain conformity to styles and their corresponding genres. From Classical Greece and Rome, through the "dark" Middle Ages, until mid-19th century, art forms reflected their *Zeitgeist*—the spirit of the era, its views, particularities and peculiarities. This is in no way to say that individual artists were restrained from developing their unique style—the opposite is true as we can see from the life and works of great masters like Caravaggio, Michelangelo, or Rembrandt. But artists were typically bound by the preferred genres, subjects and even ways of depiction.

It was not until the second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th—a period of so many changes and intellectual challenges—that Western art moved from fairly uniform styles to streams and movements, a diversity that reflected the socio-political developments of the time: the differences between the emerging post-imperial nations, the criticism of traditional values and lifestyles, the diminished importance of the church, and the insecurity experienced by multitudes of poor migrants and immigrants.

Still, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that artists discovered a passion for a "harmonious dissonance," a tendency to combine techniques, materials, genres, and approaches in a way that rejected traditional conformity, making it possible to place seemingly contradictory elements in close proximity in a fresh, often revealing and inspiring ways. This new aesthetic defines, in many ways, contemporary art and contemporary artists as we know them.

If poetry, too, creates pictures—be they "word pictures" or "images in words"—we would expect to find a similar pattern in poetry and, indeed it is there: in the fresh lines penned by Shakespeare, through the elegant verses of Pope to the rebellious Byron. It comes, therefore, as a great surprise to find a poet so contemporary as to go *her* own way—in a male-dominated society and in a time that called for strict conformity. This is, however, what I would call the Bradstreet paradox.

The Bradstreet paradox is evident in particular in her personal poetry, where it is demonstrated in combining the orthodox with the unexpected, sometimes possibly bordering on heretic. It is clear that despite her Puritan background Bradstreet endows her works with a "sense of felt experience she inherited from British poetry, mixing an alert vivacity with an apparent simplicity" (Ruland and Bradbury, 1992, p. 23). This is best illustrated in her poem "Contemplations," one of Bradstreet's true masterpieces, where she presents her reader with a sequence of strikingly different images, creating a series so dynamic and so unique, it could easily pass for a work of contemporary art.

The Poem

"Contemplations" has often been labelled as one of Bradstreet's best poems (Rich 1967; Rosenfeld 1970; Laughlin 1970). It can be described as "a long and beautiful poem in Spenserian stanza describing an afternoon walk through the autumn countryside and along the Merrimack River and presenting the thoughts of wonder and faith that the majesty of these surroundings brought to her mind" (White, 1951, p. 370). As fitting as this description is, however, it has to be added that the poem is at the same time so complicated and complex that "[t]here is a large amount of disagreement … about the precise nature of the poem and its place in English and American literature" (Rosenfeld, 1970, p. 80).

In stanza 1 Bradstreet embarks upon her "excursion." The first image she paints is that of a warm autumn's day. The *mis-en-scene* consists of a landscape with trees ("all richly clad, yet void of pride") and a prominent sun, which with "his rich golden head" gives their "leaves and fruits" the semblance of unearthly beauty.[1] The warmth of the day is emphasized by the author's selection of tones: "Of green, of red, of yellow, mixed hue," and the author concludes the stanza with the following impression: "Rapt were my senses at this delectable view."

Stanza 2 moves in a different direction: it is a heavenward meditation. The poet asks herself: "If so much excellence abide below, / How excellent is He that dwells on high … ?" The answer comes in the form of a Byzantine icon: "Sure he is goodness wisdom, glory, light." It is the *Pantocrator* himself—the creator of all that is.

Stanzas 3-9, return to the world below, painting a series of images of natural beauty. "Then on a stately oak I cast mine eye, / Whose ruffling top the clouds seemed to aspire" (stanza 3), acknowledges Bradstreet. Standing under this mighty tree, she surveys its "strength and stature" (stanza 3), meditating on its ancient age. Then, as she looks upward, through its branches she spots the object that had first caught her attention—"the glistering Sun …/ Whose beams was shaded by the leavie tree" (stanza 4)—only to grow even more amazed by its glory. The sun becomes the center of stanza 4, as if it had just risen from over the horizon, and stays up for more than twenty lines before it recedes from our view (or sets) in stanza 7.

As Bradstreet ponders the majesty of the sun—"soul of this world, this universe's eye" (stanza 4)—she comes close to deifying it, or at least understanding why someone would: "No wonder some made thee a deity," admitting "Had I not better known, alas, the same had I." Still, her fascination with the sun brings to light (pun intended) a number of attributes: In stanza 5, the sun is a "bridegroom" rushing from his chamber, and a "strong man" joyfully running a race, while "The mourn doth usher thee with smiles and blushes; / The Earth reflects her glances

in thy face." The sun is the essence of everything: The essence of life, of beauty, of joy—"Thy presence makes it day, thy absence night, / Quaternal seasons caused by thy might: / Hail creature, full of sweetness, beauty, and delight" (stanza 6).

The sun disappearing from our view in stanza 7, Bradstreet makes her way through the solitary landscape "[i]n pathless paths," with her eyes still gazing at the "lofty skies" in stanza 8, before pausing in stanza 9 to listen to the song of a grasshopper and a cricket: "They kept one tune and played on the same string, / Seeming to glory in their little art," before trailing off into a more demure tone.

What follows is a striking contrast—a skip (or more likely a plunge) into dark introspection. Bradstreet "[looks] back to ages past" and "calls back months and years that long since fled" (stanza 10), going as far as the ultimate starting point for any Puritan mind—the Creation. What unravels before our eyes is a scene from the Garden of Eden with "glorious Adam there made lord of all," in a flash turning into "a naked thrall. / Who like a miscreant's driven from that place, / To get his bread with pain and sweat of face" (stanza 11).

The sequence of images continues through stanza 20: Next up is the birth of Cain, who seems to foresee his "unknown hap and fate forlorn" (stanza 12), followed by the murder of his brother Abel, whose blood soaks "the virgin Earth" (stanza 14), and Cain's fearful flight (stanza 15), leading to Bradstreet's contemplation of human fate:

> Our life compare we with their length of days
> Who to the tenth of theirs doth now arrive?
> And though thus short, we shorten many ways,
> Living so little while we are alive;
> In eating, drinking, sleeping, vain delight
> So unawares comes on perpetual night,
> And puts all pleasures vain unto eternal flight. (stanza 17)

For three more stanzas Bradstreet considers the mortality of earthly things when—as if realizing her mind had wondered off into an unpleasant subject—she awakens to the world around and finds herself "[u]nder the cooling shadow of a stately elm" (stanza 21). Looking around, she surveys "gliding streams" only to reflect: "I once that loved the shady woods so well, / Now thought the rivers did the trees excel" (stanza 21) because unlike the trees, the rivers are dynamic, unstoppable in their flow (stanza 22).

Bradstreet next considers fish—the "wat'ry folk that know not your felicity"—the blissfully ignorant creatures "[w]hose armour is their scales, their spreading fins their shield," carefree and unrestrained (stanzas 24-25), and "[t]he sweet-tongued Philomel [nightingale]" (stanzas 26-28) who "neither toils nor hoards up in thy barn, / Feels no sad thoughts nor cruciating

cares / To gain more good or shun what might thee harm." And having soared on high with the "merry Bird," she descends back to the ground in stanza 29.

The remaining 5 stanzas carry much more serious overtones: human frailty, sinfulness, and mortality. "O Time, the fatal wrack of mortal things, / That draws oblivion's curtains over kings" (stanza 33), Bradstreet sighs, only to find solace in the Puritan dogma (cf. Stanford, 1966, p. 383), stating: "But he whose name is graved in the white stone / Shall last and shine when all of these are gone" (stanza 33). Thus ends the poem, but one has yet to process the images Bradstreet has painted to take in the striking contrasts of the juxtapositions which make her so unique an author, and so contemporary.

The Images

In stanza 1 Bradstreet starts off with an impression of an autumn's day and Impressionism is, indeed, the correct identification of the technique Bradstreet uses here as well as in stanzas 3-7. With the prominent sun, the scene is filled with a supernatural light that sets the surrounding landscape ablaze: it gilds the leaves on the trees (stanza 1), it stirs flora and fauna to life (stanza 5), and it transforms the year into a fascinating flow of seasons (stanzas 6).

The landscape is best taken in from a distance; at closer look we find no sharp lines but rather fuzzy borders: the multicolored leaves blend into an auburn canopy (stanza 1), the "stately oak" has a "ruffling top" which blends into the clouds (stanza 3), and "[t]he Earth reflects her glances in [the sun's] face" (stanza 5), blurring the distinction between the two. The technique evokes the great French masters, such as Monet, Renoir, or Van Gogh at their best.

Interestingly, it is only a small step from Impressionism to Romanticism. In stanza 21 we find Bradstreet "[u]nder the cooling shadow of a stately elm" where her attention is captured by the nearby river. Almost instantly, the serene, still sylvan landscape gives way to the dominating stream of rushing water. The river becomes the center of attention—it is at once a "gliding" (stanza 21), "stealing stream" (stanza 22), and again "a happy flood ... that holds thy race / Till thou arrive at thy beloved place / Nor is it rocks or shoals that can obstruct thy pace" (stanza 22).

Indeed, the current proves so mighty it "overwhelms" even the hard, unyielding rock (stanza 21); and it grows more powerful still, absorbing the "hundred brooks [that] in thy clear waves do meet" (stanza 23). It is as though in this picture the water has overpowered all elements as Bradstreet finds a fresh fascination with this active force, presenting us with a Turneresque image where water pervades all, fills all space. The river is untamable in a manner so characteristic of Romanticism: like the American painter Francis Edwin Church in his Niagara "the spectator

... is overwhelmed by the spectacle of the water's volume and impetuous, irresistible force" (Honour and Fleming, 1997, p. 681).

And yet, when Bradstreet turns her attention to the creatures who make their habitat amidst this landscape—the fish and the fowl—she also changes the technique. The fish become "wat'ry folk" (stanza 24) who "forage o'er the spacious sea-green field" (stanza 25) having no other armour than "their scales, their spreading fins their shield" (stanza 25), yet blissfully free of cares and worries.

In similar fashion, the "sweet-tongued" nightingale becomes the carefree,

... merry Bird ... that fears no snares,
That neither toils nor hoards up in thy barn,
Feels no sad thoughts nor cruciating cares
To gain more good or shun what might thee harm.
Thy clothes ne'er wear, thy meat is everywhere,
Thy bed a bough, thy drink the water clear,
Reminds not what is past, nor what's to come dost fear. (stanza 27)

The nightingale (not sparrow) thus becomes the bird of Matthew 6:26-30 in a paraphrase so faithful yet so playfully innocent and imaginative, it possess the childlike freshness and charm of Naive art: the seeming lack of embellishments becomes an ornament of its own.

But Bradstreet can also strike a Renaissance tune, echoing the sonnets of Spenser and Shakespeare such as in stanza 18 which meditates on the beauty of the natural world only to make a point of human mortality without the seemingly obligatory pathetic Puritan conclusions of a blissful afterlife:

When I behold the heavens in their prime,
And then the earth (though old) still clad in green,
The stones and trees, insensible of time,
Nor age nor wrinkle on their front are seen;
If winter come and greenness then do fade,
A spring returns, and they more youthful made;
But man grows old, lies down, remains where once he's laid.

If much of Bradstreet's "Contem-plations" presents images of beautifully-clad scenery which fills her with admiration, a sizable part of the poem is more sinister, with ominous images emerging from darkness, as if they were part of a Caravaggio painting.[2] Indeed, Bradstreet being a 17th-century poet, this is only too natural because Puritan America gave rise to many of the same gloomy sentiments as those felt in post-Reformation continental Europe.

14

Bradstreet thus has her Baroque moments too, especially in stanzas 10-16 where the Biblical saga of the fall of Adam and Eve turns into an epic of Cain's fratricide and subsequent fear and misery. Consider the use of chiaroscuro in stanza 12, for instance:

> Here sits our grandame in retired place,
> And in her lap her bloody Cain new born;
> The weeping imp oft looks her in the face,
> Bewails his unknown hap and fate forlorn;
> His mother sighs to think of Paradise,
> And how she lost her bliss to be more wise,
> Believing him that was, and is, father of lies.

Eve sits "in retired place" with nothing but darkness surrounding her. There is no merry Phoebus here to light up the place. For the most part, we can only guess at the contours that lie concealed by this veil of darkness, out of which only a few prominent details emerge: the round protruding parts of the mother and child's torso, arms, legs, and face. But do not be fooled—this is no Madonna; it is the exact opposite: the mother's face is filled with grief as she "sighs to think of Paradise," while the "weeping imp" wrestles in her lap with his face distorted as he "[b]ewails his unknown hap and fate forlorn."

The images in the following stanzas yield a similar impression—one of guilt, pain, suffering and misery: Cain murders his brother, "[t]he virgin Earth of blood her first draught drinks" (stanza 14), and pale Cain ("His face like death, his heart with horror fraught") takes flight (stanza 15). These pictures are bleak, full of blackness, occasional spots of white, and the violently bright red of human blood.

One might even go on to speculate that Bradstreet crosses the line between Baroque painting and Expressionism, voicing some sort of suppressed inner struggle and disillusionment.[3] Such sentiment can certainly be felt in stanza where Bradstreet muses on the state of man:

> By birth more noble than those creatures all,
> Yet seems by nature and by custom cursed,
> No sooner born, but brief and care makes fall
> That state obliterate he had at first;
> Nor youth, nor strength, nor wisdom spring again,
> Nor habitations long their names retain,
> But in oblivion to the final day remain.

And then, there is also dolorous Romanticism, which can be seen in stanza 31, where "The mariner that on smooth waves doth glide" stumbles upon a fierce storm which "makes him long for a more quiet port, / Which 'gainst all adverse winds may serve as fort." The picture is one of a calm sea momentarily transforming itself into a full-scale gale and downpour that fills the once cheerful mariner, "great master of the seas," into a humiliated weak man who cannot weather the storm. Reading these lines we can feel compassion, realizing we too are the mariner and the same fate awaits us all.

Finally, one cannot overlook the insertion of a few stanzas which bear primarily doctrinal value. At their best, they present us with a Byzantine-like icon, full of golden light and splendour (stanza 2); but at their worst they are mere space-fillers which create a somewhat pathetic effect (stanzas 20, 30, 32-33),[4] as "too often the merely traditionally rendered religious passages pale before some of the more deeply felt lyrical passages in praise of Phoebus and the things of the earth" (Rosenfeld, 1970, p. 87). Still, as Horace says: "When there are plenty of fine passages in a poem, I shall not take exception to occasional blemishes which the poet has carelessly let slip, or which his fallible human nature has not guarded against" (n.d.).

Conclusion

Regardless of the poem's more or less obvious weaknesses, it is undeniable that it is dynamic in a way so uncharacteristic of the Puritan society. The way Bradstreet combines cheerful images of sun-filled natural scenery teeming with wildlife and the more serious, even ominous pictures of human frailty and sin creates a contrapuntal rhythm—now rising, now falling—at once merry and carefree, and instantly slow and melancholy, not at all unlike a sonata, which too might open up in a magnificent style, then slow down, and pick up speed again before coming to a standstill. There is an internal conflict which "she occasionally resolves ... [but which] breaks out again and again" (Stanford, 1966, p. 373).

This is not something unheard of in our time; but it is most unusual given the strict conformity required by the Puritan era, which made most of the poetry it produced of hardly any interest to the modern reader. Indeed, the same fate would doubtless have awaited Anne Bradstreet had she not broken the norms and followed her own course. Instead of becoming "a literary fossil" (Rich, 1967, p. xiii), she became a true artist—America's first poet and, in fact, America's first painter (although she "only" painted images with words).

Certainly, the history of Western art has seen painters who employed different themes, even went through different stages in their work (e.g. Picasso), though typically long after Bradstreet's lifetime. But combining so much variety/diversity within a single work—a single poem—is more than unusual, most certainly for a

poet of an era that expected submission and conformity. This proves right Rosenfeld's words that "Bradstreet was and must always be considered a minor poet ... but an especially interesting one all the same" (1970, p. 79).

Yet, Bradstreet could combine the different word pictures without her poem falling apart in a "unity that is not easily apparent and only becomes so when one isolates some of the patterns of form and meaning and examines them, at first, somewhat apart" (Rosenfeld, 1970, p. 83). Indeed, Bradstreet's own stream of consciousness—if we may call it that—is certainly more organized than that of James Joyce: she always finishes one picture before moving on to the next, quite different in style, and when the series is complete, we see deeper into the complex mind of Bradstreet, her thoughts both of this world and of a higher realm.

And that is what makes Anne Bradstreet a contemporary artist. At her best, she breaks away from the norms prescribed by the authorities in this male-dominated era, and overcomes them, creating a unique style—even a unique aesthetic of her own. "Either follow the beaten track, or invent something that is consistent within itself," Horace (n.d.) advised his students. It turns out that Bradstreet tried the former (with her earlier poetry), but it was the latter which better suited her character and talents, giving her a place among the many artists who, if not contemporary by age standards, were certainly our contemporaries at heart.

Endnotes

[1] The sun is so central to these nine verses that Laughlin concludes that "[t]he first nine stanzas are directed by the sun in an upward movement" (1970, p. 10).

[2] Or indeed a painting by Artemisia Gentileschi, "a follower of Caravaggio, but such works as her gory picture of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* exploit *chiaroscuro* and an unidealized vision of common humanity to such violent effect that his canvases seem quite restrained in comparison" (Honour and Fleming, 1999, p. 661). In a similar fashion, Bradstreet's image of the murder of Abel is more powerful than any picture of doom the popular Puritan poet and preacher Michael Wigglesworth could paint.

[3] Laughlin also comments on a similarity between Bradstreet's views and those of the French existentialist author Albert Camus: "Awareness had an importance and poignance for Anne Bradstreet in much the same way that it has for certain twentieth-century existentialists like Albert Camus—though for different reasons. For Anne it compensated greatly for sorrows and sufferings because it enabled her to experience the magnitudes of beauty and to know the purpose of God's ways" (1970, p. 11).

[4] Rosenfeld claims that the ending "is replete with echoes of Shakespeare" (1970, p. 95), this is more on the level of play with words, the use of couplets, and the philosophy

expressed. As for the images Bradstreet creates, the stanza is rather dull, ending with a fairly unimaginative restatement of the words of the book of Revelation: "But he whose name is graved in the white stone / Shall last and shine when all of these are gone."

Works cited:

» Aristotle. 1997. *Poetics.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.
» Bradstreet, A. 1967. Contemplations. In: Hensley, J.(ed.). *The Works of Anne Bradstreet.* Cambridge MA: Belknap Press.
» Honour, H. and J. Fleming. 1997. *A World History of Art.* London: Laurence King.
» Horace. N.d. *On the Art of Poetry* [online]. [Qt. 2012-07-23.] Available at <http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/horace/arspoet.htm>.
» Laughlin, R. 1970. Anne Bradstreet: Poet in Search of Form. In: *American Literature*, March 1970, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 1-17.
» Rich, A. 1967. Anne Bradstreet and Her Poetry. In: Hensley, J. (ed.). *The Works of Anne Bradstreet.* Cambridge MA: Belknap Press.
» Rosenfeld, A. H. 1970. Anne Bradstreet's "Contemplations": Patterns of Form and Meaning. In: *New England Quarterly*, March 1970, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 79-96.
» Ruland, R.and M. Bradbury. 1992. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism.* New York: Penguin Books.
» Stanford, A. 1966. Anne Bradstreet: Dogmatist and Rebel. In: *New England Quarterly*, September 1966, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 373-389.
» White, E. W. 1951. The Tenth Muse: A Tercentenary Appraisal. In: *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, July 1951, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 355-377.

Jaroslav Marcin
Department of British and American Studies
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University
Petzvalova 4,
04011 Košice
email: jaroslav.marcin@upjs.sk

That Alluring Land (*Tá zem vábna*) Which They Both Have Never Seen: Imaging and Imagining America in the Words of Timrava and Virginia Woolf

Verita Sriratana

Verita Sriratana is a recipient of the Anandamahidol Foundation Scholarship under the Royal Patronage of HM the King of Thailand. She is also currently a recipient of the National Scholarship Programme of the Slovak Republic for the Support of Mobility of Lecturers and Researchers at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava. Verita has published articles on Virginia Woolf and the weather, on Woolf's spatial metaphors and concept of "atmosphere", and on Woolf and the Theravada Buddhist concept of "the middle path". She has recently been interested in Slovak feminist and postcolonial modernism, particularly in the works of Božena Slančíková "Timrava".

Abstract:

Božena Slančíková "Timrava" (1867-1951) and her British contemporary Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) wrote scathingly about America without having visited the place. Timrava's 1907 short story "That Alluring Land" ("Tá zem vábna") and Woolf's 1938 essay "America, which I have never seen" expose the workings of the "technology of place". The term "technology", which means "coming to presence" and "concealing" in Martin Heidegger's sense, is appropriated as part of this paper's proposition that the America imaged and imagined by both writers is a result of negotiations between the "concrete place" of the senses, both writers' socio-cultural constructs, and the "abstract place" of the imagination.

The myth of America as the promised land of freedom and opportunity, a melting pot of gold, has been prevalent in the collective consciousness since the Age of Discovery, or around the fifteenth to seventeenth century, until the present day. The Turn of the Century (1890-1914), which culminated in Antonín Dvořák's "New World Symphony", ushered in a sense of optimism and utopian exaltation in America's industrial and technological progress. Unlike the case of Dvořák who composed his masterpiece in 1893 during his actual visit to his "new world", America is featured in the works of those who have not even touched its soil. The Slovak writer

19

Božena Slančíková (1867-1951), known by her nom de plume "Timrava", and her British contemporary Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) wrote scathingly about America without having visited the place. I propose in this paper that Timrava's short story *That Alluring Land* (*Tá zem vábna*), which appeared in 1907, and Woolf's short essay *America, which I have never seen*, published in 1938, expose the workings of what I term "technology of place". The word "technology", which means both a finished product and an ongoing production process, a mode of both "coming to presence" and "concealing" in Martin Heidegger's sense, is used as part of this paper's proposition that America in the works of Timrava and Woolf is a result of constant negotiations between the "concrete place" of the senses—both writers' socio-cultural constructs; and the "abstract place" of the imagination—both writers' dreams and visions of the "alluring" unknown.

I wish to demonstrate in my paper how words shape and complement images and how images shape and complement words. I argue that the intertwined connection and rich interaction between "words" and "images", or between textual and visual culture, can be seen reflected in my analysis of "technology of place" in Woolf and Timrava's (re-) creation of words on and images of the America they have not seen or visited. In the case of Timrava, as I shall illustrate, her textual representation of America can be said to be shaped and stimulated by the reality of her time, namely, that of the early twentieth-century Slovak emigration to and migration in America,

as well as the effects of remigration on the lives of the people living in small villages in Slovakia. In the case of Virginia Woolf, as I shall illustrate, her textual representation of America, as well as the accompanying illustration by the American artist C. Peter Helck (1893-1988) of Woolf's article in *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan* (1938) which is based on her words and which is also transgressed by her words, can be said to be shaped and stimulated by the alternative reality Woolf had wished upon her world. For Woolf, America stands as a symbol of an alternative space where women writers come to forge an alternative voice or even a new language which can liberate them from the confines of dominant male writers' vocabulary and patriarchal mindset. America, for Woolf, is also an alternative place for a new world order, where Britain's socio-cultural, economic and political supremacy as well as hegemonic claims after the First World War are put into question.

Before analysing the chosen literary texts, I shall begin by briefly explaining Heidegger's concept of "technology" in my "technology of place" theoretical framework. Often read and regarded as an anti-technology and anti-modernism statement, Heidegger's essay entitled *The Question Concerning Technology* (*Die Frage nach der Technik*), first published in 1954, nevertheless can be said to suggest that technology's deconstructive tendency can lead to the questioning of preconceived notions and values. According to Heidegger, much as the use of modern technology

can dangerously reduce humans to "Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge", or "functionaries of enframing" driven only by the desire to get the most out of their resources without thinking, technology can also manifest itself as a "saving grace" in that, particularly when certain technological devices break down, humans can be moved to question their "illusions of power" over natural resources, or "standing-reserve", and also contemplate upon what it means to "be" in the world as Daseins. Quoting the lines of the German lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin: "But where danger is, grows/ The saving power also" (1977, p. 28), Heidegger asserts:

If the essence of technology, Enfra-ming, is the extreme danger, and if there is truth in Hölderlin's words, then the rule of Enframing cannot exhaust itself solely in blocking all lighting-up of every revealing, all appearing of truth. Rather precisely the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of the saving power (1977, p. 28).

"Technology of place" is therefore a mode of constructing a myth or an understanding of place, "enframing" or "setting" the mind in ways that lead it to subscribe to or propagate the "imaged", or represented, as well as "imagined", or (re)invented, place. At the same time, however, "technology of place" can also be a mode of questioning and reading below that spatial construction.

In light of my concept of "technology of place" as a mode of constructing and deconstructing one's understanding of oneself and one's place, I shall begin this paper's textual analysis by offering an overview of Timrava and her works.

Božena Slančíková "Timrava" was born in 1867 to a family of a Lutheran pastor in a small village called Polichno, Banská Bystrica Region, Slovakia. She was the author of many works which depict village life, notably exploring the relationships between landowners and peasants, between the burgeoning middle class and the working class, and between men and women in the advent of modernization. The most famous among her short stories is *The Ťapák Clan* (*Ťapákovci*), published in 1914. *The Ťapák Clan* is a story of a family trapped within a traditional and conservative way of life, stubbornly refusing to adapt to new changing conditions of society. The large Ťapák family lives together in one house:

Four brothers with their wives and children—the fifth brother, Mišo, the youngest, was still a bachelor. There was one daughter, Anča, thirty years old and an old maid because she was crippled... The whole Ťapák family lived together in one house. When they all got together, there was scarcely room on the benches (Timrava, 1992, p. 171).

The family's cramped and suffocating house serves as a metaphor of the family's narrow-mindedness which resists any form of change. Only Iľa, the wife of the eldest brother in the family, ventures to go against the patriarchal regime and the family custom of complacency by imagining an "abstract place" of healthier living and by suggesting that they expand the "concrete place" of their family house. Only Iľa dares to speak up and urge the family to embrace a more informed and "modernized" outlook and lifestyle.

21

Her "modern" opinion, of course, comes with a price. The family bestows upon her an insulting nickname "Queenie" and mocks her for her different views:

[N]one of them [the other members of the Ťapák family] liked Iľa; she felt she was too good for anyone else because she was in the community service. She was the village midwife! Since taking a course in Rimavská Sobota for two months, she had put on airs as if she no longer belonged to a peasant's family, but to a gentleman's. Now nothing and no one in the Ťapák house pleased her. She lectured them, bossed them, and tried to destroy all the old customs rooted for ages in their household. (ibid., p. 172)

Though Iľa, not without pain, successfully persuades her husband Paľo to physically remove themselves from the overcrowded "concrete place" of the Ťapák family house as well as mentally relocate themselves to a new "abstract place" of a more promising future, Timrava depicts how the rest of the obstinate Ťapák clan returns to their sense of complacency by making fun of the changes which Iľa and her husband have embraced at the end of the story:

The third brother made a small joke, leaning against the corner of the old house: "Well, well, what a yellow castle our Queenie's built—I'd be embarrassed to live in it."

"Oh, we can build one like that too," said the mistress Zuza disparagingly, "when Mišo comes home from the army."

Everyone felt pleased with himself. (ibid., p. 212)

Timrava's endeavour to capture and portray the reality of the lives of the people living in small villages in Slovakia is revolutionary. The tragic and, at the same time, satirical ending of *The Ťapák Clan* demonstrates her modernist transgressive tendency to put into question and revise the "old" traditional ways of thinking and writing whilst remaining within and utilizing the discursive tools of the very social system she criticizes in her works. Therefore, it can be said that her oeuvre goes beyond folk narratives, bordering between the trope of realism and the trope of modernism.

America, for Timrava, is an imagined land. However, it is nevertheless constructed upon the "concrete place" of the grim reality of political oppression of her time: the Magyarization Policy and the formation of an independent Czechoslovakia. Poverty, forced denationalization and socio-economic inequality prompted a vast amount of labour migration. Signs of social unrest can still be seen in post-indepedence Czechoslovakia from the year 1918 onwards:

The country itself was threatened by an invasion of Slovakia by Hungary and by the short-lived proclamation of an independent Slovak Soviet Republic. The Sudeten German minority refused allegiance to the new Republic and sought a solution of its grievances in an alignment with Austria. Finances were in chaos, due to the enormously inflated old Austrian crown. The war had all but derailed the economy; coal production had dropped drastically, and transportation was in disarray. Lack of food aggravated social unrest, and the working class, suffering most, was

radicalized by Communist agitation. Peasants were hungry for land. Strikes spread like wildfire, and attempts to seize land erupted around the country. (Korbel, 1997, p. 43)

That Alluring Land (*Tá zem vábna*) was published in 1907, the year when the Hungarian Apponyi Laws were drafted and passed, granting the government official rights to turn all Slovak elementary schools into Hungarian and decree that the Slovak language was only to be taught one hour per week as a foreign language. The impact of the Hungarian aggressive acculturation regime on Slovak education, for example, was tremendous:

[A]ll teachers, whether in state or church schools, were to educate their pupils to love the Magyar Nation and the Hungarian State. The state was authorized to change even Slovak church schools to Magyar schools if they included a minority of Magyar pupils. Teachers who neglected to teach the Magyar language could be summarily dismissed, and for the same cause the state had the right to close down a school entirely. The school became the most potent weapons of denationalization. (Lettrich, 1955, pp. 36-37)

Timrava's story is about a 26-year-old young man named Jano Fazuľa who belongs to a peasant family. Jano is worried about his father, who is dying. He has also been feeling frustrated about his wife, whom he does not love but was arranged by his mother to marry. The family has just bought new land next to the family's farm, for which Jano needs to pay and clear his debt. Jano wishes to go to America to earn enough money to pay for his newly acquired land: "So that alluring land crept into Jano's thoughts again, the New World across the ocean, which gave a man everything good, and which could ease from his shoulders the pressing debt" (Timrava, 1992, p. 109). He also wishes to go to America in order to escape from his domineering mother as well as his "mundane" and frustrated life in his small village:

The closer he got to the house, the more despairing he felt and the more he yearned to go to that land for which Prívoda [Jano's friend] had again fanned his love. The golden threads stretching from America and pulling him to herself grew stouter. That land over there could not only ease the debt off his shoulders, but also take away this burden he was always carrying in his heart. He didn't know if otherwise he could ever throw it off. (Timrava, 1992, p. 122)

Upon hearing about his son's fervent desire to leave home, Jano's mother complains:

"How could you go off to America? How could I let you? Your father's ill—he won't last till spring, so what will become of us, and of the farm? Why did we buy the new field if you're going to leave? America is across the ocean, you can get sick there, you can die there, my son! Two years! By that time I'll lay my old bones down, too, if you leave!" (ibid., p. 106)

While Jano is still deciding whether to leave or not to leave his home, he is persuaded by his friends who are also planning to go and work in America to pay off their debts. He and his friends, who usually drink at the local pub and talk about "that alluring land"

called America, are ironically and scathingly referred to by the locals as "the Americans". The village's other young men, who do not have the means or luxury to leave their homes, also join "the Americans" in the collective dreaming and imagining of the land they have never seen:

Then, while they drank, they talked about that wondrous land across the ocean which provided mankind with such blessings. It had four harvests a year with no taxes, and money fell everywhere like dust. That land glittered magically before their eyes. It was covered by luxuriant ears of grain strewn with the dollars that rained down abundantly upon the working man and jingled together like music. (ibid., p. 117)

This collective image of America as a land of milk and honey, a land of abundance, is described through the words they know, through farming imagery of crops and harvests. This extract therefore demonstrates how the "technology" of place-making is based on or "enframed", to appropriate Heidegger's term, within the context of the dreamer or the imaginer in the same way that it "enframes" or propels the dreamer or the imaginer to propagate the myth of place in his/her mindset. Here, Jano and his friends are all peasants trying to conjure up the image of America as utopia and cornucopia. This image of America as a Slovak farmer's El Dorado is also reinforced by the image of America as a land of justice and freedom:

"Over there it's not like it is here, where nothing happens to a thief. Here

you catch him, like I caught Vyšovan when he stole my sausages, and nothing happened to him because I didn't have a witness. In America, brother, if you take even one broken needle, you'll be hanged at once!" Here he looked at Paľo Prívoda. "That's what I heard." (ibid., pp. 118-19)

It is interesting to note how the word "here" is starkly contrasted with "there". Compared with the laws in Jano's village, where people can get away with petty theft, the laws in America are thought or imagined to be stricter—a guarantee of a better life. However, the hopeful voices of aspiring young men who dream their collective dreams of America are nevertheless cracked and broken by some comments which have the potential to expose and challenge the fabricated myth of America in these villagers' minds:

"But really, men, the laws about women are strict there." Jano Krajec was a young man whose appearance and speech were so proper that he had just been elected as sacristan for the new year. "Men can't even stand and joke with a woman, or play a little, or even wink at her—to jail at once! He looked toward the smiling, handsome face of Prívoda, observing it sadly, since people said Prívoda was a passionate admirer of women.

"Oh, no!" The young men groaned at the speech of Jano Krajec.

"Excuse me, but none of this is true." Prívoda still spoke coolly.

"Just nonsense! Don't worry, Janko Fazuľa."

"No getting drunk there, either. Imagine! My father-in-law said they

take drunks to jail at once," said Paľo Ambriš from the upper village.

"Now what kind of freedom is that?" Jano Guška, despite his abruptness and contrariness, always wanted another glass (ibid., p. 119).

As Jano Guška has questioned, "what kind of freedom is that?" (ibid., p. 119) when there are so many restrictions. Freedom, of course, comes with a price. Timrava plants such witty dissonance in her text so as to induce her readers to be sceptical of her characters' myth of America.

To Jano Fazuľa's delight, his mother comes to believe all the rumours about "that alluring" land which she has never seen and finally agrees to let him go and work in America. After Jano and his friends leave their hometown, a letter from Jano reaches Slovakia. It reads:

"Here it's not like people at home said it would be. Just don't believe it's so good. It's very difficult here, very hard. True, we get three dollars a day, but we work by the open furnace where the iron ore is melted. Just the two of us—old Ďuro Ťankeľ didn't last there even two days and had to quit. Now he's working by the train hauling coal in a wheelbarrow for the engine. He said he's going home as soon as he gets enough money for the ticket. Srnec went down into the mine because he didn't last by the furnace either. We work in leather gloves so the flames won't burn our hands, and we have glasses over our eyes." (ibid., p.129)

The image of America as a land "covered by luxuriant ears of grain strewn with the dollars that rained down abundantly upon the working man

and jingled together like music" (1992, p. 117) is shattered by the "concrete" reality of industrial America, or the reality of coals, hot furnaces and hard labour. The ending of the short story is tragic in that Timrava demonstrates, with wry humour, how people tend to hold on to the myths and images they only want to see and believe in. The myth of America as "that" alluring land superior in every way to "this" alluring land of one's own "concrete place" of home or homeland, of one's reality of the here and now, will still be propagated as truth when people believe in it without questioning:

When this information [in Jano's letter] reached Jano Hľozo, he went to visit the Bubučka family next door to the Fazuľa house. He enjoyed making up stories and upsetting people with them whenever he could.

There he said, "Did you hear the latest? In Libová someone just came back from America. He said Jano Fazuľa fell into the boiler where they melt the asphalt. Ah, that's the truth! Old Ondro Mihaľko was in the city yesterday, and he heard about it from the Libová men who were sawing wood at Koň's place."

"Oh-h-h!" Bubučka was so shocked she almost fainted.

In an hour, the story had spread around the whole village that Jano Fazuľa had fallen into the boiler and was cooked to pieces. Only a few bones remained of him. Vrábeľčíčka [Jano's mother], when they had revived her from her faint, grabbed a scarf for her head. She ran out just the way she was, greasy from cooking. Weeping aloud, she ran all the way to Libová to ask that

25

American if it was really true about Janko. (ibid., p. 129)

The haunting, vivid image of Jano's mother weeping and rushing out of her house in panic serves as a reminder of the destructive outcome of one's unscrupulous subscription to the myth of an imagined place.

Timrava, who grew up and lived in an isolated village, has long been regarded as a folk writer whose genius and theme of writing transcend her village ways of life, resisting the patriotic trend of writing prevalent in her time. Four years before Timrava's birth, the Matica Slovenská, Slovakia's prominent cultural and scientific institution whose objectives were "to foster Slovak education, to encourage literature and the arts, and to improve the material welfare of the nation" (Lettrich, 1955, p. 34), was established in the city of Martin on 4 August 1863:

And when the Matica Slovenská constitution of 21 August 1862 had been approved, the first general assembly took place almost a year later, on 4 August, in Martin. The assembly, attended by around 5,000 people, was the largest in the history of events in Slovakia in that time. It was an exceedingly solemn incident that might have impressed even the biggest sceptics. On this occasion, there was no shortage of false expression of sympathy towards the Slovaks artfully and calculatingly dispatched from the Emperor. (Mráz, 1963, p. 39)[1]

Timrava's father, Lutheran priest Pavel Slančík (1833-1906), was one of the institution's co-founders:

In addition to the primary school in his hometown, he [Pavel Slančík] studied in Ožďany, Kežmarok and Banska Štiavnica, from where he graduated. He went on to study theology in Bratislava. Then, in 1857, he went to Halle. He married, at the age of 28, 16-year-old Eva Mária Honétzy (1847-1923), who was daughter of the pastor of Kyjatice in Gemer. The marriage produced 11 children. Among whom that survived to adulthood were Pavel, Irena, Božena and Bohuslav (who were identical twins), Izabela and Mária... In 1863, Pavel Slančík co-founded the Matica Slovenská in Martin. (Obecný úrad Polichno, 2011)[2]

However, unlike the works of Slovak nationalist writers, most notably the poet laureate Pavol Hviezdoslav (1849-1921) and Martin Kukučín (1860-1928), Timrava's works deal with simple plots. Her emphasis is on the character's interior conflict, or "landscape of the mind", rather than on a didactic and propagandist agenda, which was the trend of her time. In 1907, in the same year that *That Alluring Land* appeared in print, Kukučín published a play entitled *Komasácia: Obraz zo slovenskej dediny v štyroch dejstvách* (*Land Consolidation: Image from a Slovak Village in Four Acts*), which was Slovakia's earliest realist play. Kukučín's prioritization and promotion of the political message of land protection and consolidation through flat and almost "lifeless" characters serves as a stark contrast to Timrava's prioritization of in-depth exploration of her fictional characters. The issues of labour migration and of land acquisition in Timrava's short story are explored on a more personal level and through the

point of views of the neglected "other", or the men and women who are left by the exodus heroes to carry on with their lives and who are also the culprits in propagating the myth of imagined place, unconsciously sustaining the inequality embedded within the social class and economic system: "When even the rich are going off to America, what can poor people like us expect?" (Timrava, 1992, p. 123).

I thus agree with Norma Rudinsky, who aptly points out that Timrava's short story "presents immigration as emigration" (1992, p. xiii). I also wish to propose that Timrava not only portrays the conditions of early twentieth-century Slovak emigration to and migration in America, but also offers insights into the effects of remigration. The men from Jano's neighbouring town of Libová who had gone to work in America and returned to Slovakia with their earnings not only transform the physical landscape of the town but also contribute to the shaping of the myth of America in the minds of the people they have left behind: "'Well, it's America that made Libová rich!' Exclaimed Srnec. 'Without her they couldn't have built those palaces'" (Timrava, 1992, p. 113). It is their "remigrated" stories of America that propel the aspiring "Americans" in Jano's town to pursue their dreams: "'Listen, brother,' Srnec spoke up proudly, then puffed on both cigars at once. 'Ďuro Hríb from Libová told me that even men who just sweep streets in America get four dollars a day. You know what one dollar will pay for! Oh, what we're going to get!' (ibid., p. 116).

Also, it is the changes which these returned "Americans" made to the community that persuade Jano's mother to agree to let him go: "Vrábeľčíčka [Jano's mother] sat down beside him at the table and began to speak. 'Well, Janko, it's true—people really do have it good who have been in America. Even Mišo Krupár in Libová brought back a lot of money, and he was there only a year and a half.'" (ibid., p. 123). Timrava, living in her microcosmic "concrete place" of Polichno, must have witnessed the phenomenon of massive labour migration and remigration. According to the statistics of migration between the United States and Europe in the years 1908 to 1923 in Wyman's *Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe,* a staggering number of 225,033 Slovaks migrated to the United States. 127,593 Slovaks (a total of 57% of all migrants) remigrated from the United States, returning to their home country or moving to other places in Europe (1993, p. 11).

As outlined at the beginning of this paper, Timrava was not the only writer who wrote about the "allure" of America without having actually visited the place. Timrava's junior contemporary from England, Virginia Woolf, also engaged in a mental journey to America without physically leaving the British Isles. To point out the similarities and differences between the two writers, I shall offer an overview of Woolf's life and works in connection with Timrava's life and works.

Woolf was born to a literary family in the year 1882, in London, England. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-

1904), was the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and one of the eminent Victorian men of letters. Around the time when Timrava was writing *The Ťapák Clan*, Woolf was writing *Melymbrosia*, a story about a young English woman travelling abroad and undergoing an emotional and sexual awakening. *Melymbrosia* is dense with blatant social commentaries on colonialism, the suffrage movement and homosexuality. Though modified and toned down by self-censorship, the *Melymbrosia* unpublished drafts would later form her first published novel *The Voyage Out* (1915). With the exception of her last unfinished novel *Between the Acts*, which centres on a village pageant, Woolf, unlike Timrava, did not produce folk stories or write extensively about village life. However, Woolf shares Timrava's keen interest in charting out the characters' interior landscapes. Both of their works deal with interior monologues and negotiations between the "concrete place" of reality and the "abstract place" of dreams and imagination. Another striking similarity between the two writers lies in the fact that both were contented to be referred to and regarded by the public as "autodidacts" who did not receive formal education. However, their claims are not entirely true. While Timrava was "[s]chooled mainly at home" and "read sporadically in European literature (Czech, German, Magyar, Russian)" (Rudinsky, 1992, p. x), she nevertheless attended a boarding school for young ladies at the age of fifteen "to improve her German and Magyar" (ibid.). Likewise, according to her enrolment

records and syllabi at King's College Ladies' Department between the years 1897-1901, when she was between the ages of 15 and 19, Virginia Stephen was officially registered for courses in English and Continental History, Greek, Latin and German. Unlike Timrava who died at the ripe old age of 84, having lived until the year 1951 and witnessed the atrocities of both World Wars, Woolf committed suicide in 1941. She died at the age of 59, right before the outbreak of the Second World War.

To complete this comparative study, we now turn to Woolf's essay which, like Timrava's *That Alluring Land*, is a product of a writer's attempt to "image" and "imagine" America. "America, which I have never seen, interests me most in this cosmopolitan world of today" was first published in April 1938 in *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan Magazine*. It was written in response to a question put to a succession of writers, with J.B. Priestley (1894-1984), for example, billed as next in line: "What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?" (2002, p. 56). Woolf is described in the headline across the article page in Hearst's as "Author of 'The Years'", which was her best-selling novel in America. Her reply, "America, which I have never seen, interests me most", is accompanied by C. Peter Helck's montage illustration, which is composed of a bird's-eye view of Manhattan and its skyscrapers, of the Statue of Liberty and a gigantic native American, of cars and traffic, and of cocktail bars and factories (1938, p. 21). The article begins thus:

'What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?' That is an enormous question; the world is a very large object, buzzing and humming on every inch of its surface with interesting things. But if we compress and epitomize, this essence and abstract of the world and its interesting things reduces itself undoubtedly to the United States of America. America is the most interesting thing in the world today. (Woolf, 2002, p. 56)

If the world is constructed from both objects and ideas, the concrete and the abstract, Woolf proposes that they come together in the form of America. How has she come to this conclusion? Woolf explains that it is "imagination", a personified winged figure who is never to be trusted when it comes to facts, that induces her to think of America in the ways she has described:

And imagination, unfortunately, is not an altogether accurate reporter; but she has her merits: she travels fast; she travels far. And she is obliging. When the question was put to her the other day, "What is America like?', she gave her wings a shake and said, in her lighthearted way: 'Sit still on a rock on the coast of Cornwall; and I will fly to America and tell you what America is like.' So saying, she was off. (ibid., pp. 56-57)

I propose that this extract demonstrates "technology of place" in the making. While the body of the speaker rests on a rock in Cornwall, her imaginative mind travels to "that alluring land" which is America, on which the speaker has never laid eyes and on which the speaker's feet have never stepped before. As a negotiation between the "concrete place" of the senses belonging to the speaker who sits on a rock in Cornwall and the "abstract place" of the imagination which transcends the physical reality, America is Woolf's New World, land of the new. The most striking aspect of this refreshing "newness" lies in Woolf's notion of America as a place of new language. After being dispatched to do the job of surveying and "imaging" America, imagination returns with a detailed report: "Everything is a thousand times quicker yet more orderly than in England. My mind feels speeded up. The blood courses through my veins. The old English words kick up their heels and frisk. A new language is coming to birth –" (ibid., p. 57). This article is not the first piece of writing where Woolf describes America as a utopia of a new language and new mindset. In an article entitled "American Fiction", published in the *American Saturday Review of Literature* on 1 August 1925, she points out that to be an American or an American writer, in particular, is to denounce the English way of writing, which has been dominant for centuries. A new language which better suits both the landscape of the place and the temperament of its people needs to be invented:

He [the American writer] must tame and compel to his service the 'little American words;' he must forget all that he learnt in the school of Fielding and Thackeray; he must learn to write as he talks to men in Chicago barrooms, to men in the factories in Indiana. That is the first step; but the next step is far

more difficult. For having decided what he is not, he must proceed to discover what he is. (1986, p. 271)

In the same way that American writers need to seek alternative means of articulating their different landscape and culture, women writers need to form an alternative voice or even a new language which can better convey their histories and memories and which can liberate them from the confines of dominant male writers' vocabulary. Woolf's comments on the similarity between Americans and women, who both need to invent their own language and history, are further elaborated thus: "Women writers have to meet many of the same problems that beset Americans. They too are conscious of their own peculiarities as a sex; apt to suspect insolence, quick to avenge grievances, eager to shape an art of their own" (ibid.). Her 1925 description of America corresponds perfectly with the content of her 1938 article and with Helck's visual representation of America which accompanies her text. Taking Woolf's ongoing concerns into consideration, we shall return to the 1938 article, where newly invented language ushers in a new social order:

There are no dark family portraits hanging in shadowy recesses. Nor, although it is dinnertime, does a parlourmaid in cap and apron bring in a silver-covered dish. A spring is touched; a refrigerator opens; there is a whole meal ready to be eaten: clams on ice; ducks on ice; iced drinks in tall glasses; ice creams all colours of the rainbow. (Woolf, 2002, pp. 57-58)

New technological devices, replacing and transforming domestic labour, contribute to the abolishment of the class system. Woolf, with Timrava's wry humour, satirises the myth of America as a land of milk and honey, a classless society with opportunities for all, through the exaggerated vision of the spurious imagination: "Everyone has a car: the millionaire has one; the hired man has one; the hobo has one. And their cars go much more quickly than our cars, because the roads are as smooth as billiard balls and very straight" (ibid., p. 58). I argue that Woolf's subtle mention of "the hobo" hints at the prevailing inequality and social hierarchy behind the rosy picture of democratic and capitalist America.

Woolf's depiction of America illustrates my concept of "technology of place". To understand America, the "other" place, Woolf's "imagination" has to paradoxically "fly back" or refer back to England, her own homeland, as a starting point: "This valley is like a cup into which time has dropped and stands clear and still. There is the England of Charles the First, still visible, still living in America" (ibid., p. 59). The clash between Imagination's "abstract place" of the America of freedom and equality, and the "concrete place" of the England of an old hierarchical world order, shows that one's understanding of oneself and of one's place is part of a dynamic and on-going process or "technology" of cognitive mapping, which, according to Heidegger, must constantly be put into question. At the very end of the article, it is clear that Woolf is consciously aware that the America she has been

describing is nothing but an image conjured up by her own imagination, and composed from the elements of the "concrete place" that she knows:

So saying, Imagination folded her wings and settled on the Cornish rock again. While she had been to America and back, one old woman had filled her basket half full of dead sticks for her winter's firing. But of course, we must remember, Imagination, with all her merits, is not always strictly accurate. (ibid., p. 60)

Like Timrava's *That Alluring Land*, Woolf's *America, which I have never seen* demonstrates that place is constructed and reconstructed out of layers upon layers of narratives, of myths and dreams, and of the tangible reality of the writers' very own lives and socio-temporal context. As the Heideggerian notion of "technology" in my "technology of place" concept illustrates, the making of place has the potential to "enframe" or set human beings to believe that a certain understanding about a place is the only fixed truth while, at the same time, "technology of place" contains the "saving power", or the potential to propel human beings to put their received and preconceived notions into question. The myth of America, propagated by the remigrated "Americans" and taken as an unquestionable truth by Jano and his fellow villagers in Timrava's short story, is used by Timrava as a satirical device or "technology" to expose one's lack of critical judgment and one's tendency to believe in everything one blindly wants to. Likewise, the image of America portrayed by Woolf through her subtly satirical adulation of the place and its people can be said to contain the seed of subversive thinking which transcends Helck's faithful illustration of the popular myth that is America. Woolf's article reveals that place is a sign which, like the figure of the winged imagination, is "not always strictly accurate" (2002, p. 60). Like Il'a in *The Ťapák Clan*, both Timrava and Woolf venture out of the mundane and invite readers to question the "allure" that is the myth of America prevalent in their time and society. Without having set their eyes on "that alluring land", they lure readers through their creative imagings and imaginings of America to construct and deconstruct an "abstract place", which is by no means less concrete and alluring.

Endnotes

[1] A keď po cisárskom schválení Stanov Matice slovenskej zo dňa 21. augusta roku 1862, temer o celý rok neskoršie, 4. augusta zišlo sa v Martine jej prvé valné zhromaždenie, to bol najväčší, sviatok v doterajších dejinách Slovákov, na ktorom sa zúčastnilo okolo 5000 ľudi za okolností náramne slávnostných, ktoré mohli imponovať aj najväčším skeptikom a pri ktorých nechýbali ani prejavy rafinovane vypočitanej panovníkovej priazne oproti Slovákom (translated into English by V.S.).

[2] Okrem ľudovej školy v rodisku, [Pavel Slančík] učil sa v Ožďanoch, Kežmarku a v Banskej Štiavnici, kde i maturoval. Teológiu skončil v Bratislave. Potom odišiel v roku 1857 do Halle. Oženil sa ako 28 ročný so 16 ročnou Evou Máriou Honétzy (1847–1923, dcérou farára z Kyjatíc v Gemeri). V manželstve mali 11 detí, z ktorých dospelého veku sa dožili Pavel, Irena, Božena a Bohuslav (dvojčatá), Izabela a Mária... Pavel Slančík v roku 1863 bol spoluzakladateľom Matice slovenskej v Martine (translated into English by V.S.).

Works cited:

» Heidegger, M. 1977. "The Question Concerning Technology". *The Question Concerning Technology,*

» *and Other Essays*. Trans with Intro. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, pp. 3-35.

» Jones, Ch. K.and A. Snaith. 2010. "'Tilting at Universities': Woolf at King's College London". In: *Woolf Studies Annual*. New York: Pace University Press, pp. 1-44.

» Korbel, J. 1977. "Laying the Foundation". In: *Twentieth-century Czechoslovakia: The Meanings of its History*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 38-62.

» Lettrich, J. 1955. *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York: Praeger.

» Mráz, A. 1963. "Vznik Matice slovenskej a jej význam v období zvýšeneho útlaku". In: *Matica Slovenská v Našich Dejinach*: *Sborník statí*. Československá Akadémia vied (Historický ústav SAV), Julius Mésároš, and Miroslav Kropilák. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, pp. 35-49.

» Obecný úrad Polichno. 2011. "Osobnosti Políchna". Available at: <http://www.polichno.sk/ index.php?data=osobnosti>

» Rudinsky, N. L. 1992. "Introduction". In: *That Alluring Land: Slovak Stories.* Timrava. Series in Russian and East European Studies. Ed. and Trans. Norma L. Rudinsky. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. ix-xvi.

» Timrava. 1992. *That Alluring Land: Slovak Stories.* Series in Russian and East European Studies. Ed. and Trans. Norma L. Rudinsky. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

» Woolf, V. 1938. "America, which I have never seen, interests me most in this cosmopolitan world of today". In: *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan*. Vol. 104 (April 1938), p. 21.

» ---. 2002. "America, which I have never seen, interests me most in this cosmopolitan world of today". In: *The Dublin Review*. Vol. 5 (Winter 2001-2002), pp.56-60.

» ---. 1986. "American Fiction". In: *The Essays of Virginia Woolf.* Vol. 4. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 269-280.

» Wyman, M. 1993. "Chapter I: A Two-Way Migration". In: *Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930*. Ithaca, N.Y./ London: Cornell University Press, pp. 3-14.

Verita Sriratana
85/36 Chimplee 28 Street, Chimplee Road,
Talingchan, Bangkok 10170,
Thailand
e-mail: vs84@st-andrews.ac.uk

"Holes that Open Inward": Landscape Paintings in Margaret Atwood's *Death by Landscape*

Lucia Otrísalová

Lucia Otrísalová holds a PhD. in Anglophone Literatures from Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, where she is currently teaching Canadian Studies and American Literature at the Department of British and American Studies. Her doctoral thesis was on the concepts of home and language in Caribbean-Canadian literature. Her research continues to focus on black Canadian writing and history and Canadian ethnic and transcultural literature.

Abstract:

"Death by Landscape" is a short story written by Margaret Atwood that centres on a wall of Group of Seven paintings and the tragic death of a young girl as remembered by the story's protagonist, Lois. The story features landscape art by the most famous group of Canadian painters who "identified Canadian identity as inextricably linked to its particular landscape" (Sturgess, 2000, p. 94) and painted wilderness areas as impenetrable and uncontrollable, which was contrary to how European artists viewed nature. This paper explores the role that the paintings play in Atwood's story. It argues that they mirror the protagonist's state of mind and unmanageable guilt at her childhood friend's disappearance. In addition, they remind her of the self that she could have become had her life not been marked with this tragedy.

The Group of Seven paintings, which feature enigmatic lake and forest scenes mainly from Algonquin Park and Georgian Bay, possess an iconic status in Canadian culture. According to Faye Hammill, they have been instrumental in "constructing urban Canadians' idea of forest landscapes" (2003, p. 55). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that they figure prominently in a short story from the pen of another of Canada's icons, Margaret Atwood.

Death by Landscape is the story of Lois, an aged woman, who, looking at her collection of Group of Seven paintings, recalls a childhood canoe trip during which she lost her best friend Lucy. Although Lois, obviously traumatized by this early experience, has avoided trips to the wilderness since then, and her present secluded life is expressive of her desire to shut nature out—she has moved into a building equipped with "a security system" where she

does not have to worry about "the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic and eating insulation off the wiring" (Atwood, 1999, p. 109)—the wilderness enters her dwelling through the landscape paintings on its walls. They fill her with "a wordless unease" because "despite the fact that there are no people in them or even animals, it's as if there is something, or someone, looking back out" (ibid., p. 110). Nevertheless, Lois is oddly attracted to the paintings.

If we draw on Atwood's vision of the natural world as "the world of the unexplored, the unconscious, the romantic, the mysterious and the magical" presented in her essay *Canadian Monsters* (1977, p. 100), the wilderness depicted in the paintings may be symbolic of a maze of Lois's complex, entangled, at times even contradictory emotions of grief, rage and guilt that she feels at Lucy's disappearance. In addition, Lois's final recognition that "every one of [the paintings] is a picture of Lucy" (Atwood, 1999, p. 129) implies her friend's subliminal but significant presence in her spiritual and emotional life (cf. Beyer 1996). In what follows, I therefore argue that the Group of Seven paintings are not only substitutes for the wilderness outside, but they hide Lois's suppressed other self.

The Group of Seven art emerged in the early 20th century when Canada was in transition "from a frontier nation to a Western industrial nation" (Mackey, 2002, p. 40). In addition, the traumatic experience of the First World War intensified debates on Canada's status and provoked calls for more independence and the loosening of British imperialist ties. The calls for change at a political level were accompanied by a conscious effort to define and construct a distinctively Canadian cultural identity. Ironically, what came to represent Canadian nationhood was the very phenomenon which was being destroyed by "the march of progress" and "civilization" (ibid., p. 40)—the Northern wilderness. The land with its vast untapped resources became a potent metaphor for the country's potential for economic strength and wealth and came to be recognized as a truly unifying element common to all Canadians.

It is therefore not surprising that when the Group of Seven started producing powerful canvases of the rugged and rocky terrain of the Canadian Shield and northern woods, their imagery was almost immediately interpreted in terms of national symbolism. Particularly their lonely, scrawny, weather-tortured trees became indicative of what was thought to constitute Canadian character: hardiness, tenacity, stamina, endurance—all of them qualities essential for survival in Canada's harsh climate and environment.

The Group of Seven paintings were, in addition, distinctly Canadian. The artists set themselves in opposition to pastoralism, an artistic style that derived from European painting styles and found its most definitive expression in Homer Watson's pastoral paintings of the Canadian countryside. As Brian S. Osborne claims, this kind of art projected "European ideas, values,

and tastes" instead of reflecting North American realities (1988, p. 163). Maybe this was the reason why the Group of Seven did not consider Watson's near-photographic naturalism a truly Canadian style and found it inadequate to depicting the rugged nature of the Canadian landscape. The Group of Seven developed a new, bolder and more vigorous painting style characterized by a heightened use of colour, which was distinct from the European tradition. Atwood aptly vocalizes its difference in her short story:

These paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren't any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path. (Atwood, 1999, p. 128)

As evident from this passage and as Mackey (2000) writes in her article *Death by Landscape: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology*, European picturesque landscapes were "civilized", "manageable" and "controlled". Evoking an illusion of "harmony between human beings and nature", they invited the viewer to explore the new terrain. On the other hand, the Group of Seven's work depicted wilderness as "uncontrollable" and "impenetrable" (ibid.), and as Atwood's description suggests, hostile to humans: it could lead you off the path, or even kill you.

The portrayal of nature as savage and menacing was part of the rejection of the European aesthetic and the decolonizing project of developing a uniquely Canadian artistic style. However, as Mackey (2000) writes, it does not mean that it was not "a colonizing aesthetic". It reflected the view of European colonizers just like the Europe-influenced pastoralism. By presenting the northern landscapes as unpeopled, the Group of Seven's work refigured the colonial myth of *terra nullius*, the fiction that the land belonged to no one. It also represented "the sense of settlers alone in the bush – unable to control it – to even imagine it" (ibid.).

Although Lois in Atwood's story purchased the Group of Seven paintings to contain her trauma associated with Lucy's disappearance, it seems to be beyond her control just like the wilderness was for the European settlers. The pictures seem to be overpowering: "instead of providing her with a sense of ownership and containment of the trauma, they captivate her and fill her with 'wordless unease'" (Rule 2008). In contrast to colonizers and painters who viewed landscape as uninhabited, she feels the landscapes in the paintings are haunted by "unseen presences" (Hammill, 2003, p. 59): "as if there is something, or someone, looking" out of the paintings (Atwood, 1999, p. 110); simply put, she has the uncanny feeling of being gazed at. Gazing creates a relationship between the gazer and the object of the gaze that is marked with a power struggle, where the gazer dominates as s/he is in control of the gaze and its direction and the one who is being gazed at is in the position of a

victim. That "something, or someone, looking back out" of the paintings thus seems to be in control of the place where Lois lives, and her life, "involving [her] in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock" (ibid., p.129).

However, as Hammill argues, it is not "hostile 'Indians' lurking in the bushes, or ... Lucy's ghost" that Lois is afraid of; "it is her own sense of culpability which frightens her" (2003, p. 58). She seems to be paralysed by the brooding sense of wrong at being indirectly accused of pushing Lucy off the cliff, at being "tried and sentenced ... condemned for something that was not her fault" (Atwood, 1999, p. 127). Her obsession with Lucy's disappearance obscures everything else in her life: "she can hardly remember ... having her two boys in the hospital, nursing them as babies; ... getting married, or what Rob [her deceased husband] looked like" (ibid., p. 127). Her suburban family life does not seem to be more than a "distraction" from the emptiness at the centre of herself left behind by the fateful, life-changing trip in her teenage years and her friend's mysterious disappearance, of which she "can remember everything, every detail" (ibid., p. 120).

However inexplicable Lois's intense feeling of guilt may seem, the fact that the details of the story are revealed only from her point of view allows a possibility that she is not telling us the full truth and that she might have been involved in her friend's disappearance. Of course, there is nothing in the story to corroborate this theory. The incongruity between Lois's life of suffering and her apparent innocence is in fact central to the tension present throughout the story, which does not dissipate even at its end. It inevitably leads to the question why a person would spend most of her life acting as if she was guilty, if she did not commit a crime. As Fraser (2007) suggests, the answer might lie in Lois's subconscious. Throughout the story there are some hints at her being envious of Lucy. Her friend came from a privileged background: "her house was on the lake shore and had gates to it, and grounds. They had a maid, all of the time" while "Lois's family only had a cleaning lady twice a week" (Atwood, 1999, p. 114). Lucy was superior in looks: "blond, with translucent skin and large blue eyes like a doll's" whereas "Lois was nothing out of the ordinary – just a tallish, thinnish, brownish person with freckles" (ibid., p. 115). Her life seemed to be much more exciting than Lois's: she had a boyfriend that her parents disapproved of; she had had her first experience with boys; and she wanted to run away from home. "Lois [had] little to offer in return. Her own life [was] placid and satisfactory, but there [was] nothing much that [could] be said about happiness" (ibid., p. 117). Although it is never made explicit in the story, Lois might have wished Lucy dead, and her guilt might stem from her subconscious wish having come true (Fraser 2007).

Lucy was what Lois was not; therefore, Lois desired to emulate her. Just like "she wanted to be an Indian" (Atwood, 1999, p. 118). The camp (fittingly named "Camp Manitou") that Lois was sent to every summer in many respects imitated native culture. Children were divided

according to age groups and assigned different animal names: "Chickadees, Bluejays, Ravens, and Kingfishers," appropriating "a sort of totemic clan system" (ibid., p. 114). Whenever they went on a canoe trip, the camp director Cappie "painted three streaks of red" across their cheeks while counsellors in blankets were beating on "tom-toms made of round wooden cheese boxes with leather stretched over the top." Lois understands now that it was not alright, that it was "a form of stealing" (ibid., p. 117). The campers became unwittingly complicit with "the appropriation and commodification of native culture by white North Americans" (Hammill, 2003, p. 56). Cappie's instructions to the girls to "bring back much wampum", "do good in war" and "capture many scalps" prove that she envisioned native peoples as bloodthirsty, primitive brutes (Atwood, 1999, p. 118). However, instead of imitating "how Indians talk", she emulated the rhetoric of European colonizers, the girls' ancestors who displaced and nearly eradicated aboriginal tribes from North America (Rule 2008). Back then Lois was ignorant of this; "she loved the campfire, the flickering of light on the ring of faces, the sound of the fake tom-toms, heavy and fast like a scared heartbeat" (Atwood, 1999, p. 118). Yet now she acknowledges that the ceremony of "send-off" was poorly represented and historically inaccurate; she notes that "Cappie was never one to be much concerned with consistency, or with archeology" (ibid., p. 119).

As can be seen, when Lois was a child, she had a desire for things that were wild and unfamiliar, she "care[d] about the things she didn't know", including natives and whatever was associated with them (ibid., p. 115). She was aware of the haunted and threatening nature of wilderness as the older campers told the younger girls stories of moose heads coming to life in the dark. When Lucy and Lois set out for the canoe trip from which Lucy is never to return—and although there is a suggestion that their destination is a safe piece of wilderness because it has been mapped, studied and used before (ibid., p. 118)—Lois has an uncanny feeling of "an invisible rope" being broken when their camp "has vanished behind the first long point of rock and rough trees. ... They're floating free, on their own, cut loose" (ibid., p. 119). However intoxicating their freedom may seem, there is something menacing about it: "beneath the canoe the lake goes down, deeper and colder than it was a minute before" (ibid., p. 119). There is a trace of subliminal fear here, a fear that comes from being alone, unprotected and at the mercy of the wilderness and the elements.

Eventually, it is the "landscape" that kills Lucy as the title of Atwood's story indicates. Or this is what Lois thinks. Although Atwood gives the reader a few hints at what may have happened, as Hammill claims, Lois seems to be convinced that Lucy has been swallowed by the wilderness "in revenge for white atrocities" (2003, p. 58). Lucy may have fallen off the cliff or committed suicide. The night before the canoe trip, she told Lois that she did not want to return to Chicago after the camp. When the girls climb up to the lookout where Lucy

is last seen, Lois's friend seems to be toying with the idea of jumping off the cliff:

'It would be quite a dive off here,' says Lucy.

'You'd have to be nuts,' says Lois.

'Why?' says Lucy. 'It's really deep. It goes straight down.' (Atwood, 1999, p. 122)

However, Lois does not remember hearing any "sound of falling rock" or a "splash", only a shout: "not a shout of fear … more like a cry of surprise … short, like a dog's bark' (ibid., p. 123). One possible interpretation is that Lucy has been carried off by "a vengeful native or a wild animal" (Hammill, 2003, p. 58). She may have been snatched by the forest itself and turned into a tree: "Who knows how many trees there were on the cliff just before Lucy disappeared? Who counted? Maybe there was one more, afterwards" (Atwood, 1999, p. 129). It even seems to be an act of poetic justice that the American who "did not care about the things she didn't know" and did not show due respect for nature suffers such a fate (ibid., p. 115).

It is probably not a coincidence that Atwood's description of the scene of Lucy's disappearance is reminiscent of the stylized landscape of a Group of Seven painting:

the path … is dry earth and rocks, big rounded pinky-grey boulders or split-open ones with jagged edges. Spindly balsam and spruce trees grow to either side, the lake is blue fragments to the left. The sun is right overhead; there are no shadows anywhere. … The forest is dry and crackly. (ibid., p. 122)

The image of pinkish and split rocks in the glaring light makes the reader think of the forest as an independent and not very friendly, if not outright hostile, entity. It seems to isolate Lois and Lucy from the other campers; they cannot hear any sounds or noises except for the crackling of the forest. This almost surreal atmosphere of the forest setting makes the reader anticipate that something uncanny is about to happen, that this is the kind of landscape where stepping off the path is not recommended. Even the name of the place, Lookout Point, suggests that one should be careful and wary there.

And Lois and Lucy are not. Their behaviour is marked by a lack of reverence for nature, even hubris. When Lois climbs to the top of the Lookout, she looks "over the water, back the way they've come." She finds it amazing that "they've travelled so far, over all that water, with nothing to propel them but their own arms. It makes her feel strong" (Atwood, 2009, p. 122). She interprets the view as attesting to her strength, to her little victory over the wilderness. Yet a moment later, it strikes back.

The image of coniferous forests on top of rocky cliffs overlooking deep lakes also evokes the paintings of Tom Thomson, a great Canadian painter who inspired and directly influenced the Group of Seven. He is sometimes cited as being a member of the group, but he was not, because he died before it officially formed. Lois even mentions owning two of his works (ibid., p. 110). Again, it is not coincidental that Tom Thomson is mentioned in Atwood's story. His story bears an uncanny similarity to Lucy's:

39

he went on a canoe trip in Algonquin Park, Ontario, and never returned. His canoe was found empty on the shore of an island, and his body was discovered drowned only several days later. Like Lucy, Tom Thomson was almost literally "'swallowed' by his beloved North" (Brock, 2008, p. 55). However, unlike Tom Thomson, Lucy disappeared without a trace, and nobody has ever found any conclusive evidence of her death: no bones, no buttons, nothing (Atwood, 1999, p. 128).

No matter what the solution to Lucy's mysterious disappearance is, its impact on Lois's life is devastating. She seems to be living what Burkhard Niederhoff calls "a death-in-life" (2009/10, p. 127): she is obsessed with ghosts and pays very little attention to the living. Lucy's disappearance teaches Lois to fear the wilderness as well as her own desires for "an alternative, non-traditional identity" (Bruhn, 2004, p. 455). It is not only Lucy who vanishes into the unknowable but also Lois's other self, the self that she could have become.

Lois and Lucy's friendship played a significant role in the former's subject formation. Lois clarified her identity through reaction to Lucy, the other, who embodied an essential part of her self (cf. Beyer 1996). Maybe she did not realize this when she was young, but now she is painfully aware of "this empty space in sound" (Atwood, 1999, p. 128). She recollects now that the night before Lucy disappeared there were two loons out on the lake, "calling to each other in their insane, mournful voices" (ibid., p. 121). She admits that at the time she might not have been filled with grief when listening to them because it was "just background", but now she identifies with the loon, mournfully calling for the other. "[I]t was as if she was always listening for another voice, the voice of a person who should have been there but was not. An echo" (ibid., p. 128). It is obvious that Lois cannot reconnect not only with Lucy, who is presumably dead, but with her alienated other self either.

Lois looks for Lucy (as well as for the lost other self) inside the Group of Seven paintings that she has collected on a wall in her living room, but she cannot see her. "There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly ... No matter how far back in you go, there will be more" (ibid., p. 128-29). Standing back and taking a prospect view does not help. As Grace suggests, in order to be able to see, one must gaze into the depths, which involves seeing oneself and inventing oneself "as part of the landscape" (2004, p. 85). That means that in order to find Lucy, Lois must descend into "the still largely uncharted, bewildering terrain of the self" (Bruhn, 2004, p. 456) and confront her other self—the vague, "shadowy" manifestation of what she might have become "if Lucy had not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time" (Atwood, 1999, p. 128).

Now that her husband is dead and her children grown up and she is liberated from the roles of wife and mother, "the distractions with which she diverted her attention from the absent otherness at the heart of her being" (Bruhn, 2004, p. 456), Lois finally not only "looks at

the paintings, [but] she looks into them" and she suddenly realizes with a "shout of recognition or of joy" that

Every one of them is a picture of Lucy. You can't see her exactly, but she's there, in behind the pink stone island or the one behind that. In the picture of the cliff she is hidden by the clutch of fallen rocks towards the bottom, in the one of the river shore she is crouching beneath the overturned canoe. In the yellow autumn woods she's behind the tree that cannot be seen because of the other trees, over beside the blue sliver of pond ... this is where Lucy is ... in the holes that open inwards on the wall, not like windows but like doors. (Atwood, 1999, p. 129)

Lois is all of a sudden able to see because she understands that she cannot observe her traumatic experience as if through a window. A window, especially if it is closed, allows you only to see but not to hear, which means that no real connection with the object of observation is possible. It is best demonstrated by Lois observing "the willows of Centre Island shaken by a wind" through the window of her apartment; on her side of the glass, the wind is inaudible, "silent" (ibid., p. 127). It is the same when her mind wanders off to the scene of Lucy's disappearance—she can recollect the vivid colours of the landscape but she cannot hear the shout; it "had been obliterated, like a footprint trampled by other footprints" (ibid., p. 123).

Windows must be therefore replaced with doors. A door must be opened so that one can see, and once the door is open, one can also hear. Hearing is important because, as Mark M. Smith paraphrases Murray Schaffer, "unlike sights, sounds cannot be blinked away or shut out with eyelids" (2004, p. xi). In order to come to terms with Lucy's disappearance and reclaim her lost other self, Lois must open the door inwards to confront the ghosts of her past head-on and relive the experience fully, including the sounds associated with it. Being able to recall Lucy's shout might help Lois describe it in more precise words and attribute it with meaning.

We do not know if the shout Lois hears at the end of the story is Lucy's or hers. Some authors (e.g. Rocard 1996) suggest that it may be a sign of Lois's descent into madness, but if we admit that Lucy is an incarnation of Lois's other and other self, the shout may be interpreted as a sign of Lois's reconnection with her other self. After all, it is a shout of "joy". The joy may be Lois's and come from her recognition that her other self is "here" and "entirely alive" (Atwood, 1999, p. 129). On the other hand, it can also be the joy of Lois's other self, who has been around all those years but whose existence had been suspected rather than recognized. The other self may have been calling at Lois out of the Group of Seven paintings, but because she lived behind a window, she could not hear her voice. Now that Lois has opened the door and is able to hear as well, the reconnection with her other self is possible because, as Schaffer puts it, "hearing is a way of touching at a distance" (qtd. in Smith, 2004, p. xi).

The Group of Seven landscape paintings are ubiquitous in Canadian culture. As Atwood writes in her short story *Death by Landscape*, they turn up "on stamps, or as silk-screen reproductions … in the principals' offices of high schools, or as jigsaw puzzles, or beautifully printed calendars sent out by corporations as Christmas gifts" (1999, p. 110). However, the main protagonist of the short story, Lois, has not bought them for the Canadianness they allegedly represent. "She bought them because she wanted them. She wanted something that was in them, although she could not have said at the time what it was (ibid., p. 110). As has been demonstrated, that "something" might be her other self, the self that also includes wilderness. Her friend Lucy's disappearance taught Lois to fear it, yet she has a subconscious desire for it. Therefore, although she hardly ever gets out of her apartment and does not go up north anymore, "to any place with wild lakes and wild trees and the calls of loons" (ibid., p. 128), she has moved the wilderness into her apartment. Yet, as it is framed, it gives the illusion of being controlled and safe.

The Group of Seven paintings are not only representative of the tangle of Lois's emotional turmoil caused by Lucy's disappearance, which she needs to acknowledge in order to resolve the experienced trauma, but they are also instrumental in Lois's reclamation of her lost other self. Although Atwood's short story permits multiple interpretations, I believe that its final sentence "She [Lucy] is entirely alive" (ibid., 129) hints at Lois's recovery from the "death-in-life" state.

Works cited:

» Atwood, M. 1999. Death by Landscape. In: *Margaret Atwood Omnibus: Wilderness Tips and Cat's Eye.* London: Little, Brown and Company, pp. 109-129.
» Atwood, M. Canadian Monsters: Some Aspects of the Supernatural in Canadian Fiction. In: Staines, D. (ed.), 1977. *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
» Beyer, C. 1996. Re-imaging Metropolis and Wilderness: Margaret Atwood's *Life Before Man*, *Cat's Eye*, "Death by Landscape". In *The London Journal of Canadian Studies* [online], 1996, vol. 12, no. 6 [cit. 2012-07-20], pp. 69-94. Available at: <http://www.londoncanadianstudies.org/Journal/12/12-6.pdf>
» Brock, R. Envoicing Silent Objects: Art and Literature at the Site of the Canadian Landscape. In *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* [online], 2008, vol. 13, no. 2 [cit. 2012-07-28], pp. 50-61. Available at: <http://cjee.lakeheadu.ca/index.php/cjee/article/viewFile/904/568>
» Bruhn, M. J. Margaret Atwood's Lucy Poem: The Postmodern Art of Otherness in "Death by Landscape". In *European Romantic Review,* Sept. 2004, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 449-461.

» Fraser, F. D. Exploring Margaret Atwood's Short Story "Death by Landscape". In *Can Fam Physician* [online], August 2007, vol. 53, no. 8 [cit. 2012-07-26]. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1949242/>

» Grace, S. 2004. *Inventing Tom Thomson*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

» Hammill, F. 'Death by Nature': Margaret Atwood and Wilderness Gothic. In *Gothic Studies*, 2003, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 47-63.

» Mackey, E. Death by Landscape: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology. In *Canadian Woman Studies*, Summer 2000, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 125-130. ProQuest.

» Mackey, E. 2002. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

» Niederhoff, B. 2009/10. Ghosts, Knowledge and Truth in Atwood: A Reader's Guide to Six Responses. In *Connotations* [online], 2009/10, vol. 19, no. 1-3 [cit. 2012-07-18], pp. 126-135. Available at: <http://www.connotations.uni-tuebingen.de/niederhoff01913.htm>

» Osborne, B. S. The Iconography of Nationhood in Canadian Art. In: Cosgrove, D., Daniels S. (eds.), 1988. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments.* Cambridge: CUP, pp. 162-178.

» Rocard, M. Approche gothique du paysage canadienne "Death by Landscape" de Margaret Atwood. In *Caliban*, 1996, vol. 33, pp. 147-156.

» Rule, L. A. Not Fading into another Landscape: Specters of American Empire in Margaret Atwood's Fiction. In *Modern Fiction Studies*, 2008, vol. 54, no. 4, pp. 627-653. ProQuest Central.

» Smith, M. M. Introduction. Onward to Audible Pasts. In Smith, M. M. (ed.), 2004. *Hearing History: A Reade*r. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, pp. ix-xxii.

» Sturgess, C. Margaret Atwood's Short Fiction. In Nischik, R. (ed.), 2000. *Margaret Atwood. Works & Impact*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, pp. 87-96.

Lucia Otrísalová
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského
Gondova 2
814 99 Bratislava
email: otrisalova@fphil.uniba.sk

Semiotic worlds in Austerlitz

Dagmar Blight

Dagmar Blight is a senior lecturer at the Department of English language and literature, Faculty of Education, Comenius University Bratislava. She specializes in British literature and British studies.

Abstract:

The paper will look into two semiotic worlds juxtaposed in the novel Austerlitz (2001) by Winfried Georg Sebald. The analysis will show how the reader is shifted from one system of signs, that of words, into another, that of photographs. The article will explore how Sebald uses photographs and plans to make the story clearer, and to document the life of the protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz, a Jewish scholar of the history of architecture.

The German author and academic Winfried Georg Sebald (1944 – 2001) was one of the most acclaimed writers at the turn of the last century. A prevailing topic in his work is the trauma of the Second World War, as seen in *The Emigrants* (1992), *On Natural History of Destruction* (1999) and in his last novel *Austerlitz* (2001). Sebald's personal stamp as a writer was to make intriguing use of black-and-white photographs in his novels. *Austerlitz* is a good example of this juxtaposition of two semiotic worlds, that of words and that of photographs. This paper will explore how the novel communicates its message through the two heterogeneous systems of signs. The article will show how the photos are used to complement the story and to document Jacques Austerlitz's missing personal history.

Plot

The novel *Austerlitz* is set in post-war Europe; it starts with the narrator meeting Austerlitz in 1967 in Antwerp. There are several flashbacks to the period of the Second World War, and particularly the Holocaust, which cast light on the origins of the protagonist and the cause of his restlessness. Austerlitz was directly influenced by the horrors of the war. He lost both parents to the Nazis' ethnic cleansing and he also lost his personal identity, having been sent away from his homeland. He then spends his entire adult life trying

to recreate his personal history and find out who he really is. In search of his own personal identity, Austerlitz visits many fortresses, prisons and ruins of once famous sites. The story thus takes place in European metropolises such as Antwerp, Liège, Brussels, London, Paris and Prague. The narrator and Austerlitz often meet unexpectedly and in unlikely places. It is through these unexpected encounters of the two main characters that the reader learns about the horrific details of Austerlitz's life. Fate has been unkind to Austerlitz. His suffering in the hands of inscrutable fate reminds us of Thomas Hardy's characters, who seem like mere puppets worked by hostile or indifferent forces. However, Austerlitz partially succeeds in his personal quest when he manages to discover who he really is. He also learns about the last whereabouts of his mother, but unsurprisingly fails to find a record of the last days of his father. Even his visit to the new Paris library in the late 1990s leaves him deprived of the last piece of this personal puzzle.

Photographs as documents of life

Austerlitz may not know his identity and his personal history, but his life is well documented through a photographic record of places he goes to, people he meets and objects he sees. As a result the novel is full of photographs. In fact there are altogether 88 photos in the 415 pages of the *Austerlitz* 2002 Penguin edition. They include photographs of people, animals, buildings, cemeteries and architectural plans, as well as photos of various objects: a stamp, a ticket to a museum, a billiard table etc. The novel thus communicates its message through two heterogeneous semiotic worlds or systems of signs; they are words and photographs. The totality of the information the reader is exposed to in the novel is conveyed by these two very different structures, which are nevertheless co-operative. By itself the corpus of photographs would make very little sense. The reader may ask: Who is that woman? What is her relation to the protagonist? Where is she? Yet, put in the context of the story the reader realizes the images accompany the text and make it clearer. The woman turns out to be Austerlitz's long-lost mother, exterminated at Auschwitz during WWII. Photographs are considered to be a mechanical analogue of reality; their denotative message makes further description impossible, so in the novel there are neither headlines nor captions to accompany the photos and duplicate their meaning. Moreover, Sebald refrains from describing the images, so the text is not what Barthes refers to as a parasitic message designed to connote the image (Barthes, 1997, p. 25). Instead, the photos illustrate the text, the story of the novel. As a result the reader is given images of important people in the protagonist's life, places

he has been to and objects Austerlitz has seen, etc.

What may strike the reader about Austerlitz is his personal history or lack of it. Michael Oakeshott in *On History and Other Essays* (1983) makes a distinction between practical history—notions of the past that we all carry around with us in our daily lives (memory, dreams, desire)—and the historical past that is built up by historians as the corrected and organized version of the past. Despite the fact that Jacques Austerlitz spends his whole adult life in search of his true identity and family, the protagonist has very little practical history. Instead, he possesses an extensive historical past; indeed he accumulates knowledge, facts and a historical past as a substitute for his own identity. The historical past is of great interest to Austerlitz. It is the subject he excels in at secondary school, and it is on the strength of his paramount knowledge of history that he gets a place at Oxford to study history of architecture. Jacques Austerlitz is a very knowledgeable and curious man. He shows keen interest in a wide range of subjects. Interestingly, he spends half of his life subconsciously censoring the history of the 20th century, the history of his own time. He closes his eyes to anything relating to his own history. It is as if his immune system has spared him from twentieth century history, his own early personal history. To him the world ended in the late nineteenth century. When he does collect some important or disturbing information from that time it results in insomnia, anxieties, lapses of memory and eventually a nervous breakdown. Interestingly, the loss of his mental equilibrium is stylistically mimicked by sentences several pages long. Similarly, as Gioia notes, with the author's geographical and chronological mazes, shifts to the past and present life of the protagonist, the reader can experience "the same sense of dislocation from which Austerlitz himself suffers".

Austerlitz's wandering starts at a very early stage of his life. As a boy of five he is saved from certain death in German-occupied Prague when his mother has him sent on a Kindertransport to Britain. There he is fostered by the family of a Welsh nonconformist preacher. When his foster parents can no longer look after him he is sent to a boarding school, where at the age of 12 he discovers that his name is not Dafydd Elias but Jacques Austerlitz. His college years take him to Oxford, where he studies history of architecture. Then he gets a teaching post about which the reader learns no details. It is his research and personal interest in architecture that take him to different places across Europe; it is by chance the narrator of the novel meets Austerlitz somewhat too often and in very unlikely places: Antwerp Centraal station, a café in Liège, the Palace of Justice in Brussels, London, Paris, etc. The unlikely encounters with the narrator are not the only surprises on the journeys Austerlitz undertakes. On one occasion he discovers the disused Ladies' Waiting Room of Liverpool Street Station, the place of his arrival in England. Austerlitz knows where he arrived in England aged four and a half, but what he does not know yet is

where he arrived from. The moment of complete epiphany comes a year later, after a period of nervous breakdown, when, again by chance, in an antiquarian bookshop he overhears a radio programme about the transportation of children before the outbreak of World War Two. It is then he realizes he was one of these children sent to Britain in the summer of 1939 and that he is of Czech-Jewish origin. Naturally, he sets off to Prague to glean any information he can about his biological parents: his opera singer mother, and his father, a company owner and left-wing politician. There are more journeys made, more details learnt; yet wherever Austerlitz is, he feels "oppressed by the vague sense that he did not belong in this city, or indeed anywhere else in the world" (Sebald, 2001, p. 354).

Austerlitz seems to accumulate knowledge "which served as a substitute or compensatory memory" (Sebald, 2001, p. 198). Similarly, he accumulates photographs to document his life, and to reconstruct his "buried existence" after the fits of hysterical epilepsy (Sebald, 2001, p. 374). A camera is Austerlitz's faithful companion on his wanderings. Whether he goes abroad or is in his homeland, Austerlitz takes the camera along to photograph the various places he visits. As he is interested in the history of architecture, particularly the architecture of imposing buildings, the novel features a number of photos of fortresses, grand institutions and stations, such as: Lucerne Station, Breendock fortress, the Palace of Justice in Brussels, the Great Eastern Hotel, Liverpool Street Station, the State archive in Prague, houses in Terezín, the new Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, etc. Buildings are not the only focus of his camera though. The protagonist takes pictures of animals he sees in a zoo, his own study, his rucksack, a billiard table untouched for 150 years, former burial grounds in London and flowers. The photographs play a double role in the novel. First, they accompany the narrative, so that the reader can visualize what Austerlitz sees. More importantly, however, the photos come in handy for Austerlitz's own use in the later part of the novel. After his nervous breakdown Austerlitz suffers from memory lapses and the photographs help him to regain his fragmented personal identity.

Frequency of photographs

Even though the frequency of the photographs in the novel seems arbitrary and follows no recognizable pattern in the story—on average they occur every one to ten pages—there are two cases in which we can find a connection between the length of the gap and the development in the story of Austerlitz. The longest pause, in which there are 26 pages of text between an illustration from a Welsh children's Bible and a photo of a rugby team from Austerlitz's

college years, may correspond to the years of Austerlitz's ignorance of his real identity. As a boy of five he is saved from certain death in German-occupied Prague when his mother has him sent on a Kindertransport to Britain. There he is fostered by the family of a Welsh nonconformist preacher, hence the Bible he was familiar with as a child. When his foster parents can no longer look after him he is sent to a boarding school, where at the age of 12 he discovers that his name is not Dafydd Elias but Jacques Austerlitz. When he is first told his real name by the master of the boarding school, he "could connect no ideas with the word Austerlitz" (Sebald, 2001, p. 94). As he has never heard the word before, it is with great expectation that he asks the master what his new name means. Austerlitz then learns it is "[...] a small place in Moravia, site of a famous battle" (Sebald, 2001, p. 96). Jacques Austerlitz should not however be just a name of a place, a battle, nor a railway station. Nevertheless, his individuality is not restored in the book (Wood, 2011, p. 17). Austerlitz's identity ends in the death camp where both his parents were likely exterminated, though Sebald withholds the name Auschwitz from the reader.

The second longest gap, 15 pages between a plan of Liverpool Street Station and a photograph of the main portal of the state archives in Prague, corresponds to the nervous breakdown Austerlitz experiences when he eventually discovers his true identity. With a professional interest in the history of architecture, Austerlitz takes many walks across London. On one such wandering in the late 1980s he finds himself in the Ladies' Waiting Room of Liverpool Station, which he recognized as the place of his arrival in England. The waiting room "contained all the hours of my past life, all the suppressed and extinguished fears and wishes I had ever entertained" (Sebald, 2001, p. 193). This discovery has a devastating effect on Austerlitz's state of mind. He becomes aware of the destructive effect of his desolation and is overcome by a terrible weariness "at the idea that I had never really been alive" (Ibid, p. 194). Austerlitz knows where he arrived in England aged four and a half, but what he does not know yet is where he arrived from. The moment of complete epiphany comes a year later, after a period of nervous breakdown, when, again by chance, in an antiquarian bookshop he overhears a radio programme about the transportation of children before World War Two. It is then he realizes he was one of these children sent to Britain in the summer of 1939 and that he is of Czech-Jewish origin. Naturally, he sets off to Prague to find out any information about his biological parents: his opera singer mother, and the father, a company owner and left-wing politician.

Fictional vs. factual

The story is a fictional account of a fictional life of a fictional character. The photographs, however, are factual. They are images of real people, real places and real objects. Logically, the photographs of the people in the novel are then NOT images of the people Austerlitz as a character meets and describes. The photos of places could not have been taken by Austerlitz. The objects in the photos are not those that Austerlitz as a fictional character comes across either. In fact the text signifies "something different to what is shown" (Barthes, 1997, p. 18-19). When looking at the two semiotic worlds in the novel, the text and the photographs, a question arises as to what we are to think about the relation between the fictional text, the story of Austerlitz and the factual photographs. Cognitive psychology might cast some light on what happens in the mind of the reader when reading a fictional life story and simultaneously looking at photographs of real people, places and objects.

Austerlitz, the last novel of Winfried Georg Sebald, conveys its message through 415 pages of text and 88 photos. The relationship between the two very different structures to which the reader is exposed in the text is, however, cooperative. The images make the text clearer; they illustrate the story of the novel rather than duplicate its meaning. Simultaneously, the photographs Austerlitz takes and accumulates throughout his life serve to document his buried existence and are, along with his vast knowledge, a substitute for his unreliable memory.

Works cited:

» Barthes, R. 1997. *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana Press.
» Deledalle, G. (ed.) 2001. *Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Signs: Essays in Comparative Semiotics (Advances in Semiotics).* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
» Frye, N. 1990. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
» Gioia, T. "*Austerlitz by W.G. Sebald*". Available at: <http://www.thecanon.com/austerlitz.html> (accessed 20 Feb. 2012).
» Jaggi, M. 2001. *The Last Word*. The Guardian 21 December 2001.
» Mohr, H.U. 2009. *Wandering Jew*. In: Mulvey – Roberts, M. (ed), 2009. *The Handbook of the Gothic*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
» Moi, T. (ed.) 1986. *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press.
» Mulvey – Roberts, M. (ed). 2009. *The Handbook of the Gothic*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
» Oakeshott, M, 1999. *On History and Other Essays*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
» Sebald, W. G. 2001. *Austerlitz*. London: Penguin.
» Wood, J. 2011. "*Sent East*". In *London Review of Books*, 2011, vol. 33, no. 19, pp. 15-18.

Dagmar Blight
Faculty of Education
Department of English language and literature
Račianska 59
Bratislava
813 34
email: blight@fedu.uniba.sk

A Peircean characterization of the semiotic properties of selected visual signs found in comics

Michał Szawerna

Dr. Michał Szawerna is assistant professor of linguistics at the Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław. His current research is situated at the intersection of comics studies, cognitive linguistics, and semiotics.

Abstract:

In the currently flourishing comics studies, a few attempts have been made to characterize the visual signs found in comics from the perspective of Peircean semiotics. These attempts seem flawed in that they often overlook the indexicality of these visual signs and usually fail to go beyond the obvious iconic similarity between the pictorial images found in comics and their real-world referents and the equally obvious symbolicity of writing, whereby sign forms are arbitrarily related to their meanings. The goal of this paper is to present a more comprehensive semiotic characterization of the relations between a broad array of visual signs found in comics and the multiple referents they relate to in terms of Peirce's modes of semiosis: indexicality, iconicity and symbolicity.

In the burgeoning field of comics[1] scholarship, several attempts—notably by Duncan and Smith (2009), Khordoc (2001), Magnussen (2000), McCloud (1994/1993), and Saraceni (2003)— have been made to apply the analytical instruments of Peircean semiotics to characterize visual signs found in comics. On the whole, these attempts seem flawed, albeit to a varying extent. McCloud (1994/1993, p. 27) rather gravely distorts the Peircean sense of icon and symbol by redefining these terms in accordance with the way they are intuitively understood by non-experts. Both McCloud (1994/1993, p. 27) and Saraceni (2003, pp. 20-27) altogether overlook the indexicality of visual signs found in comics. What is more, Saraceni (2003, pp. 20-27) fails to go beyond the obvious iconic similarity between pictorial images found in comics and their real-world referents and the equally obvious symbolicity of writing, whereby forms of written signs are arbitrarily related to their meanings. On the few occasions when indexicality is mentioned (Duncan & Smith 2009, pp. 10-11; Khordoc 2001; Magnussen 2000), the proposed semiotic analyses of visual signs employed in comics seem less than comprehensive—they rarely characterize these visual signs at the level subordinate to indices and

icons[2], they do not recognize the fact that in comics the semiotic value of a visual sign emerges with relation to multiple referents, and they overlook the cyclicity of many visual signs found in comics, whereby a sign gives rise to another sign, which may give rise to yet another sign, potentially ad infinitum. The goal of this paper—conceived as a modest contribution to comics research informed by semiotics—is to formulate a Peircean characterization of a broad array of visual signs commonly found in comics in terms of their indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity, with the focus on those aspects of their semiotics that were previously said to have been neglected by comics experts like Duncan and Smith (2009), Khordoc (2001), Magnussen (2000), McCloud (1994 /1993/), and Saraceni (2003). Because an exhaustive characterization of all visual signs found in comics, if at all feasible, certainly exceeds the scope of this paper, the following discussion centres on the main kinds of visual signs dubbed "diegetic images" by Duncan and Smith (2009, p. 155), i.e. visual representations of entities appearing in story worlds encoded in comics.

A story world of this kind, henceforth referred to as a comic's diegetic world[3], is a conceptual structure actively created by the comic's reader with the use of his or her prior knowledge in response to the visual signs making up the comic[4]. Following Werth (1999, p. 82), who proposes a taxonomy of the kinds of entities that populate mental representations of textually encoded worlds, we may divide the entities appearing in diegetic worlds of comics into characters, objects and concepts. Characters are necessarily sentient entities, which vary in the degree to which they approximate the reader's experiential prototype of a sentient entity: the human being. While some of the popular genres of comics listed by Duncan and Smith (2009, pp. 196-245) (e.g., detective comics, memoir comics, and war comics) are almost invariably concerned with the vicissitudes of human characters, others (e.g. funny animal comics, horror comics, and superhero comics) feature imaginary characters which may be considered conceptual blends (in the sense of Fauconnier & Turner 2002) integrating human and non-human attributes in various proportions[5]. As regards the category of objects, it comprises a variety of real as well as imaginary non-sentient entities which may be sensorically perceivable by characters in the diegetic world of a comic: organisms (notably, plants and animals), physical objects (clothing, vehicles, buildings, etc.), physical substances (flame, water, smoke, etc.), and audible sounds (speech, music, various environmental noises). As to the category of concepts, it comprises non-sentient entities which may not be sensorically perceivable by characters in the diegetic world of a comic: linguistic meanings, thoughts, emotions, etc.

While the classification of diegetic images found in comics into visual representations of characters, objects and concepts is a useful heuristic guiding the structure of this paper, the following semiotic characterization of these images extends beyond their

relation to characters, objects and concepts populating diegetic worlds of comics and includes their relations to referents that are extrinsic to these diegetic worlds because it is only with relation to all of its referents that the overall interpretation of a diegetic image is accomplished by the reader. Additionally, the semiotic characterization presented in this paper addresses the issue of the previously mentioned semiotic cyclicity of diegetic images found in comics because a selective characterization which ignores any of the relevant semiotic cycles in the interpretation of a diegetic image cannot be taken as a psychologically realistic model of the process whereby this image is interpreted by the reader. As the semiotics of Peirce constitutes the theoretical foundation of the semiotic characterization proposed in the main, analytical part of this paper, the next seven paragraphs overview the elements of Peirce's theory that are featured particularly prominently in the main part, which immediately follows the concise overview presented below.

Peirce's conception of the sign appears to be mentalistic because, as Nöth (1995/1990, p. 42) observes, Peircean "[s]igns are not a class of objects. They exist only in the mind of the interpreter." In Peirce's own words, "[n]othing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign" (Peirce, § 2.308[6], quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 42). Unlike other sign models, e.g. de Saussure's (2011 [1959/1916], p. 66) "two-sided psychological entity," Peirce's model of the sign is a triadic one because it consists of three relata

characterizing it "in its semantic dimension" (Nöth 1995/1990, p. 83). According to Nöth (1995/1990, p. 42), Peirce once characterized his model of the sign as comprising a "triple connection of *sign, thing signified, cognition produced in the mind*" (Peirce, § 1.372, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 42). According to Nöth (1995/1990, p. 42), the first relatum of the Peircean sign model, the sign (also referred to as the representamen, see Nöth, 1995 /1990, p. 42; Johansen & Larsen, 2002 [1994], p. 26), is the "perceptible object" (Peirce, § 2.230, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 42) which functions as a sign. In this paper, the first relatum of Peirce's sign model is referred to as the sign. The second relatum of the Peircean sign model, the object, is the thing signified—"that which the sign stands for, that which is represented by it" (Johansen & Larsen, 2002 [1994], pp. 26-27). Nöth (1995/1990, pp. 42-43) observes that the object may be either physical or non-physical, real or imaginary, unique or generic. In this paper, the second relatum of Peirce's sign model is referred to as the referent[7], to distinguish it from what Werth (1999, p. 82) calls an object—a kind of entity found in a mental representation of a textually encoded world. As regards the third relatum of the Peircean model of the sign—the cognition produced in the mind, referred to as the interpretant— Peirce characterized it as "the proper significate outcome" or "effect of the sign" (Peirce, § 5.47475, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 43).

According to Nöth (1995/1990, p. 43), Peirce's semiosis, the cyclic process

"whereby the sign has a cognitive effect on its interpreter" (Nöth 1995/1990, p. 42), is unlimited because a sign gives rise to an interpretant which becomes another sign, which in turn gives rise to another interpretant, and so on, potentially ad infinitum.

Peircean signs qualify as indices, icons or symbols depending on the manner in which the first relatum, the sign, is associated with the second relatum, the referent (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 44; Johansen & Larsen, 2002 [1994], pp. 31-32).

Atkin (2010) characterizes the Peircean index as a sign which utilizes some existential or physical connection between it and its referent. Johansen and Larsen (2002 [1994], p. 32) observe that indexical signs qualify as reagents when there is "a cause-effect relation" between the referent and the sign. According to Johansen and Larsen (2002 [1994], p. 32), (animal) tracks and (medical) symptoms are "[t]wo key types of reagents": tracks are left by the referent and can lead back to it, whereas symptoms typically occur at the same time as the referent, "and form a part of it" (Johansen & Larsen, 2002 [1994], p. 33). The second major group of indexical signs discussed by Johansen and Larsen (2002 [1994], p. 35) are designations, indices "that signify by pointing to something": pointing fingers, spotlights, proper names, etc. The function of designations consists in localizing and identifying their referents "in time and space within a given universe, and in relationship to a given system" (Johansen & Larsen, 2002 [1994], p. 35). According to Nöth (1995/1990, p. 113), other features of the Peircean index are the following: it is "a category comprising not only natural, but also many conventional signs," it "focuses the interpreter's attention" on the referent, it "involves the existence" of the referent "as an individual entity," and it "asserts nothing," only shows the referent.

Johansen and Larsen (2002 [1994], pp. 36-37) observe that Peircean icons, divided by Peirce into images, diagrams and metaphors, are all based on the similarity they bear to their referents. Images are said to have "simple qualities" (Peirce, § 2.277, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 123), like colour, shape, size, etc., in common with their referents. In turn, diagrams are iconic signs "which represent the relations … of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts" (Peirce, § 2.277, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 123). Lastly, metaphors are iconic signs which "represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else" (Peirce, § 2.277, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 123). In other words, the iconicity of metaphors is based on the similarity between the referents of two signs (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 123) situated in the target and source domain of the metaphor.[8]

As concerns symbols, Johansen and Larsen (2002 [1994], p. 43) define them as arbitrary (unmotivated) signs, i.e. signs neither (existentially or causally) connected to their referents nor similar to them, "constructed or agreed upon to be used as signs for given purposes in the internal or external world, i.e.

as conventional designations with a referentiality and a meaning that are determined by conventional usage."

Importantly, indices, icons, and symbols are not mutually exclusive categories of the sign: according to Atkin (2010), "Peirce was aware that any single sign may display some combination of iconic, indexical and symbolic characteristics."

As indicated previously, the following Peircean characterization of the semiotic properties of diegetic images found in comics is structured along three parts: the first part focuses on diegetic images representing comics characters, the second part concentrates on diegetic images representing objects appearing in diegetic worlds of comics, and the third part describes diegetic images representing concepts entertained by comics characters in their diegetic worlds.

The diegetic image of a comics character is a pictorial sign which may be characterized as a combination of index, icon and symbol with relation to several referents (or things signified, objects). Of crucial importance for the reader of a comic, whose principal aim is to construct the comic's diegetic world, is the relationship between the pictorial image of a character (a character-sign) and the character signified by this image, conceived of as a component of the diegetic world of the comic (a character-referent). With relation to a character-referent situated in the diegetic world of a comic, the corresponding character-sign qualifies as an icon as the character-referent's appearance is constructed

by the reader solely on the basis of the pictorial images of this character encountered in the comic. Because the reader constructs the appearance of the character-referent in response to the character-signs featured in the comic, an individual character-sign necessarily shares many of its visual qualities (including its shape, colour and relative size) with the corresponding character-referent. To the extent to which a character-sign reproduces the visual qualities of the corresponding character-referent, which it necessarily does by virtue of its role as the only visual cue of the character-referent's appearance available to the reader, this pictorial sign can be considered an iconic image. The imaginal iconicity of a character-sign additionally follows from the fact that character-signs are often rendered in linear perspective: executed in this fashion, a two-dimensional character-sign simulates the way in which the sign's three-dimensional character-referent would appear to a viewer from a fixed vantage point inside the diegetic world of the comic featuring this character-referent.

But a Peircean characterization of an individual character-sign must go beyond its categorization as an iconic image, if only because character-signs always underspecify the corresponding character-referents visually[9]. There are several reasons why an individual character-sign remains visually underspecified. Firstly, the reader of a comic interprets a character-sign as a two-dimensional projection onto the surface of the comic's panel of its three-dimensional character-referent,

situated in the comic's diegetic world. Secondly, a character-sign remains altogether motionless and mute, while the corresponding character-referent is understood to be a 'walking and talking' sentient entity. Thirdly, a character-sign invariably represents the corresponding character-referent as viewed from a single angle—in comics, a character-sign typically represents either a side view or a front view of its character-referent. There are other reasons, too. More often than not, a character-sign is executed highly schematically, with many of the details of its character-referent omitted, and quite frequently it is rendered in austere black and white. Inasmuch as a character-sign constitutes an abstraction from many visual properties ascribed by the reader of a comic to the sign's character-referent, but at the same time exhibits isomorphisms between its structural relations and the referent's relational patterns, it may be regarded as an iconic diagram of this referent.

There is, however, more to a character-sign than its imaginal and diagrammatic iconicity. To the extent that a comics character, conceived of as a fully specific sentient inhabitant of the diegetic world encoded in a particular comic, is constructed by the reader on the basis of fragmentary pictorial images of the character found in the comic, an individual pictorial image of this kind can be considered indexical with relation to the character. Specifically, a character-sign qualifies as a designation of the corresponding character-referent because the presence of this inherently fragmentary sign in a comics panel indicates the presence of the entire character-referent in the diegetic situation visualized in this panel. The designational indexicality of a character-sign is particularly evident in cases when a portion of the character-sign is cut off by the frame of the panel in which the sign is situated—it seems that a partial character-sign of this kind is always unmistakably interpreted by the reader of a comic as signifying the whole of the character-referent in the comic's diegetic world.

It seems that most of the visual characteristics of a character-sign which make it an incomplete representation of the corresponding character-referent confer the status of a symbol onto the character-sign. The two-dimensionality of character-signs is a major convention of comics, dictated by the limitations of the planar material support of the comics panel. Outside the medium of comics, this convention is easily bypassed, as evidenced by the existence of collectable figures which constitute three-dimensional representations of popular comics characters[10]. There are other character-related conventions dictated by the limitations of the material which supports the images making up comics. In printed comics, the immobility and muteness of character-signs results from the fact that these signs are produced by printing ink onto paper. These conventional traits of character-signs are bypassed by some online comics (or webcomics) and all animated films based on popular comics, which feature character-signs that move around and speak[11]. Additionally, the convention whereby comics characters

are viewed from one angle is not only dictated by the material limitations of comics, but also reflects the inability of the human visual apparatus to simultaneously perceive the front and back of the observed object. While it is difficult to imagine a character-sign that could effectively bypass this convention[12], it is much easier to envisage character-signs representing other views of the corresponding character-referents than the default side views and front views typical of most character-signs in comics. In many comics, the reader does get to see characters from above, from below, and from behind, even though a consistent use of such non-standard angles of vision is never practised. As regards the usual schematicity and incompleteness of the character-sign, they are two conventions which may be easily overridden in the medium of comics as they are independent of the physical constitution of the material which supports comics images. Consequently, the schematicity and incompleteness of a character-sign vary both within an individual comic and across individual installments of a comics series[13]. Last but not least, character-signs in comics are often rendered in linear perspective, which, as demonstrated by Gombrich (1961/1960), has been one of the principal conventions of Western representational art since the Renaissance. Linear perspective is said to be conventional because " (1) historical circumstances brought it about; (2) artists and perceivers have to learn it as a system; and (3) it falls short of complete replication of phenomenal

reality" (Bordwell 1986/1985, p. 107). In comics, perspectival representation of characters is hardly an obligatory convention, as evidenced by a lack of perspectival depth cues in the character-signs of many comics[14].

A character-sign may be also described as a combination of index, icon, and symbol with relation to referents situated outside the diegetic world of the comic in which the corresponding character-referent appears. Specifically, a character-sign may signify referents populating the reader's mental representation of the real world (the real-world model). These real-world referents may be represented at varying levels of abstraction, among which the specific level and the generic level seem to be of particular prominence with relation to the character-sign.

At the specific level, the character-sign may signify a real-world individual, which is a regular occurrence in educational comics, memoir comics, and war comics. But the character-sign may also signify its creator— occasionally, comics creators include character-signs of themselves in the panels of their comics[15]. Provided that the reader recognizes the character-sign as referring to the comic's author, the author's pictorial representation may be considered a character-sign signifying a real-world individual (albeit in addition to being a character-sign signifying its corresponding character-referent in the comic's diegetic world). When a character-sign refers to a real-world individual, it is semiotically analogous to a character-sign signifying a character-referent in the diegetic world of a comic:

it is an iconic image to the extent that it reproduces the visual qualities of this individual, an iconic diagram insofar as it abstracts away from many properties of its real-world referent (three-dimensionality, motion, sound, etc.) but at the same time exhibits isomorphisms between its structural relations and the referent's relational patterns, an indexical designation inasmuch as this inherently fragmentary sign points to the whole of the corresponding real-world individual, and a symbol to the degree that its visual characteristics deviate from those of its 'walking and talking' real-world counterpart.

At a more general level, the character-sign may signify a referent type—a generalization over a class of specific objects (a generic policeman, doctor, fire-fighter, etc.). From the Peircean perspective, a generic-level character-sign (or character legisign) is not unlike a specific-level character-sign (or character sinsign): it combines the characteristics of an iconic image, iconic diagram, indexical designation, and symbol, with the proviso that while the former type of sign (i.e. a generic-level character-sign) foregrounds its diagrammatic iconicity and symbolicity at the cost of its imaginal iconicity (by being largely devoid of truly unique visual features), the latter type (i.e. a specific-level character-sign) does the reverse: it emphasizes its imaginal iconicity and downplays its diagrammatic iconicity and symbolicity (by drawing attention to the visual uniqueness of its referent).

Many comics genres—funny animal comics, horror comics, science-fiction comics, superhero comics, and sword-and-sorcery comics—feature imaginary characters which are visualized as iconic images of more than a single referent type: typically, these character-signs combine the visual attributes of people with the visual attributes of either animals or machines[16]. With relation to the character-referent inhabiting the diegetic world of a comic, the semiotic characterization of the corresponding blended (or hybrid) character-sign matches that of the previously discussed ordinary character signs: a blended character-sign appears to combine the characteristics of an iconic image, iconic diagram, indexical designation, and symbol. In contrast, with reference to the corresponding real-world referents providing the visual sources for a blended character, the blended character-sign seems only weakly iconic (to the extent to which the real-world visual source-referents are recognizable in the components and structure of the blended character-sign); and not at all indexical (it indicates the whole of the blended character rather that any of its individual real-world source-referents.); or symbolic (it is a conventional rendition of the blended character rather than any of the real-world individual source-referents.).

While the iconicity of a character-sign appears to be its major semiotic attribute whenever this kind of sign is considered with relation to a character-referent situated either in the diegetic world of a comic or in the real-world model, a character-sign may also signify a real-world referent in a decidedly non-iconic manner. Specifically, a character-

sign may signify its creator even if the creator is not pictorially represented in the form of an imaginal or diagrammatic icon. In such cases, character-signs may be said to signify their creators in an entirely indexical fashion. Viewed as an index, a character-sign is always a reagent of its creator because the presence of the image of a character inside a comics panel necessarily presupposes the existence of the writer who conceived the character and the artist who executed the character's pictorial image. In other words, a character-sign is a reagent of its creator regardless of whether or not the reader knows the identity of the creator.[17] On occasion, however, the visual distinctiveness of a character-sign enables an informed reader to uniquely identify the sign's creator[18], which likens the reader's interpretation of the character-sign to the process whereby an experienced animal tracker gathers a wealth of information concerning the animal he or she is tracking on the basis of the imprints left in the mud by the animal, as described by Johansen and Larsen (2002 [1994], p. 32).

Comics make frequent use of visual signs which are immanent in pictorial representations of characters in the sense that they are fully integrated with these character images and cannot be separated from them. These signs are to do with the communicative potential of characters' bodies and comprise pictorial representations of gestures and postures. The term gesture is used here in its narrow sense, as "bodily communication by means of hands and arms and to a lesser degree by the head"

(Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 392). Comics employ all of Ekman and Friesen's (1969[19]) types of gesture listed by Nöth (1995/1990, p. 394): emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and body manipulators.

Emblems are gestures "which have a direct verbal translation, or dictionary definition" (Ekman & Friesen 1969, p. 63, quoted in Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 394). Countless specific emblems have been pictorially represented in comics exemplifying various generic conventions and publication formats, irrespective of their time and place of origin. They include emblematic gestures made by comics characters with hands alone (the okay sign, the beckoning sign, the fig sign, the thumbs-up sign, etc.) or in combination with other body parts (the cut-throat sign, the hat tip, various forms of military salute) and face alone (rolling the eyes, the puppy face) or in combination with other body parts (the raspberry sign, the facepalm, the air kiss). As regards illustrators, i.e. "speech related gestures serving to illustrate what is being said verbally" (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 394), Nöth (1995/1990, p. 397) states that Ekman (1980, p. 98[20]) distinguishes eight kinds of these gestures: (1) batons, which emphasize words; (2) underliners, which emphasize sentences; (3) ideographs, which sketch a direction of thought; (4) kinetographs, which depict actions; (5) pictographs, which show objects; (6) rhythmics, which depict an event's rhythm or tempo; (7) spatials, which depict spaces; and (8) deictics, which point to objects. It seems that, due

to the stationary nature of the visual signs making up comics, it is spatials and deictics, rather than ideographs or kinetographs, that lend themselves particularly well to being pictorially visualized in the medium of comics. As to affect displays, Nöth (1995/1990, p. 394) characterizes them as "nonverbal (mostly facial) expressions of emotions and affects." As affect displays are frequently represented in comics in the form of pictorial signs, they have been discussed in considerable detail by prominent comics experts, such as Eisner (2008/1985, pp. 112-114; 2008/1996, pp. 31-32, 57-79) and McCloud (2006, pp. 80-101), as well as researchers studying comics within the field of applied cognitive linguistics, such as Forceville (2005), Eerden (2009), and Shinohara and Matsunaka (2009). As concerns regulators, Nöth (1995/1990, p. 394) describes them as "speech-related gestures which regulate the verbal interaction between speakers and listeners." These gestures include head nodding, head shaking, and shrugging one's shoulders, which are pictorially represented in comics from time to time. Lastly, according to Nöth (1995/1990, p. 394), body manipulators are "movements of touching or manipulating one's own body (e.g., scratching the head, licking the lips) or an object (e.g. playing with a pencil)." Nöth (1995/1990, p. 394) observes that body manipulators are "acts of subconscious autocommunication" interpreted by Ekman and Friesen (1969, p. 84) as "adaptive efforts to satisfy self or bodily needs or to manage emotions" (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 394).

Like regulators, body manipulators are occasionally represented in comics in the form of pictorial signs.

From the Peircean perspective, the relation between a gesture-sign and a gesture-referent is on the whole analogous to the previously discussed relation between a character-sign and a character-referent. With relation to a gesture-referent situated in the deictic world of a comic or in the real-world model, the pictorial sign of this gesture-referent can thus be regarded as an iconic image, an iconic diagram, and a symbol. Additionally, a gesture-sign may be considered indexical inasmuch as it signifies an individual stage[21] of the "visible bodily action" (Kendon 1983, p. 13) making up the corresponding gesture-referent. Specifically, a gesture-sign may be regarded as an indexical designation of its emblem-referent as the occurrence of this inherently fragmentary sign in a comics panel points to the occurrence of the entire corresponding gesture-referent in the deictic-world situation visualized in this panel or in the reader's mental representation of the real world. While a gesture-sign may signify a gesture-referent situated either in a comic's deictic world or in the real-world model, the nature of the signifying relation is not identical in these two cases. The gesture-referent situated in the deictic world of a comic qualifies as a gesture-token because it is invariably immanent in a specific character who performs it on a specific occasion in the unique story encoded visually in a particular comic. In contrast, the gesture-referent situated in the real-

world model qualifies as a gesture-type, which abstracts away from the specifics of its performer and the unique spatio-temporal coordinates of its occurrence.

Perhaps more interestingly, the interpretants of the previously discussed gesture-referents qualify as secondary gesture-signs with relation to their performers as well as the meanings they communicate. With relation to its performer, either a character in the deictic world of a comic or a human in the real-world model, a secondary gesture-sign is indexical. Specifically, it is a reagent as it is the performer's product and a designation as it uniquely identifies the performer by virtue of being immanent in him or her. With relation to the meaning it communicates, a secondary gesture-sign may variously combine indexical, iconic, and symbolic characteristics depending on the type of gesture exemplified by this sign. On the whole, secondary gesture-signs are symbolic with relation to the meanings they communicate inasmuch as the relation between the form of a secondary gesture-sign and its meaning is for the most part arbitrary. It is by virtue of a culture-specific convention that a secondary emblem-sign like the thumbs-up gesture or the hat-tip gesture is associated with its unique meaning. Similarly, a secondary regulator-sign qualifies as a symbol because the relation between nodding the head and encouraging the interlocutor to continue or raising the index finger and wanting to speak is conventional. Some secondary gesture-signs are indexical with relation to the meanings they communicate: a secondary deictic

illustrator is an example of a designation as it is made to point to an object, whereas a secondary affect display or a secondary body manipulator is an example of a symptomatic reagent as it signifies the psychological state experienced by its performer. Lastly, some secondary gesture-signs appear to be iconic with relation to the meanings they communicate. For example, a secondary spatial illustrator may be considered an iconic image with relation to its meaning to the extent that it shares visual qualities with the spaces it depicts: their height, width or depth. For the same reason, some secondary emblems (e.g. the okay sign, the fig sign, the puppy face, and the cut-throat sign) qualify as iconic images of their referents. Additionally, however, the interpretants of these secondary emblems function as tertiary signs connoting similar or related meanings

In comics, pictorial representations of bodily postures, whose referents may be somewhat intuitively characterized as intentionally meaningful configurations of the human body (cf. Nöth, 1995/1990, pp. 394-395), exhibit the same semiotic characteristics as the previously discussed gesture-signs. In short, with relation to a posture-referent token situated in the deictic world of a comic or a posture-referent type in the real-world model, the corresponding posture-sign may be characterized as a designational index, an imaginal as well as diagrammatic icon, and a symbol. Additionally, a posture-sign may signify a specific action (an action token) performed by a character in the deictic world of a comic or a generic

action (an action type) performed by an individual in the real-world model. In this case, a posture-sign, which captures "a movement selected out of a sequence of related movements in a single action" (Eisner, 2008 [1985], p. 107), may be regarded as an indexical designation of the action it signifies because the occurrence of this inherently fragmentary sign in a comic indicates the occurrence of the entire corresponding action in the comic's deictic-world or in the reader's mental representation of the real world[22].

As secondary signs, i.e. considered with relation to the individuals they are immanent in (either in the deictic world of a comic or in the real-world model) and to the meanings they communicate, postures are semiotically analogous to the previously discussed secondary gesture-signs. With relation to their bodily loci, secondary posture-signs qualify as indices: reagents as well as designations. With relation to their meanings, secondary posture-signs appear to be both symbolic and indexical. They are symbolic to the extent that their interpretation is gender- or culture-dependent (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 394). As regards their indexicality, secondary posture-signs qualify as symptomatic reagents because they may variously signify the emotions as well as "status, power, preference, or affiliation" (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 395) of the individuals they are immanent in.

From the Peircean perspective, the relation between object-signs, i.e. pictorial images of various physical objects (clothing, items of furniture, vehicles, buildings, etc.) found in comics, and the corresponding object-referents, i.e. the object-tokens they signify in diegetic worlds of comics and the object-types they signify in the real-world model, is on the whole analogous to the previously discussed relation between character-signs and character-referents. With relation to an object-referent situated in the deictic world of a comic or in the real-world model, the corresponding object-sinsign or object-legisign qualifies as an imaginal icon to the degree that it reproduces the referent's visual qualities, a diagrammatic icon insofar as it simultaneously abstracts away from many of the details of the referent and exhibits isomorphisms between its structural relations and the referent's relational patterns, and a symbol insofar as its visual characteristics deviate from those of the corresponding object-token or object-type referent.

As secondary signs considered with relation to characters in their deictic worlds, object-signs often function as pictorial analogues of the so-called "textual indicators of character" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002/1983, p. 59), i.e. written linguistic signs referring either directly (by being explicitly named; see Rimmon-Kenan, 2002/1983, pp. 59-60) or indirectly (by being displayed and exemplified in various ways without being explicitly named; see Rimmon-Kenan, 2002/1983, pp. 60, 61) to various characteristics attributable by the reader to a character in a literary work of fiction. In comics, the secondary object-signs contributing to a character's "visual distinction" (McCloud, 2006, p. 63) (clothing,

eyewear, hairstyle, etc.; see Eisner, 2008/1996, p. 16 and McCloud, 2006, p. 78), the secondary object-signs with which a character interacts (tools, weapons, vehicles, pieces of furniture, etc.; see Eisner, 2008/1996, p. 15), and the secondary object-signs making up the environment in which a character is situated (including the detail which is drawn as well as the choice of lighting, perspective, etc.; see McCloud, 2006, pp. 28, 158-179) may be indicative of such attributes of the character as his or her psychological states, character traits, social status, age, profession, etc. To the extent that secondary object-signs connote a character's attributes indirectly—the attributes, which are not explicitly named, have to be inferred by the reader from these signs with the use of his or her prior knowledge—they qualify as designational indices of the characters they refer to.

Duncan and Smith (2009, p. 144) observe that due to the stationary nature of the comics medium, any sound occurring in the diegetic world of a comic must be represented in this comic as a visual sign. The kinds of sounds that undergo visualization in comics include (1) speech sounds uttered by characters endowed with the ability to speak, (2) vocalizations produced by such characters with the use of their speech apparatus (laughing, crying, moaning, etc.; see Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 250), and (3) a variety of sounds which can be collectively referred to as the sonic environment. The last category seems the most varied; it comprises the biological sounds produced by animals (barking, chirping, croaking, etc.), the non-biological sounds originating with individual characters (knocking on doors, tapping of fingers, shuffling of feet, etc.) and the devices they operate (musical instruments, garden tools, kitchen utensils, etc.), the non-biological sounds originating with living organisms (creaking of trees, tramping of hooves, whirring of wings, etc.) and inanimate objects (creaking of floorboards, crash of breaking glass, thudding of heavy objects against the ground, etc.), the sounds associated with natural phenomena (rain, thunder, wind, etc.), and a broad array of mechanical sounds (drone of traffic, noise of industry, sound of gunfire, etc.).

Visual representations of sound found in comics (sound-signs), which typically consist of alphabetic writing situated inside bordered ovals known as balloons, make up a semiotically dense category—Duncan and Smith (2009, p. 144) point out that these signs may "lack the realism found in an auditory medium, but they can be a great deal more expressive than they are in non-illustrated prose."

As sound-sinsigns, i.e. considered with relation to specific sound-referents in the diegetic-world of a comic, and sound-legisigns, i.e. considered with relation to their corresponding generic sound-referents in the real-world model, visual representations of sounds in comics combine indexical, iconic and symbolic characteristics.

As far as their indexicality is concerned, sound-sinsigns are designations of their acoustic referents insofar as they localize and identify unique sound-referents in specific situations,

visualized in the form of panels, within the diegetic worlds in which these sounds occur, while sound-legisigns qualify as designations of their acoustic referents because they localize and identify generic sound-referents in the real-world model.

As regards their iconicity, sound-signs qualify in their entirety as metaphors of their deictic-world and real-world model sound-referents because these combinations of balloons and writing represent sound in visual terms[23]. Additionally, certain visual attributes of sound-signs, which are themselves signs immanent in these sound-signs, may correspond metaphorically to certain acoustic properties of the corresponding sound-referents. For example, writing in sound-signs is often rendered in large-sized and/or bold-faced lettering to represent the increased volume of the visualized sound (Duncan & Smith, 2009, p. 145; Forceville, Veale & Feyaerts, 2010, p. 63; Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 475; Saraceni, 2003, p. 20), in accordance with a metaphor whereby an increase in the size and/or thickness of letters in the visual source domain corresponds to an increase in the volume of the visualized sound in the acoustic target domain. Somewhat similarly, a jagged outline of a balloon may be used to represent "sound or speech that emanates from a radio, telephone, television or any machine" (Eisner, 2008/1985, p. 25), in accordance with a metaphor whereby a distortion of the balloon's outline in the pictorial source domain corresponds to a distortion in the quality of the visualized sound in the acoustic target

domain. Certain aspects of metaphorical sound-signs indicate that they may additionally qualify as diagrammatic icons. Arguably, the correspondence between the spatial left-to-right and top-to-bottom arrangement of letters in the written component of a sound-sign and the temporal progression of the sound-referents metaphorized by these letters is a case of diagrammatic iconicity. Similarly, the correspondence between multiplied letters in written sound-signs like *awaaaay* (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 475) and *screeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeecchhhh* (Figure 6.17 in Duncan & Smith, 2009, p. 144) and the prolonged sounds they metaphorize seems to confer the status of diagrammatic icons on such sound-signs.

As to the symbolicity of sound-signs, it follows from the fact that the sound-signifying combination of writing and balloons is a major convention of comics (Forceville, Veale & Feyaerts, 2010, pp. 56-57). Additionally, the components of a sound-sign qualify as symbols: the left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading protocol[24] of both balloons and the writing they contain is purely conventional (Eisner, 2008/1985, p. 24; also see Khordoc, 2001, p. 160); the relation between the forms of letters and the speech sounds they signify is for the most part arbitrary, as is the relation between the oval shape of balloons and their sound-referents. Perhaps a little less apparent is the symbolicity of non-verbal sound-signs found in comics (comprising visual representations of character vocalizations and sounds making up the sonic environment), which follows from

the fact that these non-verbal sound-signs appear to the reader in the form of alphabetically written words—either lexicalized words like *ahem*, *crash*, and *wham* (McCloud, 1994/1993, pp. 6, 70) or nonce words like *poinck*, *splongksh* (Duncan & Smith, 2009, p. 145), and *eeyaa* (McCloud, 1994/1993, p. 71)—in which individual letters conventionally signify their speech-sound referents. It is only when the spoken referents of non-verbal sound-signs are conceived of as secondary signs signifying non-verbal sound-referents that they qualify as onomatopoeias, i.e. spoken words "representing similar sound events" (Nöth, 1995/1990, p. 125), which are characterized by Nöth (1995/1990, p. 125) as uncontroversial cases of imaginal iconicity observable in spoken language.

In addition to signifying sounds, sound-signs usually refer to the characters who utter or produce these sounds, regardless of whether or not the sound-sign and the pictorial sign of the sound-producing character are co-present in the same panel, as demonstrated by Khordoc (2001, pp. 161-163). In either case, the sound-sign qualifies as a reagent index of the character because the mere presence of this sign in a comic's panel necessarily indicates the existence of the sound-producing character in the diegetic world of this comic. Khordoc (2001, p. 159) observes that sound-signs can also identify the corresponding sound-producing characters. They do so by means of their projections, referred to by Khordoc (2001, p. 159) as tails, which quite literally point to

the pictorial signs of the corresponding sound-producing characters. In such cases, the sound-signs additionally qualify as designational indices of the corresponding sound-producing character-referents because they uniquely identify these referents from among other entities visualized in the same panel.

In comics, combinations of balloons and writing signify not only acoustic but also conceptual entities: linguistically communicated meanings, emotions experienced by characters, their thoughts, dreams and so on. With relation to linguistic meanings, concept-signs comprising balloons and writing constitute combinations of indices, icons and symbols.

As regards their iconicity, concept-signs representing linguistic meanings qualify as metaphors of their conceptual referents inasmuch as they reify these abstract entities, which cannot be sensorically perceived by characters in their diegetic worlds, in the form of visual images permanently available for the reader to interpret. Forceville, Veale and Feyaerts (2010, p. 67) argue that a sound-sign which consists of writing enclosed in a balloon may be regarded as a visual exemplification of Reddy's (1993/1979) conduit metaphor, which represents the naïve (folk) understanding of linguistic communication, whereby a speaker puts meaning into linguistic expressions, conceived of as containers for meaning, which he or she sends to the listener, who then takes the meaning out of the received expressions. To Forceville, Veale, and Feyaerts (2010, p. 67), a

concept-sign exemplifies Reddy's (1993/1979) conduit metaphor to the extent that a balloon functions as a visual container holding linguistic meaning visualized in written form. Additionally, the written component of a concept-sign appears to visually exemplify an important aspect of Langacker's (1987, p. 452) building-block metaphor, "which sees the meaning of a composite expression as being constructed out of the meanings of its parts simply by stacking them together in some appropriate fashion." Specifically, the convention of alphabetic writing whereby a written word is a visually discrete unit, spatially separated off from the neighbouring written words, may be taken to metaphorically indicate the presumed discreteness of the meaning signified by the written word, which may be stacked together with the meanings of other written words in accordance with the building-block metaphor. There is also a diagrammatic side to the written component of concept-signs considered with relation to the linguistic meanings they signify. It may be argued that the correspondence between the spatial left-to-right and top-to-bottom vectorization of writing in concept-signs and the temporal progression of the events described qualifies as diagrammatic iconicity. As secondary signs, i.e. as spoken language considered with relation to the signified meaning, these concept-signs are uncontroversially diagrammatic—Nöth (1995/1990, p. 126) states that "the correspondence between the order of words and the sequence of the events described is a case of diagrammatic

iconicity (cf. Caesar's *veni*, *vidi*, *vici*)"— without being metaphorical because in this case the signs as well as their referents are of temporal nature.

As to the indexicality of written concept-signs, they may be regarded as designational indices of the linguistic meanings they signify to the extent that they cue the reader to focus his or her attention on the corresponding concept-referents, i.e. the signified linguistic meanings, with which they are for the most part symbolically associated, which in turn confers the status of symbols on these written concept-signs.

Concept-signs which consist of balloons containing writing may also signify the thoughts entertained by comics characters. To the extent that these concept-signs signify silent speech (see Figure 15 in Eisner, 2008/1985, p. 25), their semiotic characteristics are on the whole analogous to those of the previously discussed concept-signs of linguistic meaning, albeit with one notable exception. Typically, a concept-sign referring to a character's thoughts is conventionally represented by a cloud-shaped "thought balloon" (Forceville, Veale & Feyaerts 2010, p. 59), which metaphorically alludes to the nebulous quality commonly attributed to thoughts.

In addition to signifying linguistic meanings, concept-signs may also refer to emotions and various psychological states experienced by characters. As previously indicated, emotions are often indexically signified in comics by means of gesture- and posture-signs. There is, however, a category of semiotically

denser signs which represent emotions and psychological states indexically as well as iconically and symbolically. According to Cohn (2007, pp. 49-50), these signs, referred to as pictorial runes by, among others, Eerden (2009), Forceville (2005, 2011), and Shinohara and Matsunaka (2009)[25], include various pictorial signs (Xs, spirals, droplets, stars, hearts, etc.) which are used in combination with character-signs—typically, they are situated in place of the images of a character's eyes or around the image of a character's head. Pictorial runes qualify as symbolic concept-signs to the extent that the relation between the form of a pictorial rune and its referent—e.g., spirals and hypnotism, Xs and pain, stars and desire of fame, circling birds and wooziness, dark scribbles and bad mood, bubbles and drunkenness (Cohn 2007, pp. 49-50)—is arbitrary. Additionally, pictorial runes can be considered symbols also because they are "non-mimetic" (Forceville 2011, p. 875), i.e. they are concept-signs which do not resemble their abstract referents, they need to be combined with a character-sign to be interpretable for the reader (Cohn 2007, p. 50; Forceville 2011, pp. 875-876), and their meaning varies in accordance with their location—stars in place of eyes signify desire of fame, while stars above the head signify pain (Cohn 2007, p. 50). Pictorial runes are also indexical. Specifically, they qualify as symptomatic indices of the emotions and psychological states experienced by characters, albeit non-mimetic ones. Additionally, pictorial runes may be regarded as designational indices of

the emotions and psychological states they signify—the fact that they are drawn in the area of the pictorial image of a character's head indicates that the emotions and psychological states signified by pictorial runes originate and reside in the character's mind, conceived of as located in the character's head. Last but not least, pictorial runes qualify as metaphorical icons to the extent that they reify abstract concepts, which cannot be sensorically perceived by characters in their diegetic worlds, in the form of visual images which are permanently available for the reader to interpret.

This paper, addressed primarily to undergraduate and graduate students interested in the intersection of comics studies and semiotics, has attempted a preliminary Peircean account of the diegetic images found in comics that would simultaneously preserve the undeniable insight into the semiotics of comics shown by comics scholars who previously tried to apply the analytical instruments of Peircean semiotics to characterize various visual signs used in comics (notably, Duncan & Smith 2009; Khordoc 2001; Magnussen 2000; McCloud 1994/1993; and Saraceni 2003) and overcome their shortcomings. It seems that while the semiotic characterization of the diegetic images found in comics presented above falls short of being comprehensive because, mostly due to the limitations imposed on its length, this paper focuses on diegetic images, to the exclusion of Duncan and Smith's (2009, p. 155) "hermeneutic images"[26]; it offers a reasonably detailed Peircean

account of the main types of diegetic signs encountered in the medium of comics: character-signs together with the gesture-signs and posture-signs that are immanent in them, a variety of object-signs, and some (linguistic as well as non-linguistic) concept-signs. The proposed characterization of the diegetic images found in comics includes the discussion of the diegetic images found in comics at the level of categorization subordinate to what may be referred to as the basic level in Peirce's taxonomy of signs (which comprises indices, icons, and symbols), takes into account the fact that in comics the overall semiotic value of a visual sign emerges with relation to multiple referents (situated in diegetic worlds of comics as well as in the real-world model) and describes the cyclicity of many diegetic images found in comics, which must be taken into consideration in a comprehensive semiotic characterization of the process whereby the reader arrives at their overall interpretation.

Endnotes

[1] This paper follows McCloud's (1994/1993) usage of the English noun *comics*, which became widespread in the field of comics studies. In accordance with this usage, the plural form *comics* used with a singular verb refers to the entire medium, the singular form *comic* used with a singular verb refers to an individual publication, and the plural form *comics* used with a plural verb refers to a collection of such publications.

[2] It is only Magnussen (2000) who occasionally uses the term iconic-diagrammatic with reference to some of the pictorial and linguistic images she discusses in her paper.

[3] This term is borrowed from film theory, where it is used to refer to a cinematically encoded story (see Beaver 2009/2006, p. 77).

[4] Researchers in fields related to comics studies, including cognitive discourse theorists (see Werth 1999, p. 156) and multimodal narratologists (see Ryan 2004, p. 9), agree that a textually encoded story world is a knowledge structure constructed by the interpreter in response to the text.

[5] Szawerna (2011, p. 98) describes the character of the Comedian from Moore, Gibbons, and Higgins's (1986-1987) *Watchmen* (New York, NY: DC Comics) as a single-scope conceptual blend.

[6] The references to Peirce's *Collected Papers* (Peirce, C. S. 1931-1958. *Collected Papers.* Volumes 1-6 edited by C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss; volumes 7-8 edited by A. W. Burks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) indicate volumes and paragraphs; for example, "(Peirce, § 2.308)" refers to volume 2, § 308.

[7] Nöth (1995/1990, p. 42) points out that "Peirce's second correlate of the sign, the object, corresponds to the *referent* of other models of the sign."

[8] The terms source domain and target domain, referring to "the two domains of meaning interacting in the metaphorical process" (Nöth 1995/1990, p. 129), are used here in the sense established by Lakoff and Johnson (2003/1980).

[9] According to the film critic Bordwell, all images are "inherently incomplete" (1986/1985, p. 101).

[10] Note that these figures may be used to enact individual scenes, but also entire stories, originally encoded in comics.

[11] In animated webcomics like Parker's (1995-) *Argon Zark* (available at http://www.zark.com/), Campbell's (2008-) *Nawlz* (available at http://www.nawlz.com/hq/), Houry's (2009-2010) *Martin Koala* (available at http://martinkoala.blogspot.com/), some of the character-signs in some of the panels are partly animated.

[12] Certain character-signs, however, like the fan-made "A cubist take on Wolverine inspired by Pablo Picasso" (available at http://www.earthsmightiest.com/comics/pictures/?i=4), may be regarded as attempts at bypassing the convention whereby comics characters are viewed from one angle.

[13] The varying schematicity and incompleteness of character-signs is particularly evident in comics created by various artists as installments of long-lasting series, such as DC Comics' *Superman* (1938-) and *Batman* (1939-) or Marvel Comics' *Fantastic Four* (1961-) and *X-Men* (1963-).

[14] Most character-signs in Schulz's (1950-2000) *Peanuts* do not provide depth-cues.

[15] Examples are many. Szyłak (2009/1998, p. 59) observes that one of the prominent representatives of the American comics underground of the 1960s, Crumb, often placed character-signs of himself in the panels of his comics. According to Duncan and Smith (2009, p. 181), the leading creators of Marvel Comics—writer Lee and artist Kirby—appear in the story of one of the issues of their comic-book series *Fantastic Four* and interact with the characters they created. Similarly, the character-sign of Papcio Chmiel, a supporting character in the Polish comics series *Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek* (1957-), is a pictorial representation of Chmielewski, the creator of the series.

[16] Duncan and Smith (2009, p. 206) observe that comics about funny animals regularly feature characters combining human and animal characteristics. In turn, some superhero comics feature cyborg superheroes (such as Cyborg from comic books published by DC Comics) and cyborg supervillains (such as Doctor Octopus from the *Spider-Man* series published by Marvel Comics), who are combinations of man and machine.

[17] Duncan and Smith (2009, p. 120) point out that in the past, the names of comics creators "were not even a part of the cover presentation."

[18] For an informed reader of comics, it is not a great feat to identify a character-sign as executed by a creator like Schulz, Mignola, or Sienkiewicz.

[19] Ekman, P., Friesen W. V. 1969. The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding. In: *Semiotica* vol. 1, pp. 49-98.

[20] Ekman, P. Three Classes of Nonverbal Behavior. In Raffler-Engel, W. (ed.) 1980. *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*. Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger, pp. 89-102.

[21] Typically, it is the final stage of a gesture-referent, which provides "the key to its meaning" (Eisner, 2008 /1985/, p. 106) that is captured by the corresponding gesture-sign.

[22] In comics, posture-signs are not the only signifiers of actions performed by characters in their deictic worlds. Duncan and Smith (2009, pp. 136-137) observe that the motional component of such actions may be represented in the stationary medium of comics by a range of pictorial signs, from among which the so-called speed lines (also referred to as motion lines and zip ribbons, see McCloud 1994/1993, p. 111), i.e. lines "used in conjunction with posture" (Duncan and Smith, 2009, p. 136) which signify such properties of actions as "the direction and rapidity of movement" (Duncan and Smith, 2009, p. 136), are employed particularly frequently by creators of comics. To the extent that speed lines

do not qualify as deictic images—they are not self-contained signs (Cohn, 2007, p. 48) representing characters, objects, or concepts in the previously specified sense—their semiotic characterization extends beyond the scope of this paper. Speed lines do, however, merit this kind of characterization, primarily as designational indices of the deictic-world referents of the character-signs they combine with, because they clearly contribute to the reader's interpretation of character-signs by supplying information concerning the direction and rapidity of the motional component of the actions performed by the corresponding character-referents in their deictic worlds.

[23] In Eisner's (2008/1985, p. 24) words, a sound-sign "attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound."

[24] The term reading protocol is borrowed from Groensteen (2007 [1999], p. 34), who uses it to refer to the left-to-right and top-to-bottom vectorization of panels in comics.

[25] Eerden (2009, p. 245) attributes the term pictorial rune to the perception psychologist Kennedy, who used it for the first time in reference to non-realistic visual metaphors in his 1982 paper titled Metaphor in Pictures (*Perception* vol. 11, pp. 589-605).

[26] Duncan and Smith's (2009, p. 155) define hermeneutic images as visual signs "which are not part of the world of the story, but instead comment on the story and influence how readers interpret it."

Works cited:

» Atkin, A. 2010. Peirce's Theory of Signs. In: Zalta, E. N. (ed.) 2010. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)* [online]. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/ win2010/entries/peirce-semiotics/>.

» Beaver, F. E. 2009 /2006/. *Dictionary of Film Terms : The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art.* 4th edition. New York : Peter Lang Publishing.

» Bordwell, D. 1986 /1985/. *Narration in the Fiction Film.* Reprint. London: Routledge / Madison: University of Wisconsin Press/.

» Cohn, N. 2007. A Visual Lexicon. In: *The Public Journal of Semiotics*, 2007, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 35-56.

» De Saussure, F. 2011 [1959 /1916/]. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Baskin, W. New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press [*Cours de linguistique générale.* New York: The Philosophical Library /Lausanne, Paris: Payot/].

» Duncan, R., Smith, M. J. 2009. *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture.* New York/London: Continuum.

» Eerden, B. 2009. Anger in Asterix: The Metaphorical Representation of Anger in Comics and Animated Films. In: Forceville, C. J., Urios-Aparisi, E. (eds.), 2009. *Multimodal Metaphor* [Applications of cognitive linguistics, volume 11]. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 243-264.

» Eisner, W. 2008 /1985/. *Comics and Sequential Art*. Reprint. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. /Tamarac: Poorhouse Press/.

» Eisner, W. 2008 /1996/. *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*. Reprint (originally published as *Graphic Storytelling*). New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. /Tamarac: Poorhouse Press/.

» Fauconnier, G., Turner, M. 2002. *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's*

Hidden Complexities. New York Basic Books.

» Forceville, C. 2005. Visual Representations of the Idealized Cognitive Model of *Anger* in the Asterix Album *La Zizanie*. In: *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2005, vol. 37, pp. 69-88.

» Forceville, C. 2011. Pictorial Runes in *Tintin and the Picaros*. In: *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2011, vol. 43, pp. 875-890.

» Forceville, C., Veale, T., Feyaerts, K. 2010. Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics. In: Goggin J., Hassler-Forest, D. (eds.), 2010. *The RISE and REASON of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form.* Jefferson : McFarland, pp. 56-73.

» Gombrich, E. H. 1961 /1960/. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

» Groensteen, T. 2007 [1999]. *The System of Comics.* Trans. Beaty, B., Nguyen, N. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi [*Système de la bande desinée*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France].

» Johansen, J. D., Larsen, S. E., 2002 [1994]. *Signs in Use: An introduction to Semiotics.* London; New York: Routledge.

» Kendon, A. 1983. Gesture and Speech: How They Interact. In: Wiemann, J. M., Harrison, R. P. (eds.), 1983. *Nonverbal Interaction.* Beverly Hills: Sage, pp. 13-46.

» Khordoc, C. 2001. The Comic Book's Soundtrack. Visual Sound Effects in *Asterix*. In: Varnum, R., Gibbons, C. T. (eds.), 2001. *The Language of Comics: Word and Image.* Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, pp. 156-173.

» Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. 2003 /1980/. *Metaphors We Live By*. 2nd edition. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.

» Langacker, R. W. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Volume I: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

» Magnussen, A. 2000. The Semiotics of C. S. Peirce as a Theoretical Framework for the Understanding of Comics. In: Magnussen, A., Christiansen, H. C. (eds.), 2000. *Comics and Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics.* Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, pp. 193-207.

» McCloud, S.,1994 /1993/. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Reprint. New York: HarperPerennial /Northampton: Tundra Publishing/.

» McCloud, S. 2006. *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels*. New York: HarperCollins.

» Nöth, W. 1995 /1990/. *Handbook of Semiotics.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

» Reddy, M. The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about Language. In: Ortony, A. (ed.), 1993 /1979/. *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 164-201.

» Rimmon-Kenan, S. 2002 /1983/. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics.* 2nd edition. London/New York: Routledge /London/New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd/.

» Ryan, M. L. 2004. Introduction. In: Ryan, M. L. (ed.), 2004. *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling.* Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 1-40.

» Saraceni, M. 2003. *The Language of Comics* [Intertext]*.* London/New York: Routledge.

» Shinohara, K., Matsunaka, Y. 2009. Pictorial Metaphors of Emotion in Japanese Comics. In: Forceville, C. J., Urios-Aparisi, E. (eds.), 2009. *Multimodal Metaphor* [Applications of cognitive linguistics, volume 11]. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 265-293.

» Szawerna, M. 2011. Superpower Corruption — The Blended Universe of *Watchmen* by Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, and John Higgins. In: Wąsik, Z., Post, M. (eds.), 2011. *Papers*

and Studies in Axiological Linguistics [Philologica Wratislaviensia: Acta et Studia. Vol. 7. Edited by Z. Wąsik]. Wrocław: Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław Publishing, pp. 87-101.

» Szyłak, J., 2009/1998. *Komiks: świat przerysowany.* 2nd edition. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria.

» Werth, P. 1999. *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* [Textual explorations]. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Michał Szawerna
Instytut Filologii Angielskiej
Uniwersytet Wrocławski
Kuźnicza 22
50-138 Wrocław
email: szawerna@uni.wroc.pl

The Art of Remembering in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

Simona Hevešiová

Simona Hevešiová works at the Department of English and American Studies at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, where she lectures and teaches courses on British and postcolonial literature. She received her PhD. in the field of translation studies at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. Her research interests include contemporary British and postcolonial fiction. Dr. Hevešiová is the co-author of the following monographs: *Cultural encounters in contemporary literature, Multicultural Awareness: Reading Ethnic Writing, Literature and Culture*, and the most recent, *Literary and Visual Dimensions of Contemporary Graphic Narratives*.

Abstract:

Published in 2006, Bechdel's graphic memoir Fun Home recounts the complicated relationship between Alison and her father Bruce, whose secret double life, triggered by his closeted homosexuality, leads to a swirling journey of self-doubt and self-discovery. The paper seeks to demonstrate how the format of the graphic novel enables Bechdel to revisit the past and play with various readings of the crucial events that shaped her life. The structure of Fun Home, defying linearity and a chronological account of events, invites the reader to contemplate the process of memory construction. The disparate materials and sources Bechdel uses throughout the process, ranging from diary entries, letters, reports and newspaper articles to photographs and novels, which are dispersed all over the book, point to the complicated yet intensely fascinating nature of remembering.

Since the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survival's Tale* in 1986, the format of the graphic novel has become a true literary phenomenon. As Mária Kiššová points out, the Pulitzer Prize for Spiegelman's biographical narrative represented "a definite landmark, accepting graphic novels as 'serious' and intellectually challenging literature" (2012, p. 12). Although the passionate disputes over the term itself have still not died down, the popularity of graphic narratives among the general readership is indisputable. Having started out as stories of powerful superheroes, contemporary graphic novels, focusing on topics as diverse as war, genocide, homosexuality, growing up and emigration, now attract readers from all age groups. And it might be the very combination of the two essential

components of this format, namely graphic and narrative (Petersen, 2011), that appeals to readers and draws them in.

The dynamic combination of the visual and the textual posits graphic novels in a vital space of storytelling which leans both on images and the textual elements that accompany them. While the text, in its limited form, recounts a particular story that might seem quite straightforward, the visual part of the narrative, thanks to the chosen composition, perspective, size of the panel or character positioning, may often uncover another dimension of the story. One has to be able to read these narratives in many different directions, focusing on various aspects that play a role in the storytelling process. The format of the graphic novel, thus, invites readers to read both the text and the images, as well as what is *said* between the images. Moreover, understanding the tangled relationships between visual and textual components of the narrative (which are often as challenging as the story itself), is of utmost importance. If not grasped properly, a vital part of the story might get lost in the process of interpretation. What may, therefore, look like a simple format of easy-to-follow drawings is, in fact, an intricate web of interrelated elements that must be perceived in all their complexity.

As recent developments indicate, the format of the graphic narrative proves to be more than suitable for recounting personal stories of trauma and identity crisis. Memoirs, capturing the (often troubling) personal history of the author in graphic form, have emerged as a particularly powerful trend in the last few years. In this context, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* comes to mind as one of the most influential graphic memoirs published after the millennium. This paper seeks to demonstrate how the very form of the memoir in pictures enables the author to inspect her private history and come to terms with some unresolved issues. The focus is put on the process of remembering, as captured by the visual and textual tools of the graphic format and Bechdel's specific narrative techniques that mimic the very process.

Published in 2006, Bechdel's powerful graphic memoir immediately stirred the calm waters of the book industry. A National Book Critics Circle Award finalist, *Fun Home* won the 2006 Publishing Triangle's Judy Grahn Nonfiction Award, a Lambda Book Award, an Eisner Award and the Stonewall Book Award-Israel Fishman Nonfiction Award from the American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table. *Fun Home* thus joined the long line of graphic memoirs, including such titles as Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, David Small's *Stitches,* Craig Thompson's *Blankets* and David B.'s *Epileptic.* The increasing popularity of the genre among contemporary writers aptly documents not only the need to reconstruct personal histories in an often painful process of self-identification but also the obsession with one's past and its impact on the present.

Fun Home centres on the complicated relationship between Alison and her father Bruce, whose secret double life, triggered by his closeted homosexuality (discovered by Alison shortly before her twentieth birthday), leads to a swirling journey of self-doubt and self-discovery. While contemplating her father's homosexuality and its implications on their family life, Bechdel explores her own sexuality and lesbian identity, which tie her to her father more than she ever thought possible. In an attempt to come to terms with her troubling family past and her own identity issues, Bechdel reconstructs her childhood narrative in an impressive visual parade of her recollections and inevitably interlinks her story with that of her father. Undoubtedly, the father-daughter relationship becomes the fundamental part of the book, which leads to the exploration of memory and its role in sustaining an individual's sense of identity.

In fact, Bechdel's memoir opens with a highly emblematic panel which instantly captures the problematic father-daughter relationship, the fundamental particle of the narrative that constitutes Alison's quest for self-identification. The father, lying casually on the floor with one hand in an open book, is pulled out of his fictional refuge by his shy daughter, timidly asking him to play with her. The seemingly idyllic image of the father balancing his daughter, pretending to be an airplane, on his legs reveals, on a symbolical level, the fragility of their intimacy. Alison's instinctive need for physical proximity to her father (which is very rare) makes her endure the discomfort of the position so that she can enjoy "the moment of perfect balance" (Bechdel, 2007, p. 3). It is in this rare moment that she can experience what it means to lean, both literally and symbolically, on the parent. But just as the immediate textual allusion to the mythical story of Daedalus and Icarus implies, the fall is inevitable and the fleeting idyllic moment is soon gone.

Instead, Bechdel, together with her fictional alter ego Alison, embarks on a journey of self-exploration that forces her, literally, to scrutinize her childhood and intricate family relationships. And she does so with unswerving honesty and directness. *Fun Home* represents a visual collage of private family affairs which are interpreted retrospectively in a series of painfully reconstructed visual recollections. Bechdel's straightforward visual style enables her not only to return to her past but also inspect it with a critical eye and thus relive, through her extremely elaborate and detailed drawings[1], those moments again. Her drawings, however, capture not only her past but they also record, via the smudges, blurs and violent crossings-out, her emotional response to the events depicted. In the words of Ann Cvetkovich, Bechdel "creates an 'archive of feelings', using the intensive labour of her drawing to become an archivist whose documents are important not merely for the information they contain but because they are memorial talismans that carry the affective weight of the past" (2008, p. 120).

Each chapter opens with a visual representation of a photograph, obviously taken from a family album,

75

suggesting that what follows will be an excursion into a private history of one family. By doing so, "Bechdel reminds us that it is in the space between existing visual images and familiar storylines where we make meaning of our individual lives" (Lemberg, 2008, p. 130). Though the photographs capture various episodes from the lives of her relatives, Bechdel's narrative does not process the events chronologically. Instead, as she keeps discovering new details and titbits from the lives of her family members, selected episodes and periods of her life are redrawn and re-examined with new fervour. Her narrative thus oscillates between past and present, real events and those imagined, creating a cyclical whirlwind of emotions, speculations and pressing questions.

After the untimely, and highly ambiguous, death of her father, Alison's compulsive analysis of their relationship becomes even more urgent (partly because she thinks her coming out has precipitated the tragic event). Though her words in the captions suggest certain emotional detachment or even indifference towards her father, the panels, which repeatedly capture their feeble attempts at intimacy and closeness, point to an intense, though never verbalized, bond between them. It is the images that make her emotional involvement and struggle evident, and so to say, *speak* for themselves since Bechdel's drawings document her feelings far more precisely than her words. The size of the panels, the angles from which she examines the events depicted and the significant details which are carefully reproduced in her images all contribute to the emotional impact of her narrative.

At one point, for example, she replicates blood stains smeared into her journal "to transmit [her] anguish to the page" (Bechdel, 2007, p. 78); then there are the violent crossings-out, which almost obliterate her journal records, that speak of her serious epistemological crisis. Or while depicting one of the most intimate moments shared with her father, as they seem to be right on the verge of an open discussion about their sexual preferences, Bechdel portrays the scene in a two-page long series of rigid, almost identical frames. What was supposed to be a liberating moment for both father and daughter ended in failure and therefore remained enclosed within symbolical tiny black squares (see pp. 220-221). The visual and textual components are carefully kept in balance here as they both function as powerful mediums of expression. Clearly, Bechdel uses all the tools of the graphic format to capture her experience as authentically as possible, emotions included.

In his book *The Past is a Foreign Country,* David Lowenthal claims that memories feel like our private property, representing that part of us that is inviolable (2003, p. 195). Even though they may be verbally reproduced, memories cannot be fully shared with others since they are "inherently personal" (ibid.). Wallace Stegner, on the other hand, claims that "[b]ecause it is not shared, the memory seems fictitious" (quoted by Lowenthal, 2003, p. 196).

In this case, the tension between the urgency to share and thus relive her personal story (in order to make some sense of it) and the task of communicating such a complex process stand at the very core of Bechdel's book. While the reminiscences are often painful and confusing, they, at the same time, present the inevitable components of Bechdel's quest in which the reader is invited to take part.

It is through her strategic composition that Bechdel places the reader right into the centre of action and thus shares her most intimate moments with him/her. The motif of gazing and looking is an inherent part of her story, as she repeatedly draws images which capture or imply somebody's inquisitive look. It is not only Alison but also the reader, often put virtually into her shoes, who examines all of the documents she comes across in her effort to archive her family history. As she studies the photograph of her father capturing him in his early twenties and compares it to her own photographic portrait (p. 120), the drawing zooms in on the photographs and leaves space only for Alison's fingers holding the pictures. The positioning and the angle of the drawing recreate the effect of a direct gaze, now executed by the reader who is thus put in the very same position as Alison. This technique is repeated several times throughout the book, the most memorable example being the photograph of Roy, her father's lover, extended in identical position over two whole pages (see pp. 100-101). In this way, her memories are shared with the readership, and what is more, they are

even reconstructed through the images in such a way that some of the crucial moments of her life acquire the feeling of a simulation.

Besides, the temporal distance from the narrated events allows the author a certain level of emotional detachment and an opportunity for critical evaluation. At the same time, it creates space for speculation and interpretation. Therefore, to a certain extent, the memoir also functions as an imaginary playground where Bechdel plays out various scenarios and investigates their implications. Considering alternative, imagined versions of the past, she places her father in different social contexts, thus imagining the possible outcomes of *what-if* situations. The reader witnesses Bruce as a carefree homosexual who does not have to hide his real identity but also as "a tragic victim of homophobia" (Bechdel, 2007, p. 196) although none of these possibilities seems to satisfy his daughter.

As the author realizes that grounding her narrative solely on her memories and family pictures will not suffice, other materials, such as personal letters, diary entries, newspaper articles, maps, novels and reports, are brought on stage. "Describing herself as a compulsive collector, she imports this archive into her text, rendering each document with such care that her drawings carry some of the same magical qualities of the photograph's verisimilitude" (Cvetkovich, 2008, p. 119) All these materials serve as technology of memory (ibid., p. 118), helping Alison to reconstruct the story

of her father as truthfully as possible. There is absolutely no doubt that every single detail related to Bruce Bechdel is thoroughly examined by her inquisitive look. Yet even with such an informational overload, some answers are irrevocably lost in the past.

Since "[m]emories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize, and classify the world around us" (Lowenthal, 2003, p. 210), *Fun Home*, reconstructing the mental process of remembering, oscillates between particularly powerful fragments, random recollections and speculative scenarios. Bechdel's carefully constructed narrative strategy supports the idea that "[t]he recollected past is not a consecutive temporal chain but a set of discontinuous moments lifted out of the stream of time" (Lowenthal, 2003, p. 208). The very form of the graphic narrative enables Bechdel to portray the scenes of her life separately, in clearly delineated panels, and manipulate the order they appear in the book. The readers are, therefore, forced "to attend to disjunctions between the cartoon panel and the verbal text, to disrupt the seeming forward notion of the cartoon sequence and adopt a reflexive and recursive reading practice" (Watson, 2011, p. 124) that mimics the process of remembering.

In fact, the structure of *Fun Home*, defying linearity and a chronological account of events, invites the reader to contemplate the process of memory construction. The disparate materials and sources Alison uses throughout the process, ranging from diary entries, letters, reports and newspaper articles to photographs and novels that are dispersed all over the book, point to the complicated yet intensely fascinating nature of remembering. The cyclical scattering of these fragments all over her memoir encourage, if not force, the reader to flip the pages forward and backward and engage in an intense, multi-layered investigation. In fact, Bechdel frames her graphic narrative in a way "that traces, through the interaction of a set of repeated visual and verbal tropes, the formation of a daughter's sexual and gender identity in tandem with, in relation to, and in opposition to, her own father's" (Mitchell, 2009). The gradual discoveries of new titbits and pieces of information thus provide new clues to the unsnarling of the father-daughter relationship and their entangled life stories.

In addition, the format of the graphic novel allows the author to play with the textual and visual possibilities of the narrative by putting them in various relations. When recounting the story of Bruce's domineering presence in the house, Bechdel exploits the contradictions between the textual and visual elements of the panels[4]. For example, while retelling the well-known myth of Icarus and Daedalus through the text above the panels, the panels parallel the textual narrative with scenes from the family life. Bruce is thus positioned in various roles "based on his behaviours and attributes at a given moment (Daedalus in his father

role; Icarus falling when shamed)" and he even takes on the role of the Minotaur. Thus, Bechdel "can stagger such representations throughout her text, returning again and again to continue the metaphor, adjust or alter it" (Mitchell, 2009). She invites the reader to examine various layers of the text with all the alterations that are provided at various stages of her personal odyssey. "This, in turn, contributes to our understanding of memory and the creative act which casts it, retroactively, in terms that please the current self, and may be shared with others " (ibid.).

To conclude, Bechdel revisits her troubled adolescent years to examine the complicated relationship with her father which seems to hold the key to her own peace of mind. In doing so, she employs various visual and textual strategies to facilitate the process of reconciliation. As was manifested, her manifold attempts at visual representation of her father's life, which undoubtedly capture the emotional bond between them, often contrast with the brusque language in the captions. Though the words (especially at the beginning of the book) might give the impression of a reluctance to be connected with her father, the pictures tell another story. The repetitive, almost compulsive, drawing of the same scenes from various angles and perspectives not only express the urgency of her quest but also help her to *exhaust* all possible readings of Bruce's story. In fact, by replaying her father's life through various scenarios, whether realistic or imaginary, and by reliving their *story* again in the visual form,

Bechdel manages to close it and thus come closer to him. It is through the dynamic interplay between her images and her words that the story of the father and the daughter comes full circle. Since, according to Lowenthal, the role of memories is "not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present" (2003, p. 110), Bechdel uses the threads from her personal history to reach a desired reconciliation with her father and with herself as well. Returning to the Icarus moment from the book's opening, the final panel portrays a symbolical father-daughter reunion, thus closing "a memorial loving enough to illuminate and even make light of their shared story's most heartbreaking depths" (Wolk, 2007, p. 364).

Endnotes

 [1] Most of Bechdel's drawings represent detailed reproductions of real photographs, those from her past and family archives, but also those that she made of herself during the process of writing the book. Striving for authenticity first and foremost, she kept posing for her photographs, which she then reproduced in her drawings.

Works cited:

» Bechdel, A. 2007. *Fun Home. A Family Tragicomic.* Boston/New York: Mariner Books.
» Cvetkovich, A. 2008. Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's Fun Home. In: *Women's Studies Quaterly*, 36, 1/2, pp. 111-128.
» Kiššová, M. 2012. When Literature Turns Graphic – Contemporary Graphic Novels in Focus. In: Kiššová, M. et al. *Literary and Visual Dimensions of Contemporary Graphic Narratives.* Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 12-44.
» Kiššová, M., Hevešiová, S. 2012. A Threat or Redemption? Examining Authorities in Craig Thompson's Blankets and Alison Bechdel's Fun Home. In: Kiššová, M. et al. *Literary and Visual Dimensions of Contemporary Graphic Narratives.* Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 76-105.
» Lemberg, J. 2008. Closing the Gap in Alison Bechdel's Fun Home. In: *Women's Studies Quaterly*, 36, 1/2, pp. 129-140.
» Lowenthal, D. 2003. *The past is a foreign country.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
» Mitchel, A. 2009. Spectral Memory, Sexuality and Inversion: An Arthrological Study of Alison Bechdel's Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic. In: *ImageTexT. ImageSexT: Intersections of Sex, Gender, and Sexuality*, Vol. 4., No. 3.
» Available at: < http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v4_3/mitchell/>
» Petersen, R.S. 2011. *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives.* Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio.
» Watson, J. 2011. Autographic Disclosures and Genealogies of Desire in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*. In: Michael A. Chaney. *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels.* Winsconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 123-156.
» Wolk, D. 2007. *Reading Comics. And What They Mean.* Philadelphia: Da Capo Press.

Simona Hevešiová
Department of English and American Studies
Constantine the Philosopher University
Štefánikova 67
949 74 Nitra, Slovakia
e-mail: shevesiova@ukf.sk

Touching Digital Literature

Zuzana Husárová

Zuzana Husárová is a scholar teaching at Comenius University and Masaryk University. From January until June 2011, she was a Fulbright scholar at MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Via a Slovak grant on electronic literature research, she co-edited, with Bogumiła Suwara, the publication *V sieti strednej Európy: nielen o elektronickej literature*. She is the author of experimental literature across various media and with Ľubomír Panák has created several interactive literary pieces. She is the author of a visual poetry book, liminal. Her theoretical and creative works have appeared in several European and American journals.

Abstract:

The paper studies the haptic sensual activity in the context of digital intermedial literature. Discussed are those pieces of digital literature that literally ask the reader to touch their words, images, or sounds—either by hypertextual clicking with the "hand" cursor (my body—a Wunderkammer), by experiencing various levels of touch (Touch), or by manipulating the work by the use of sensors (Enter: in´ Wodies). The paper "touches upon" the ways of interactivity, intermedial relations and poetics of touching digital literature, or digitally touching literature.

Introduction

If the audience is physically engaged in the art and the interactor´s body becomes the central focus of the aesthetic experience, the body´s importance increases significantly. In such a context, we "think" much more directly through the body and somehow feel the meaning of the work at hand.... The body may be our general medium for "having a world", as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002, 169) puts it; our mind is the indispensable means of understanding the mediated world.
(Simanowski, 2011, p. ix)

In a time when post-digital art accentuates not the concept of digitality and virtuality but the inclination towards humaneness and sensuality; when technological progress orients towards the multisensory experience (touch displays on smartphones, tablets, devices with embedded artificial voice, multimedia elements); when instead of getting the illusion of virtual reality, augmented reality "opens" on our screens just by a mere click—it seems very topical to discuss the concept of touch and the implications of the activity

of touching in connection with art, namely new media literature. The sense of touch was traditionally conceptually deprived in the digital media, where the digital was connected with the virtual (Vilém Flusser's idea of 0-dimension of the technical images in his book *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*). On the contrary, literature, bound in books, bore the "aura" of sensuality. Books have been considered as objects that provide "pleasures" for several senses. Readers have valued the fact that they can be looked at, smelled, even tasted if you like, and touched. The last three qualities of books, or rather their proclaimed absence in their digitized versions, used to be the main arguments why readers did not perceive electronic formats of digitalized books as providing a "pleasurable reading experience." The issue of "you cannot bring the computer into bed", an argument speaking for the tactility of books, has resonated in the last few decades. However, as the technologies progressed, the electronic publishing industry came up with e-books and their special readers; people can also read e-books on light tablets or laptops. Electronic books can be read these days very comfortably in bed, at the beach, or elsewhere where the robustness of previous computers did not allow readers to engage in this activity. The digital counterparts still do not smell like books (smell of pages, smell of a cover), but the tendency to engage more and more senses in the reading process has caused literature to move into the multimedia realm, where it can be not just read but also looked at, heard and touched. I will look into various ways in which the experience of touching is represented in digital literature and what are its aesthetic and poetic implications.

Touching as exploring the fragmented self

Nowadays, some trendy literary works are produced especially for children´s engagement with stories. Interactive narratives designed as applications for mobile devices (tablets, e-readers, smartphones and other touch-controlled computer platforms) have popularized and commercialized interaction with multimedia stories via touching. The interactor's fingers and hands move the story ahead, trigger special effects, make the characters or objects move, play instruments and so on. However, this is not the first time that literature has been made interactive through touching. The concept of touching already existed in the literary "realm"in the 1990s and will be discussed in the example of Shelley Jackson's *my body & a Wunderkammer* from 1997. *my body & a Wunderkammer* is a typical hyperfiction with a symptomatic way of interaction—via links. The intro presents a black-and-white drawn woodcut image of a naked woman, whose body is divided by lines into parts.
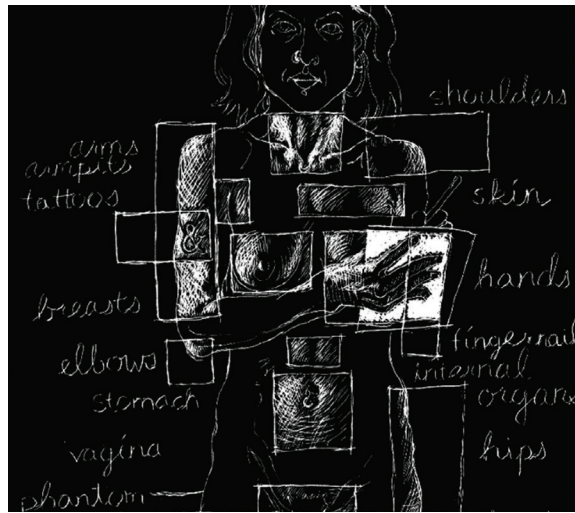
Screenshot from Shelley Jackson´s *my body & a Wunderkammer*
Available online: http://www.altx.com/thebody/

After clicking on any part of the body or the text, the reader gets a textual lexia (a term, introduced to hypertext studies by George Landow, 1992, describing a textual unit that appears on the screen), usually with a small, thematically corresponding image (in the same black-and-white visual aesthetics as the initial image). The text contains one or more active links, so the reader can move through the work by clicking the link(s) in the text. Alternatively, she can also go back and choose another body part from the initial image.

Screenshot from Shelley Jackson´s *my body & a Wunderkammer*
Available online: http://www.altx.com/thebody/

Each textual lexia refers to a particular body part and describes the narrator's relationship to that part or her attitude towards it. The narrative that is "cut into pieces", disassembled like the image of a female body, gets, after having read the whole piece, assembled in the reader's mind. Similarly as the body parts create a body, the narrative fragments create an autodiegetic, probably partially even an autobiographical narrative (the image resembles the author's portrait) that reminds one of a memoire. Through the topic of the body and its parts, the narrator presents her relationship to the world and to herself. She seems to "put herself together" from her own integral parts. The nakedness of the woman is presented not only as the absence of clothes on the images, but she also "reveals herself" to the reader in narrating her own story with very private details. The images are drawn by the author herself (as stated in the notes); the narrative self often addresses the process of drawing a certain body part: "In my earliest drawings, there are no necks (neck); but drawing is an antidote to judgment: skin pulled over bone is beautiful, so is bulge and sag (butt)." The intermedial connections between the text and the visuals evoke the idea of body cult and its fetishism—but here, instead of letting the outsider, a "gazer," create the narrative about the "object", the body as a "subject" tells her own story.

Regarding the concept of the whole piece and its intimate atmosphere, the position of the reader in interacting with the piece strengthens the body cult. The reader initially interacts with the piece by clicking on the parts or on the text. But as with most works that contain links, when the cursor gets to an active area, its icon changes into a little hand. Thus the activity of clicking on the initial image seems like "touching" the body parts. It could then be said that after a body part was touched by the "reader's hand," the part reveals its narrative. Similarly as when getting closer with a living human—after touching her or his naked body, we might be allowed to "discover the narratives" that their parts want to share.

The piece, written in the post-feministic discourse, does not put the recipient into the position of a typical "voyeur." The tradition of Laura Mulvey's concept of "male gaze" that was symptomatic of Hollywood cinema (Mulvey developed this theory in 1975 in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*) and strongly criticized also by other feminist theoreticians cannot be applied here. On the one hand, there is no male protagonist that the reader could identify with. On the other hand, staring at the female body in this work is not considered as the "ultimate pleasure"; the image of a female body is just an "entrance" into the narrative, with a female voice and her perspective. She is the subject and the reader, "touching upon" the body parts, sparking off the subject's narrative voice. Also, just by clicking on the body parts does not open up the whole story for the reader. There are more lexias than number of body parts. The lexias connected with face especially do not have their corresponding visual outlines—the face is not visually

"fragmented". But if the reader clicks on the visual representations on the image (eyes, eyebrows, teeth, nose, brain) she can get to the lexias. There are also two very remarkable lexias—one of the phantom limb and one of the tail. These cannot be accessed from the image, and their discovery requires a further "exploration" in the "bodily" narrative. Although there are texts in the initial image stating "phantom limb" and "tail", there is no access to them from this point. "Touching" through the cursor is in this hypertextual piece a way of revealing, a discovery of the narrator's bodily parts and more deeply, a way of learning about her conception of "I narrate, therefore I am" (in the tradition of the narrative turn in the humanities).

Touching as multimedia reading

In comparison with the textual-visual piece by Shelley Jackson, the work *Touch* (with the subtitle *Six scenes on the paradox of screen-touching*) by Serge Bouchardon, Kevin Carpentier and Stéphanie Spenlé, from 2009, incorporates a wider variety of media. This work addresses the polarity of senses that can be employed in the reading process. The initial image shows a hand, where each of the fingers is active and presents a different mode of touching. When moving the mouse towards the thumb, the word "Move" appears on the hand; when moving towards the index finger, the word "Caress" appears. After hovering over the middle finger, the reader gets "Hit"; after moving to ring finger, "Spread"; and the little finger reveals "Blow".

Screenshot from *Touch* by Serge Bouchardon, Kevin Carpentier and Stéphanie Spenlé, available online: http://www.to-touch.com/

"Move" leads the reader to the instructions to click and move the words. After that, the sentence appears: "Do you touch me when I touch you?" And the expressions "you touch" and "I touch" get gradually changed in the same sentence structure, but with a change in verbs: move, caress, love, attract. After clicking the index finger, "Build a shape by caressing and following the sound" occurs. By moving the mouse as if painting the initially white canvas with a grey brush, a sound of a woman's moaning can be heard. When filling in a sufficient amount of space, the reader gets a naked, reclining female figure. The image is silent unless moving the cursor on the woman, "caressing" her— then the sound of her moaning mixed with the sound of a burning fire in the hearth emerges. "Hit the fly to be able to read the text" appears when clicking on the middle finger. The reader should hit the moving object, consisting of FL and a big Y between these letters. FLY leaves black letters Z behind; when being hit it starts leaving red Zs behind. The visuals and audio remind one of breaking glass. Even when "hitting" the fly, the underlying text does not occur immediately. It needs some time (or a number of cracks) until getting the text—a paragraph from Aristotle's *The History of Animals*. In numerous readings, I got two different paragraphs of that book with the theme of flying insects and, especially, their senses. At the end of one paragraph I read that flies can paint a red colour when their sting is out. "Spread" opens with music, and smudgy violet/green/blue stains appear where the canvas is clicked

on. The reader does not really create the music (a musical canvas as said in the instructions) by clicking, she or he mostly influences the volume (clicking on the upper part makes the music louder; clicking on the lower part turns the music down). The "Blow" part opens with snowing. The reader is supposed to use the microphone to utter some sounds. The words then fall along with the snowflakes. When spreading the snow, generated sentences appear: "I can hear without being heard, see without being seen but I can't touch without being touched." By uttering other sounds, words get spread and new poetic sentences will firstly "snow" and then form into sentences. The last one "What is touching me when I touch you?" creates from the work a circle—here is the relation with the formulations in the part "Move". There is still one part hidden, as if a sixth finger, and disseminated in the menu. In this part, called "Brush", a video camera activates and scans eye movement. The more the reader blinks, the more circles appear on the water's surface.

A part of the formulation on Blow, "...what is perceived without touching?", is a poetic question that makes the reader ponder upon the essence of this sense, as well as about the work itself, bearing the same name. The other senses do not require mutuality—but one cannot touch a person or a thing without it touching him or her at the same time. Touch is a sense that indisputably connects two entities. Touching can provide a number of different effects— from the harmful and destructive ones (like killing a fly) to touching

as a creative activity, such as sensing movement, the momentary phenomena (snowflakes), touching as manipulating things (circles on a water's surface, tones of music) and the intimate touches that trigger pleasure (a woman's moaning). This work wants to bring about the idea that reading is interconnected with touching—but neither just in the sense of holding a book in the hands and thumbing through its pages, nor in the sense of clicking on a mouse and thus interacting with an electronic piece. Reading is here intertwined with touching on the thematic level (touch as the main theme) as well as on the semantic level. Both reading and touching are followed by the act of learning something new, learning something about somebody and getting closer to a subject. Reading follows touching (a book, display, mouse, paper) and metaphorically speaking, touching both precedes and follows "reading" somebody. We learn about other people by touching them, getting closer to them (it seems impossible for young lovers to be without touching each other). We usually do not feel comfortable touching strangers, therefore we like to "read" a little from one's personal "life library" before we make contact with them. By putting a parallel between reading and touching, the digital piece *Touch* stresses the necessity of realizing the status of touch also in the multimedia world.

Touching as sensing words/bodies

What we are witnessing with electronic writing is a movement towards the exteriorisation of writing through its relationship to gesture, a form of body motion capture and entrainment rather than speech capture. If electronic text is increasingly being treated as a visual landscape to be explored rather than a mnemonics for the reproduction of inner speech, then this landscape is subject to the manipulation of the reader/user.

(Angel and Gibbs, 2010, p. 131)

Several interactive installations have used the concept of body motion capture to let the interactor "read" digital words. Famous examples are *Text Rain* by Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv, where the words fall on the representation of a reader's body; *Still Standing* by Bruno Nadeau, where the reader cannot move if she or he wants to read the text; or VR installation *Screen* by Noah Wardrip-Fruin et al., programmed for Cave (a multiple-screen projection based virtual reality system). Digital words that leave the printed page and can *rock´n´roll* in the space are in intellectual debates considered as having their "bodies" in the form of "flickering signifiers" (Hayles, 1993) or as an "alphabet on the move" (Strehovec, 2010). The bodily dimension of words and wordly dimension of bodies stands also behind

87

the interactive intermedial digital piece *Enter: in´ Wodies,* created by myself and my collaborator Ľubomír Panák.

The piece is meant to be presented as an interactive installation or performance that uses the 3D sensor Kinect for manipulation. The interaction is projected on the screen in front of the reader. The main theme of the work is the "reading" of one's interior. The title refers to the blending of words and bodies, *wodies* (other newly created meanings of the word are also sperms or friends or chill) that you read while being inside. So entering the bodies could mean entering the words that are bodies and bodies that are words. The person interacting with the piece has at the beginning a choice—entering a female or a male. Since the 3D models of the humans are generic, the reader should imagine a person of his or her own choice, whose interior she would like to explore/read. After the initial text, the reader is exposed to a model with seven points marked on his/her body. These are the external representations of these organ systems: musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, digestive, integumentary, respiratory, nervous and reproductive system. The manipulation happens by a "virtual" touch; the reader does not touch anything physically; a sensor scans the reader's body and reacts to her/his movement in the space. The reading of this intermedial and interactive project requires, besides reading, also moving, watching and hearing. By "virtual clicking" with the hand in front of one of the points, the reader is exposed to a multimedia representation of the corresponding organ system—an image of a tissue (from medical websites) and a sound layer (expressing the organ sound) that goes with the main music theme. To discover the poetic narrative, one has to get into the area: "caress here/ uncover the secret/of what you just touched." There the reader "uncovers" the words by virtually caressing that "black canvas." On a place where she or he virtually touches the place, words appear. After having caressed the whole area, the reader gets the whole poem on that organ. The reader moves to the image with the red points after clicking "explore more". Thus, she can explore all seven systems.
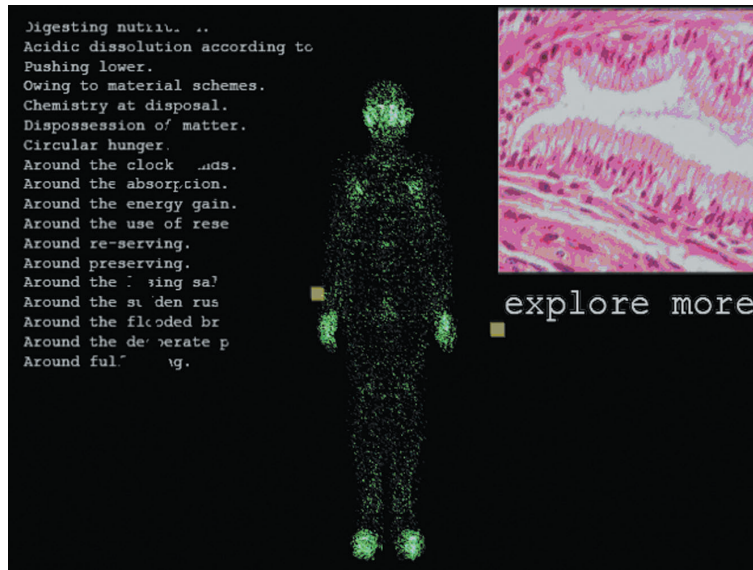
Screenshot from *Enter: in´ Wodies* by Zuzana Husárová and Ľubomír Panák
Available online: http://projects.delezu.net/enterin-wodies/

The intermedial aspect addresses the interconnections of sign systems (text, visuals, music) in bringing about the poetics of the human body's interior through exploring the essence of its parts. The text poeticizes the functions and ontology of the organs and there is also a structural coherence—in each text, a specific preposition prevails— *around* for stomach, *about* for brain, *out* for lungs, *for* for muscles, *of* for heart, *in* for skin, *trans-* for reproductive organs. Thus, each organ has its own poetic voice, but still belongs to the whole of the body. The interactive reading does not restrict the reader to reading only the whole words; the words can get broken into pieces as the reader moves her hand—reading gains a different dimension. After having read all the pieces, the final text appears, informing of the reader's leaving the other person's body. This piece allows the grasping of the poetics of a human body by providing the space for interaction, imagination and the artistic experience on the border between poetics, aesthetics, technological innovation and biology. It defines touching as crossing alternative "boundaries", boundaries between the imagined/thought of, and the virtual, between two humans, between the inside and the outside. It questions the idea of words as "bridges" into the imagination, and treats them as material that the reader unveils when getting into another's intimate space. The reading happens when touching means the crossing of a body's natural boundary and the reader appears in a space where the "owner" of the body has never been, into the interior that she/he has never read.

89

Conclusion

Haptic sensuality has gone in the media, cultural and artistic world of the last two decades through several significant changes. I looked at three different artistic and media/technological representations of haptics in digital literature—from the touch represented as clicking on a hypertextually fragmented body, through different modes of understanding haptics in the intermedial digital literature presented on a computer, to an interactive installation where the "virtual" touch of a generic 3D model (representing a person in the reader's mind) triggers the intermedial poetics of the bodily internal organs. Touch is a sense that connects people with objects and has been widely artistically explored especially thanks to its merit in interpersonal linking. New media technologies have been trying (and have also gradually managed) to implement the phenomenality of haptics into the multimedia world. Simultaneously with the efforts to limit the necessity to touch in our every-day world (brain computer interface), new possibilities for the artistic implementation of this sense will open up.

Works cited:

» Angel, M. – Gibbs, A., 2010. Memory and Motion. In: Schäfer, J., Gendolla, P. (eds.). *Beyond the Screen.* Bielefeld : transcript Verlag, pp. 123-135.
» Bouchardon, S.- Carpentier, K. – Spenlé, S., 2009. *Touch.* [online]. [cit. 2012-07-21]. Available at: <http://www.to-touch.com/>.
» Flusser, V., 1985. Ins Universum der technischen Bilder, Göttingen: European Photography.
» Hayles, N. K., 1993. Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers. In *October,* Autumn, 1993, vol. 66, pp. 69-91.
» Husárová, Z. – Panák, Ľ., 2011. Enter: in´ Wodies. [online]. [cit. 2012-07-21]. Available at: <http://projects.delezu.net/enterin-wodies/>.
» Landow, G., 1992. *Hypertext, the convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
» Mulvey, L., 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. In*: Screen*, Autumn, 1975, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 6-18.
» Shelley, J., 1997. my body & a Wunderkammer. [online]. [cit. 2012-07-21]. Available at: <http://www.altx.com/thebody/>.
» Simanowski, R., 2011. *Digital Art and Meaning*. University of Minnesota Press.
» Strehovec, J. 2010. Alphabet on the Move: Digital Poetry and the Realm of Language. In: Simanowski, R., Schäfer, J., Gendolla, P. (eds.), 2010. *Reading Moving Letters*. Bielefeld : transcript Verlag, pp. 207-227.

Zuzana Husárová
Katedra anglického jazyka a literatúry
Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Komenského
Šoltésovej 4, 811 08, Bratislava
Slovakia
email: husarova@fedu.uniba.sk
webpage: http://zuz.husarova.net/

Out of the Blue and into the Sewer: The Drip Painting of Jackson Pollock and the Devised Theatre of Stoka

Ivan Lacko

Ivan Lacko is an assistant professor at the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. He teaches courses in American studies and literature with particular interest in the correlation between our inner, personal world and the outer, social and political one.

Abstract:

The paper aims to examine how Jackson Pollock's drip technique, associated with imaginative art originating in the unconscious, found its counterpart in the theatrical expressivity of the Bratislava-based theatre group Stoka. Bearing traces of Artaud's theatre of cruelty and the American radical theatres of the 1960s and 1970s, Stoka has evolved into an idiosyncratic artistic phenomenon. Stoka's method of collective creation produced works with a distinctive aesthetic form, expressionist motivation, and distinctly abstract presence on stage. Just like Pollock's drip painting, the group's performativity (often mined from the unconscious) has made Stoka the single most influential theatre company in Slovakia.

Jackson Pollock's legendary statement that he "[wanted] to express [his] feelings rather than illustrate them" (Wetzsteon, 2002, p. 529) is a bold take on the notion that art can be created in the human unconscious. In crafting his abstract expressionist art Pollock found a unique and subversive method known as the drip technique. Pollock's rejection of traditional methods—preliminary sketches, vertical placement of the canvas, or using brushes to paint—stood at the beginning of a process which made Pollock an influential and highly respected abstract painter. Almost fifty years later, shortly after the democratic changes in the then Czechoslovakia, the Bratislava-based theatre group Stoka was founded. Stoka was the creative concept of director Blaho Uhlár and designer Miloš Karásek, who aspired to challenge the established system of theatrical expressivity and performance by introducing a new creative method into theatre performance: devised theatre, also known as collective (or collaborative) creation. This paper endeavours to examine the background of how the creative methods introduced by Pollock and Stoka became unique expressions of artistic creativity of their time and how similar they are in terms of their subversiveness, authenticity and performativity.

By the time the Stoka Theatre was founded in 1991 as the first independently established and funded professional theatre, the Slovak theatre community had been well-acquainted with Uhlár's and Karásek's declaration of artistic purpose, known as the *Slovak Theatre Manifestos I* and *II.* Published in two parts in 1988, the manifestos became "one of the most revolutionary expressions in Slovak theatre in the late 20th century" (Mistrík, 2011, p. 219).[1] The manifestos openly declared war on traditional realistic theatremaking, replacing standard director-focused approach and method acting by eliminating written scripts altogether and using the creative possibilities of collaborative teamwork in which scripts were generated by the actors themselves in quasi-improvisation sessions. The manifestos introduced terms such as "decomposition" and "polythematization", pronounced that both authors and characters were dead and that the only way to resurrect modern-day theatre was to focus on what traditional theatre would normally leave out (Uhlár, Karásek, 1988). In a sense, Uhlár's approach became a typically postmodernist way of disrupting the narrative, fragmenting or wholly eliminating the story and plot, challenging traditional characterization, and, perhaps most of all, focusing on the role of the audience in completing the picture sketched out on stage (if there was one).

The point of departure from which Jackson Pollock took off to refine the expressionism of his abstract painting was his assumption of the horizontal posture within the space in which he created his paintings. Ross Posnock explores the implications of Pollock's horizontality as part of a larger socio-cultural system in which vertical structures have often been challenged by American artists and thinkers—Whitman, Thoreau and Emerson, among others (Posnock, 2010, p. 122). When Uhlár founded *Stoka* (the Slovak word for "sewer"), he willingly assigned his theatre a position in the artistic underground—he descended vertically to occupy a space that allowed him to expand horizontally. Similarly, when Pollock crouched on the ground to drip and splatter paint on his huge canvases, he assumed a position which allowed him to be "inside" his painting, not in front of or above it:

My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor, I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.

I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools, such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.

When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the

image, etc., because painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well (Karmel, 1999, pp. 17-18).

It is important to note here that when Pollock claims that once he "enters" his painting he is not conscious of what exactly he is doing and his painting assumes its own existence. Pollock's claim corroborates Jungian ideas about the unconscious and his own ideas about the unconscious becoming a source of his art (Gibson, 1988, p. 210). This closeness to the work of art in the process of its creation is essential for Pollock—a painting cannot be "messy enough" as long as the proximity between the creator and his product is maintained. Charles Harrison implies that the significance of the autonomous existence of a work of art lies in "the practical feedback that may be generated in the production of such things as paintings" and that "[t] his feedback is independent of the will of the artist" (Harrison, 1989, p. 315). In this respect, both Pollock's and Stoka's unconsciously inspired visions and their artistic portrayal became regenerating sources of inspiration for other visions and their expression.

The idea of being in close contact with the product of a creative effort became also Stoka's working method—the ensemble's total rejection of script-based and direction-driven drama stimulated collective creativity which came from the actors themselves and was unbound by Aristotelian structures,

Brechtian socially engaged theatre, or even postmodernist narratives. Uhlár deliberately dismissed most attempts to start off with a specific idea, a concept, let alone a script: "It all originated in small discussions, arguments, talking about this and that" (Balogh, 2011). The result of this kind of communication were scenes that would gradually take shape and become expressions of dramatic situations. Just like Pollock understood that in order not to "lose contact" with the painting he had to be free to experiment, to play, try and fail, Stoka's collaborative creativity was dependent on similar freedom. In this regard, Stoka's approach resembles the methods used by the American radical theatres of the 1960s and 1970s, most notably Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater. In his book *The Presence of the Actor*, Chaikin describes the method adopted by the Open Theater as a process in which the group would be making constant discoveries because they would not only break the traditional structures and relationships, but also use new and unconventional material, all the while being willing to fail in the process (Chaikin, 1991, pp. 56-57).

In a manner similar to Pollock's almost ceremonious squatting inside his painting, Stoka's performances were ritualized excursions into the world of our emotions and sensations, often coming from the subconscious and/or unconscious. Pollock's drip technique was critically perceived as an "abolition of difference" because the artist assigned all lines and parts in the painting equal importance, erased the differences in depth, width

or dimensions, and created the work in a process which brought to mind the primitive shaman-like spontaneity defined by Jung as a collective psyche (Levine, Pollock, 1967, p. 368). The Jungian idea of a collective unconscious, even though I do not aspire to scrutinize it as such here, may be applied to Stoka's working method as well. When Uhlár first defined decomposition as his working method in 1988, he outlined it as "the depiction of the world by non-narrative form, which negates the beginning and end of the work and permanently proves the non-dramatic" (Uhlár, Karásek, 1988). This is echoed in Levine's examination of Pollock's drip technique when he claims that Pollock's painting has no "dominant direction" and no "beginning or end" (Levine, Pollock, 1967, p. 368). The primitive, action-like painting by Pollock is as much non-representational as Stoka's performativity is non-dramatic.

Michael L. Quinn demonstrates Stoka's decomposition of traditional theatre space and its role using the example of the performance of *Heath (Optimistically)*, Uhlár's conceivably least verbal and most visual production:

Putting the audience in a "V" arrangement that opens from the narrow door at the entrance from the lobby to an open end that verges into a blackout suggesting infinite expanse. The audience is also raised about three feet above the ground, with the curtained platforms that support the chairs creating a kind of sub-theatrical crawl-space for the actors; most of the quick exits and entrances came from this space directly under the spectators,

and when the actors stood quickly or appeared directly below a bank of chairs, the arrangement created a novel effect of intimacy (Quinn, 1995, p. 103).

This is Uhlár's way of abolishing the differences between the actors and spectators—just like Pollock would obliterate the differences between lines in his paintings. In *Heath (Optimistically)* the actors no longer enter and exit from behind the stage, nor do they move and act from within the audience; they are actually positioned underneath the spectators, they crawl from underground, from the sewer of the audience's expectations. While in Pollock's paintings there are splatters, blots, smudges and foreign objects, in Stoka's performances there is creeping, growling, hissing and rattling. This provides for a theatrical performance whose effect on the audience transgresses a purely aesthetic consciousness, or perhaps even consciousness as such. The performance thus attempts to transmute emotions without representing or illustrating their meaning and significance, in a way doing what Antonin Artaud expressed by his notion of a theatre of cruelty: "All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to *dissimulate it.* True expression hides what it makes manifest" (Artaud, 1958, p. 71).

In *Heath (Optimistically)*, as well as in other Stoka's performances, emotions are not expressed dramatically, but performatively, with as little theatrical deception as possible. This is what Robert Leach refers to when he discusses the power of pure

95

theatre as "no representation of one thing by another, no impersonation of one person (character) by another (actor), but only the truth of reality" in order to allow the theatrical event to communicate "the visceral pain of genuine experience, not the pretence of its enactment" (Leach, 2004, p. 195). Similarly, Pollock's artistic endeavour affects our perception of how non-representation and the emphasis on the creative process contribute to the final work of art. The abstractions stretching over the space of his canvases "seem to be expressions of both pure being and also non-being, identity and difference" (Rampley, 1996, p. 90).

The unique nature of the sources of Pollock's and Stoka's creativity also called for a shift in the critical approach of their art. With Pollock, the consequence of the lack of figurative meaning in the lines and splatters was that "[t]he eye could not rest even momentarily on a 'figure', but instead it [had to] move restlessly over the surface" and that there was "no centrality, no boundaries, no hierarchical organization of space" (Burbick, 1982, p. 114). Both critics and audiences were required to look at the artwork through a different lens, at times even from a wholly new starting position. Pollock and Stoka challenged and enriched the possibilities of visual art and theatre—stretching the boundaries to territories where the original definitions of the genre started to fade. In Stoka's productions, critics recognized an inherent artistic and performative power, as well as the need to invent new critical language to address its art: "Stoka balances on the edge

of what is considered theatre. Stoka's method is similar to 'the conjuring up of spirits'—some kind of ritualized touching of the fundamental issues of existence which, if successful, endows its productions with a deep ontological dimension" (Grusková, 1997, p. 15). Grusková also points out that Stoka's aesthetics bypass the grounds on which critical response could begin to deal with what "dramatic characters" the actors take upon themselves, because the actors' performance is rooted in a free-flowing expression of their psyche and emotions, not in a character description based on a script (Grusková, 2000, p. 222).

Jackson Pollock successfully decomposed the figurative character in painting and blurred it into both disrupted and disruptive images which could potentially represent a polythematic reality—just like Stoka broke the dramatic arc and single character representation into a multitude of nuanced and inferred events and experiences (rather than stories and plots). The fragmentation and disintegration of the structural elements of both Pollock's visual art and Stoka's theatrical performance created new room for experimentation and unimpeded expressionism. However, the creative sources Pollock and Stoka used were not always benign. As Joan Burbick suggests, the consequence of Pollock's dynamic approach to painting seemed to be that "[the] matter and the surface of the painting have now the ability to convey and embody a quality of life that was powerful and dangerous, certainly as powerful and

dangerous as the unconscious and the id had earlier suggested to Pollock" (Burbick, 1982, p. 114).

Burbick also comments on the tag "action painting" attached to Pollock's art and argues that it is "also viewed as an attempt to express 'numinous experience' where the immediacy of matter is captured in the surface of paint" (Burbick, 1982, p. 117). The term "action painting" was coined by critic Harold Rosenberg in 1952:

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual, or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event (Rosenberg, 1994, p. 25).

In this sense, Pollock's art can be viewed as a series of process-oriented encounters, an improvisation session of sorts in which the ritualistic nature of the event, the subversive attitude towards tradition and the automatized painting by the artist bring together all of the elements mentioned by Rosenberg in the above excerpt—the painter is *in* the painting not only while he is actually painting, but also after the finished painting is hung up on a wall. The process of creating a painting becomes a performance, the canvas is indeed "an arena" and the result is as fleeting as every theatre show—a work of art which lasts only for the duration of any particular staging and becomes something different the next time around. Thus, one play has the potential to offer the audience a different experience with every staging. With paintings, the ephemeral impact is especially strong in abstract expressionism—the works provide very few structural and organizational footholds.

The ritualistic, automatic, action-centered and performative nature of both Pollock's and Stoka's art bears resemblance to the howling Beats or, at least, to the kind of art the Beats aspired to create—primal, subversive and unashamed, flooding the page with spontaneous and uncontrolled words and images. Though this may appear to be creativity with no boundaries and no restrictions, Stoka and Pollock never relied on coincidence. In a memorable quote, Pollock said: "It seems possible to control the flow of paint, to a great extent, and I don't use – I don't use the accident – 'cause I deny the accident" (Karmel, 1999, p. 22). With Stoka's open dramaturgical structure and its collaborative teamwork, it was a more complex job to avoid accidental episodes; however, Uhlár has managed to give his actors total freedom to create *and* hold the reins of the overall composition. As Michael L. Quinn suggests: "Uhlár is clearly the composer, but in this situation he is even more than an enabling 'actors' director;' his presence is almost avuncular" (Quinn, 1995, p. 105).

But just like in Stoka's performances, which sought to engage the audience to respond to what they saw on stage, the critical and popular reaction to Pollock's art relied on the recipients' ability to perceive the seeming accidents in the painting and respond to

them (Karmel, 1999, p. 138). Similarly, Stoka's audiences were expected to constantly question and reevaluate their social, cultural and political values to connect with the performance. In short, they could never just sit back and relax. The rules of decomposed theatre required the spectator to participate in the creative process, to get involved in the encounter simply because "a person who purchases a theatre ticket cannot expect to pay a few cents just to slack [during the performance]" (Uhlár, Karásek, 1988). Uhlár was very critical about the inability of traditional realist theatre to achieve this. He succinctly expressed his scepticism in this regard in an interview:

[…] I believe that this is an issue related to an absence of authentic perceptibility. People like to accept existing models and customs – and based on these they try to understand and name new things. They don't make an effort to constantly alter and reassess all of the basic values, they never try to face them authentically (Hroncová, Ulmanová, 1998).

For Stoka, and to a great extent also for Pollock, the ability of their audiences to readjust their views and perspectives of perception was an essential element in finding associative links and submerging themselves in their art. Uhlár appealed to the audience's involvement in piecing the fragmented performance together, and Pollock aimed to entice the recipient by underlining the significance of the abstract in his work: "Abstract painting is abstract. It confronts you" (Roueché, 1950, p. 16). Technique, theory and structure became secondary—motivated by the somewhat primal desire to express emotions and communicate ideas. For Uhlár, acting technique "without 'a great truth' is just exhibitionism" (Krénová, 1992, p. 108). For Pollock, the craft is always the result of necessity. In lines reminiscent of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, Pollock explains:

Technic is the result of a need –
new needs demand new technics –
total control – denial of
the accident –
States of order –
organic intensity –
energy and motion
made visible –
memories arrested in space,
human needs and motives –
acceptance – (Pollock, 1978, p. 253)

Pollock finds "organic intensity" and "energy and motion made visible" more relevant than the comprehensive effect of the finished product. The path towards an emotional or even rational response to a painting is as important as the response itself. The drip technique allowed Pollock to experiment with his own paths leading to his creating art freely, associatively, indeed from within the picture and from within his unconscious. Stoka's creative method was akin to Pollock's notion of strong and animated passion. In its visual and verbal productions Stoka often combined highly artistic imagery and movement with the trivial, everyday experience, creating a complex collage consisting of "[an] associative flow of images, metaphors, theatre signs and symbols, skillfully interwoven with the banalities of everyday life, the junk of

fragments of reality, and sediments of the humdrum" in which the "elements of everyday reality [were mixed] with theatricality and artificiality of a new reality in a collage of fantasy, dreaminess and [were placed] on the other side of the concrete [*sic*]" (Bakošová-Hlavenková, 2011, pp. 66-67).

In merging the evidently prosaic with the metaphorical performativity of their aesthetics, Stoka found its own "organic intensity". In doing so, the theatre company subverted most (if not all) structural tenets of drama and openly challenged what Michael Vanden Heuvel calls "rigid, dichotomous thinking behind [the imposed orders and oppositions]" recognizing the potential of new theatre which tends to "move beyond binary simplifications" in order to stimulate "more complex thought about what constitutes and represents reality" (Heuvel, 1992, p. 52). This is another parallel between Stoka and Jackson Pollock—their common ability and willingness to test the flexibility of both the creative process and the process of reception.

The individualistic and idiosyncratic approach of both Pollock and Uhlár to the making and presentation of their art, as well as to their own publicity, was marked by their subversive, rebellious, often even anti-social attitude. Richard Shiff is one of the critics who pertinently recognizes this: "With Pollock and many others an individualistic, iconoclastic art seems to be linked to wildness and antisocial behavior" (Shiff, 1978, p. 117). For Uhlár it was essential to continue fighting for the freedom his theatre was born from—freedom to be creative, experimental and innovative, and to exist outside of the predefined hierarchy of the cultural structures. For Stoka, existence freed from the state-run systems of art funding and art control was an essential booster of its creativity. In fact, Stoka's aesthetics directly reflected its social, political and cultural background: "[There are] important analogs [between Stoka and] cultural situations in contemporary Slovakia, a case in which a set of artistic strategies seems able to combine with social anxieties in order to create very important, dynamic, and affecting new work" (Quinn, 1995, p. 98). Uhlár tried to delve deep into his collective's consciousness (and perhaps its unconscious) in an attempt to forego the traditional director- or author-imposed artistic purpose and replace it with a collaborative essence of human emotions reflecting the fragmentary and multi-faceted society in post-communist societies.

Uhlár often had to defend his artistic freedom and creative method—and he did it in a very forthright and vocal manner. He frequently offended the authorities with his up-front honesty, calling the members of the Bratislava city council "perverse" and their thinking "born in the offices of the Austro-Hungarian empire and toughened by Bolshevik terror" (Uhlár, 2006). Uhlár openly criticized the government's cultural policy, referring to the government administration as a bureaucratic "mafia" (Rozkvitne divadlo pre všetkých?, 2007). Pollock too was known as a person whose passion often transmuted into anger and as an artist

99

with "[a]n uncompromising spirit of revolt [...] with the more expressive and often exasperating contemporary manifestations of artistic freedom" (Hunter et al., 1956-1957, p. 5).

To some extent, Uhlár's lifelong fight for "a space for self-fulfillment, and for the freedom to enjoy this space by everybody, even those with different opinions" (Šebesta, 2011) mirrors what fellow abstract expressionist and surrealist David Hare said about Jackson Pollock: "The man who deals with originality is desperately needed, but seldom wanted. For along with his promise of victory he lets loose the shadows of chaos" (Landau, 1989, p. 207). Every so often, these shadows originate in the unconventional, introspective and unconscious-driven creative methods used by both Uhlár and Pollock. From paintings such as *Blue (Moby Dick), Guardians of the Secret,* or *Full Fathom Five*, which were inspired by well-known works of literature, Jackson Pollock moved on to create his first drip paintings and changed the paradigm of abstract expressionism forever. Similarly, Uhlár's pre-Stoka productions such as *Quintet, Sens Nonsens,* and *The Penultimate Supper* foreshadowed his decomposed theatremaking which was to peak with Stoka's performances in the 1990s, including *Collapse, Deep Enough (Heavy Mental), Heath (Optimistically), Eo Ipso*, and *From a Distance.* From the Miró-like coloured scheme of *Blue (Moby Dick)*, Pollock went on to create his best-known drip paintings *Lavender Mist: Number 1, Blue Poles: Number 11,* and *Convergence: Number 10.* Pollock went

all the way from literature-inspired work to fully unconscious drips, just like Uhlár went from script-based theatre to fully devised collaborative creations.

Pollock claimed that he was essentially concerned "with the rhythms of nature" and that he liked to "work inside out, like nature" (Landau, 1989, p. 159). This approach was to be a guarantee of purity and authenticity which Pollock seemed to have achieved to such a degree that some researchers found the structures of his paintings to "bear the characteristics of fractal shapes found in nature" (Taylor et al., 2002, p. 203). In Uhlár's case, his devised theatre became a means to enact the freedom of an unbound, creative individual, making the theatrical encounter what he desired it to be, namely "an artistic and a humanly authentic experience" (Hroncová, Ulmanová, 1998).

In Jackson Pollock's paintings and Stoka's theatre performances, the freedom of the drip and the autonomy of the devised performance became an articulation of freedom, subversiveness and authenticity. They both became idiosyncratic phenomena of their time, distinctive artists who produced works characterizing a liberated individual who might be bound and coerced by his/her external conditions, but who will break through because there is hope both in art and human society. Stoka managed to leave "a deep imprint on Slovak theatre history" and became "[a]n extraordinary and significant achievement of a small group of theatre makers [who have] influenced the entire modern development of our theatre culture" (Bakošová-Hlavenková,

2011, p. 64). And Jackson Pollock, in a similar manner, became a unique source of inspiration for a whole generation of people in the 1950s, indeed an icon of their "new sense of liberation and hopefulness" (Hunter et al., 1956-1957, p. 5). In this respect, Pollock and Stoka have had a similar impact—their artistic voices became loud, distinctive and influential, appearing out of the blue from beneath the calm surface, and resolutely descending into the depths of the human consciousness and artistic underground.

Endnotes

¹ All of the citations from Slovak texts were translated into English by the author.

Works cited:

» ---. Rozkvitne divadlo pre všetkých? In: *SME* [online], 2007, 19 April, [qt. 2012-04-27]. Available at: http://www.sme.sk/c/3253086/rozkvitne-divadlo-pre-vsetkych.html

» Artaud, A. 1958. *The Theater and its Double.* New York: Grove Press.

» Bakošová-Hlavenková, Z. Song of Stoka. In *KØD – Konkrétne o divadle,* English Annual Issue 2011, pp. 64-67.

» Balogh, A. Ako tvorím: Blaho Uhlár (Interview). In: *SME* [online], 2011, 10 September, [qt. 2012/05/04]. Available at http://divadlo.sme.sk/c/6049449/ako-tvorim-blaho-uhlar. html

» Burbick, J. Grimaces of a New Age. The Postwar Poetry and Painting of William Carlos Williams and Jackson Pollock. In: *Boundary 2*, 1982, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 109-123.

» Chaikin, J. 1991. *The Presence of the Actor.* New York: Theatre Communications Group.

» Gibson, A. Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language. In: *Art Journal,* 1988, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 208-214.

» Grusková, A. On the Quality of Emotional Life. (Review of the performance of "Monodramas"). In: *Domino Forum,* 1997, No. 41, p. 15.

» Grusková, A. 2000. Closer to the "Sewer". A View of Slovak Theater. In: Stefanova, K. (ed.), 2000. *Eastern European Theatre after the Iron Curtain.* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, pp. 217-228.

» Harrison, C. 1989. On the Surface of Painting. In: *Critical Inquiry,* 1989, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 292-336.

» Heuvel, M. V. 1992: Complementary Spaces. Realism, Performance and a New Dialogics of Theatre. In *Theatre Journal,* 1992, Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 47-58.

» Hroncová, S., Ulmanová, M. Interview with Blahoslav Uhlár. In *Divadlo v medzičase,* 1998, Vol. III, No. 4, [qt. 2012-05-08]. Available at: http://www.stoka.sk/roz7.html

» Hunter, S., Karpel, B., Pollock, J. Jackson Pollock. In: *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art,* 1956-1957, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 3-16+18-19+21-36.

» Karmel, P. (ed.) 1999. *Jackson Pollock. Interviews, Articles, and Reviews.* New York: Museum of Modern Art; H.N. Abrams.

» Krénová, M. 1992. Na slovo s Blahom Uhlárom (Interview). In: *Slovenské pohľady,* 1992, No. 1, p. 108.

» Landau, E. G. 1989. *Jackson Pollock.* New York: Abrams.

» Leach, R. 2004. *Makers of Modern Theatre. An Introduction.* London; New York: Routledge.

» Levine, E., Pollock, J. 1967. Mythical Overtones in the Work of Jackson Pollock. In: *Art Journal,* 1967, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 366-368+374.

» Mistrík, M. 2011. Miloš Karásek – človek manifestov. In: *Slovenské divadlo – Revue dramatických umení,* 2011, Vol. 59, No. 3.

» Pollock, J. doc. 90. In: O'Connor, F. V., Thaw, E. V. (eds.), 1978. *Jackson Pollock. A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works. Vol. 4 (4 vols.).* New Haven: Yale University Press.

» Posnock, R. 2010. "Don't think, but look!": W. G. Sebald, Wittgenstein, and Cosmopolitan Poverty. In: *Representations,* 2010, Vol. 112, No. 1, pp. 112-139.
» Quinn, M. L. 1995. Uncertain Slovakia. Blaho Uhlár, Stoka and Vres. In: *Theatre Survey,* 1995, No. 36, pp. 97-110.
» Rampley, M. 1996. Identity and Difference. Jackson Pollock and the Ideology of the Drip. In: *Oxford Art Journal,* 1996, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 83-94.
» Rosenberg, H. 1994. *The Tradition of the New.* New York: Da Capo Press.
» Roueché, B. 1950. Unframed Space. In: *The New Yorker,* 1950, Vol. 26, No. 24, p. 16.
» Šebesta, J. 2011. Martýrov úspešný pokus o autoportrét. Pokus (V hľadaní spirituality). Video-divadelná inscenácia. In: *Divadelný ústav – divadlá a recenzie* [online]. 2011. [qt. 2012-04-23]. Available at: http://www.theatre.sk/isrecenzie/641/333/Martyrov-uspesny-Pokus-o-autoportret/?cntnt01origid=333/
» Shiff, R. 1978. Art and Life. A Metaphoric Relationship. In: *Critical Inquiry,* 1978, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 107-122.
» Taylor, R. P., Micolich, A. P., Jonas D. 2002. The Construction of Jackson Pollock's Fractal Drip Paintings. In: *Leonardo,* 2002, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 203-207.
» Uhlár, B. 2006. A Note from the Underworld. In: *Transcript of a Speech Made by Blahoslav Uhlár to the Members of the Bratislava Municipal Parliament* [online]. 2006, [qt. 2012-05-24]. Available at: http://www.stoka.sk/aktual/akt2006/slovozozahrobia.html
» Uhlár, B., Karásek M. Slovak Theatre Manifesto I. In: *Bulletin to the play "So What?" premiered at the Ukrainian National Theatre in Prešov on 29 April 1988.* [qt. 2012-05-29]. Available at http://www.stoka.sk/uhlar/slovdivmanif.html
» Uhlár, B., Karásek M. Slovak Theatre Manifesto II. In: *Bulletin to the play "Vinegar" premiered at the Ukrainian National Theatre in Prešov on 15 December 1988.* [qt. 2012-05-29]. Available at: http://www.stoka.sk/uhlar/slovdivmanif.html
» Wetzsteon, R. 2002. *Republic of Dreams. Greenwich Village, the American Bohemia, 1910-1960.* New York: Simon&Schuster.

Ivan Lacko
Martinengova 28
811 02 Bratislava
email: lacko@fphil.uniba.sk

Split Personality, Narcissism and the Search for the Authentic in David Fincher's Adaptation of *Fight Club*

Zuzana Starovecká

In 2011 Zuzana Starovecká graduated from Comenius University, Bratislava with a degree in translation and interpretation. She is currently an internal doctoral student reading American literature at the same university. In her diploma thesis on Tony Kushner's millennial drama Angels in America she examined the link between insanity and prophecy and the play's theatrical realization. She is writing her PhD. dissertation on the search for authenticity in Chuck Palahniuk's early fiction. Her research interests include American postmodern literature, psychology in literature and film and the psychological phenomenon of fragmentation of the self as a literary and cinematic device.

Abstract:

This paper focuses on David Fincher's cinematic adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel Fight Club. It examines the causes that lead its narrator to construct a separate identity as a means of coping with his existential crisis. It shows how the use of a dissociative identity disorder works on the structural level of the film and foregrounds the portrayal of the psychological damage caused by the evils of modern consumerist society. Utilizing the myth of regeneration through self-destruction as a premise, the author demonstrates how self-directed violence is necessary to heal and reconnect with community. The paper also hints at notions of narcissism and pathological self-love to explain the destructive nature of the narrator's double.

Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club* followed by its 1999 film adaptation achieved almost immediate cult status. Its stylish nihilism galvanized the core readership of angry young men dissatisfied with the social and economic system of the modern world. However, what on the surface looks like a rebellion against the "system", is actually a desperate struggle of an individual, alienated from society, to regain the lost meaning of existence and connect with another human being in an authentic relationship. Here the self-directed violence becomes the narrator's way of coping with his identity crisis. The raw violence that *Fight Club* is suffused with has led many critics to assume that Palahniuk's novel is nothing more than an act of public insurgence. The punched faces, cracked jawbones, bruises and scars, however, are only spectacular (if not spectacularly wrong) outlets for the

narrator's long-suffered, dispossessed spiritual desires. *Fight Club* does not advocate violence nor destruction but uses them in a very unique way as a *saving grace* for its narrator.

The myth of regeneration through self-destruction and self-directed violence has deep roots in mythology and can also be tracked to historical events. In Christian tradition for example, Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for humanity, suffered a long and humiliating death by crucifixion and was later resurrected to redeem mankind. Richard Slotkin talks about the westward expansion in the U.S. as a national regeneration through self-destruction and even utilizes this metaphor for the title of his work. This book chronicling how violence forms an integral part of the American mythogenesis has become an archetypal example of this myth. Palahniuk's use of the trope is by no means new to the American experience. David Fincher's adaptation of Palahniuk's novel presents viewers with its postmodern reinterpretation.

Surrendering to Chaos as a Coping Mechanism

Palahniuk's solution to the existential crisis that keeps recurring in his early novels consistently seems to be to embrace one's fears and in that way assert one's personal freedom to make free-willed choices. In *Invisible Monsters* Shane tells the narrator: "Our real discoveries come from chaos, from going to the place that looks wrong and stupid and foolish" (Palahniuk, 1999, p. 258). As Shannon shoots off her beautiful face just because that is the worst mistake she could think of, so *Fight Club's* narrator indulges in incessant fights as these provide him with the sense of *real* existence.

The outward sadism, the pain inflicted on others, turns into a peculiar kind of mental masochism: "Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer... Maybe self-destruction is the answer" says Tyler, the narrator's double (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 49). Though unknown to the audience until the dramatic climax of the story, all the injuries that the narrator contracts are self-inflicted because he and his dark nemesis, Tyler Durden, are, in fact, the same person. The acts of sadomasochism turn into acts of masochism alone.

For Palahniuk's characters "the self-directed violence provides a pathway to transcendence" (Johnson, 2009, p. 66). These characters feel the need to escape the hegemonic control of the socially appropriate and acceptable behaviours and choices. Ida Mancini, Palahniuk's character from *Choke*, makes this point saying: "... laws that keep us safe, these same laws condemn us to boredom. Without access to true chaos, we'll never have true peace" (Palahniuk, 2008, p. 159). This statement suggests that surrendering to chaos might be the right way of getting a more vivid experience from one's life. However, it

should not be taken at face value; rather, it needs to be examined in the novel's (movie's) broader themes.

Fight Club's narrator (Edward Norton) is depicted as a victim of the postmodern society: he finds himself wearing the "right" clothes, living in the "right" apartment furnished with the "right" furniture, working for the "right" corporation. Yet, he feels increasingly alienated in a corporate and materialistic world. The limitations built into the lifestyle of a white-collar worker leave him feeling trapped and emotionally stagnant for the lack of substance and deeper meaning.

He lives in a secure but all the more lonely nest, which looks like a sanitized IKEA showroom. Without hesitation he tells the audience that his life is steered by a compulsive need to buy items of Swedish brand furniture: "I flipped through catalogues and wondered: What kind of dining set defines me as a person" As such he typifies a person unable to exist beyond the confines of material values.

For a certain period of time the acquisition of IKEA products becomes the sole goal in his life, something to occupy his thoughts, something to hold onto. What should represent the ideal existence for him (as he has achieved all that society suggests should bring one pleasure—the right clothes, the right furniture, a good job), becomes a pointless way of living one's life.

Though the narrator is conscious of his position in society, he is weak to rise against it. To fight back the annihilating boredom that comes with the safety of his white-collar job, he constructs

a double, whom for the better part of the movie the audience knows as Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). Seemingly a separate character, he is a figment of the protagonist's tortured mind. Tyler is a product of the narrator's imagination, his alter-ego on whom he projects all his desires, but which he has not enough guts to go through on his own.

The narrator and his alter-ego find a way in which to escape the banality of life and free themselves from the stultifying effects of consumerism by forming an underground boxing network. Here, similarly dissatisfied young men give vent to their suppressed rage and thus rebel against what critics often describe as the "emasculating conformity of contemporary America" (Kavadlo, 2005, p. 5). These men engage in brutal fights to get a real experience. "Self-elected violence becomes the postmodern panacea to soothe the men's feelings of inadequacy and alienation, both classic symptoms of the postmodern individual" (The Mythology of Violence).

As most of Palahniuk's narrators, *Fight Club*'s narrator suffers from a myriad of mental illnesses. The presence of his "other" personality (Tyler Durden) may be explained by one of them: a psychological disorder known as a dissociative identity disorder or split personality. According to the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual, DID is defined as a mental disorder characterized by (at least) two distinct and relatively enduring identities or dissociated personality states that alternate control of a person's behaviour. The memories

formed by one identity are not accessible to other identities within the individual. That is why the narrator is not conscious of Tyler being an integral part of himself. A further characteristic trait of this disorder relevant to the case of *Fight Club*'s narrator is that the "various identities often interact with each other; this often leads to auditory hallucinations in which other personalities speak directly to the personality currently inhabiting the individual" (Lee 2010).

Whereas the most common cause is believed to be a childhood trauma, the disorder may also be triggered by various stressful situations. In such a case, the sufferer will involuntarily use dissociation as a coping mechanism. (ibid.). So Tyler Durden as a product of the narrator's imagination becomes his unique way of dealing with the postmodern feeling of entrapment, or in short his identity crisis. Following Tyler's ethic "It's only after you've lost everything… that you're free to do anything" (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 70), the narrator gradually frees himself from his material obsession that he clung on to in the past and fully surrenders to "chaos" embodied in the charismatic, self-professed nihilist, Tyler.

Jungian theory suggests that one must face death by symbolically killing one's ego to resurrect into a more advanced identity (qtd. by Johnson, 2009, p. 67). Hence, Tyler represents the subversive force lurking in the dark recesses of the narrator's mind. In order to heal and regenerate, the narrator must battle with his alter-ego to be reborn into a new, refined self. This struggle unwinds

dramatically in the hero's own mind. Lucy Huskinson, a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Psychoanalytical Studies explains that what is required in this regenerative process is "a Dionysian violence in which the ego is effectively torn apart in order to be born anew" (qtd. by Johnson, 2009, p. 67). Although the process may involve blood and pain, it is necessary for growth: "The violence of the *Self* in this context is therefore not malign, as it is not wholly destructive: it does not seek to eradicate all ego-consciousness, but seeks the ego's continual improvement by disrupting its misguided orientations" (ibid.). Accordingly, in Huskinson's terms, *Self* represents the narrator's dynamic, original identity, whereas *ego* (or alter-ego in the sense I am using the term in this article) is the locus of the narcissism or selfishness of the narrator that prevents him from connecting with other people or the world at large. It is essential to point out that the violence against the ego is not utterly a negative thing, because its ultimate purpose is to help the self "be born anew". Thus, the outcome of the process is supposed to be an advanced version of one's former self.

Cinematic Portrayal of the Narrator's Split Psyche

The opening scene in David Fincher's version of *Fight Club* puts us in the head of the protagonist, which we realize only after we are no longer there. Namely, *Fight Club* takes advantage of film technology to depict the internal thoughts of the narrator. We are taken on a roller-coaster ride in a dark space that seems both confined and limitless, vaguely reminiscent of living tissue. The flashes of light against the moon-like landscape, which are actually the synaptic impulses of the narrator's brain, the pumping music, and the credits superimposed on the screen suggest the overall tone of the movie: darkly psychological and disturbing. What the viewer is just about to witness is the chaotic mental development of an individual whose psyche is split into two identities. Just as the audience begins to wonder what kind of space-age place they are in, the eye of the camera is hurtled out through a pore on the protagonist's forehead, moving along the barrel of a gun that is jammed half-way in his mouth.

"Fight Club is an action movie that's all about interiority" (Taubin 1999). In hindsight the viewer understands that the movie is an extremely clever projection of the associative train of thoughts of the narrator that can be forwarded, rewound and paused at any time, while the scenes change with dizzying intensity. This effect is to a considerable extent achieved by the narrator's muffled voiceover, which makes it distinctly different from the rest of the sound. It seems as if there were a direct line transmitting the voice speaking in the narrator's head.

In the following scene the narrator tells us there are bombs planted in the surrounding buildings. The cinematic depiction of this statement looks like a free-fall as the viewer is suddenly hurtled through the window, down 30 storeys into the basement, through a bullet hole in the windshield of a van with the explosives and then out on the other side. In this very odd fashion the rapid succession of images, which is digitally created from a series of still photographs, illustrates our everyday thought processes.

The work with camera in the next scene perfectly captures the flatness, superficiality and "depthlessness" so characteristic of the postmodern attitude. The narrator's blank stare at a copy machine, drained of any traces of life along with the shot of a ubiquitous Starbucks coffee cup create a scene that exemplifies the hegemony of postmodern consumerism and franchises. The camera is positioned in such a way so that the viewer shares the narrator's point of view and sees the dullness of his existence. The narrator's subdued voiceover, a result of both his insomnia and the stupefaction from his office work, convey the narrator's inner thoughts: "With insomnia, nothing's real; everything's far away. A copy of a copy of a copy." The narrator's lamentation also prefigures the appearance of Tyler, who turns out to

be nothing more than another kind of a copy, his own hallucination and simulacrum.

The narrator's inner thoughts are followed by the eye of the camera showing us the by-products of everyday American life. The shot begins in a trashcan littered with Krispy Kreme doughnuts wrappers and other remnants of branded fast foods. The narrator's absent-minded rumination is followed by a conversation between him and his boss. Suffused with office jargon, it emphasizes the superficiality of his work.

Though only the movie's twist ending will reveal Tyler's true identity, the arrival of our hero's alter-ego is cinematically foreshadowed in the early beginning of the narrative. The filmmakers adapted Palahniuk's novel with considerable fidelity: just as Tyler disrupts family movies by splicing in single frames of pornographic images, so do images of Tyler unexpectedly appear on the screen for a split of a second at specific points in the movie. The first one occurs when the narrator visits his doctor about his insomnia. When the narrator asks for some medication, the doctor refuses, saying that what he needs is natural, healthy sleep. The doctor concludes that, "if [he] want[s] to see pain [he should] go to the testicular cancer support group... that's pain." Just as the doctor utters these words, the image of Tyler appears on the screen. This juxtaposition links pain with Tyler and thus foreshadows Tyler's role of an evil character in the movie as well as the creation of Fight Club.

The narrator can be seen as an example of an individual that is "consumed with rage... [though] outwardly bland, submissive, and sociable, [he] seethes with inner anger" (Lasch, 1978, p. 11). In a sardonic voiceover the narrator recounts the airports he frequents on his business travels: "You wake up at O'Hare. You wake up at Dallas Ft. Worth. You wake up at BWI." Then he admits to praying for some kind of catastrophe, a plane crash or a meteor collision that would disturb the monotony of his life. By wishing for such disastrous experiences he attempts to get a more visceral, tangible experience of the world. Therefore he envisions a plane crash, in which he and his single-serving friends—as he calls his co-travellers—get killed. His survival instinct has gone totally numb. This imagined crash does not only symbolize his inner anger and wish to succumb to chaos, but also the degeneration of his psyche. As he snaps out of his mental simulation of a plane crash, he wakes up seated next to a man who introduces himself as Tyler Durden. While it appears that Tyler is a living human being, in reality he is just the narrator's outlet for his repressed feelings of dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

In this scene the narrator and the audience learn that Tyler is a soap manufacturer. Soap takes on a deeper meaning, which deserves closer attention. On the one hand, soap stands for a means of washing away the materiality, which lives up to Tyler's image of a preacher exhorting against the evils of consumerism. However, the way Tyler's soap business functions

only reinforces the consumerist system. Tyler scavenges bags of fat suctioned out of the richest thighs in America from medical human waste dumps to make expensive designer soap, which he subsequently sells for 20$ a bar to upscale department stores and to the same women who have paid to have the secret ingredient—their very own fat—sucked out. As Tyler puts it: he is "selling rich women their own fat asses". The dualistic nature of the symbol of the soap captures the contradictive nature of Tyler's nihilistic philosophy. He might be inciting men against consumerism and materialism, but materialism and capitalism are the very systems that enable him to conduct his business.

After the narrator returns from one of his countless business trips to his apartment in the "filing cabinet for widows and young professionals" quite fittingly named *Pearson Towers: A Place to Be Somebody*, he finds that everything that he has managed to acquire is gone. His stylishly furnished condo has mysteriously turned into ashes. This is finally the moment when the realization of being a victim of consumerist society dawns on him. The narrator is no longer satisfied with his "perfect" but bland life. In his despair, he calls Tyler, the charismatic soap-seller he has met on the plane. The conversation they have in a bar is a direct critique of the consumerist society and the postmodern world at large, in which what matters is no longer crime or poverty, but the brands we subordinate our lives to. Tyler says: "We are by-products of the lifestyle obsession... The things you own, they end up owning

you." The narrator reluctantly concedes to this commentary on the pitiful state of the modern individual. What the audience is unaware of at this point is that Tyler Durden is not a real character, but also a product, namely a product of the protagonist's imagination. He has undergone a process of fragmentation of his personality and his projection is now fully manifested. Tyler is a perfect visual and auditory hallucination.

Following the narrator's explosion of his beautiful condominium, he moves into Tyler's dilapidated house on Paper Street, cut off from whatever civilization by half a mile in every direction. Without the material comforts of his former flat and the long sought after possessions, the narrator soon separates himself from the despised materiality in search for some tangible experience. The narrator's sudden decision to follow Tyler represents his ultimate rejection of the consumerist lifestyle. Moving into his crumbling house, bleak, wet and run-down encourages his retreat into the dark corners of his mind. "The interior of the house is a veritable wilderness of disintegration, mimicking the condition of the narrator's mind" (Mythology of Violence). Being inside the house becomes like being inside the narrator's head. As Tyler constantly occupies the narrator's thoughts, the audience witnesses the inner workings of his brain. Watching the scene when a police inspector calls the narrator to inform him that his condo was blown up with homemade explosive is like watching Dr. Jekyll argue with Mr. Hyde—the good and the evil identity fighting each other to take possession of the person

they inhabit. Visually, this is portrayed by Tyler moving in and out of the rooms and climbing up and down the staircase. The odd thing that Tyler and Marla, Tyler's/narrator's love interest (Helena Bonham Carter), are never in the same room except when they "hump", nor are the three of them ever contained in a single frame also testifies to the fact that Tyler is just a fictitious character.

The narrator cures his insomnia and boredom by attending support group meetings for patients with various terminal illnesses like testicular cancer, tuberculosis, lupus and blood parasites. These meetings come to have a profound meaning for him. Though surrounded by approaching death, he feels more alive than ever. He loves the support groups because "if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention… they really saw you. Everything else… went out the window." People engaged in authentic conversations and "[they] listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak (Palahniuk, 1996, p. 107). The relationships formed here are at last not faked and commodified, but genuine, making him feel important and unique. For once he is the centre of attention, which is what matters to him. However, when Marla starts visiting the support groups because "the coffee

is free and it's cheaper than a movie", the narrator's insomnia comes back. It is obvious she is a faker and thus the sense of authenticity evaporates.

Christopher Lasch's description of a narcissist captures the quality of the narrator's existence: "Having internalized the social restraints by means of which they formerly sought to keep possibility within civilized limits, they feel themselves overwhelmed by an annihilating boredom, like animals whose instincts have withered in captivity … they long precisely for a more vigorous instinctual experience" (1978, p. 11). Since the support groups no longer suffice to soothe his inner anger and cannot provide him with the experience of authenticity, the narrator finds refuge from his boredom by delving into the dark recesses of his mind. Michael Kimmel notes that the longing for authenticity "has always led men back to the frontier, back to nature, even if it is inevitably the frontier of their imaginations" (1996, p. 323). His comment perfectly justifies the narrator's building of a double, a tangible entity, to fight back his existential crisis. Constructing Tyler in his mind through dissociation (which counts as a real mental disorder) becomes his coping mechanism.

"Hitting the Bottom" – Destructiveness of the Alter-ego

The myth of regeneration through self-destruction becomes more evident in the scene in which Tyler kisses the back of the narrator's hand

and sprinkles it with lye. The impact of this action is particularly mind-blowing in retrospect, when the viewer understands that it was an act of self-

mutilation since Tyler is not a real person, but a figment of the narrator's imagination. A kiss is normally an expression of affection, "a signifier of love and tenderness" (Mythology of Violence), but here it becomes a gesture of self-destruction, an example of narcissistic "pathological self-love" to use an expression from Otto Rank's article (1971).

Rank talks about the so-called "pathological self-love" as "the defensive form of the pathological fear of one's self, often leading to paranoid insanity and appearing personified in the pursuing shadow, mirror-image, or double" (1971, p. 85). Note that Tyler Durden as the narrator's "shadow" becomes the means of his identification and embodiment of all his desires: "All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you want to look, I am smart, I am capable, and most importantly, I'm free in all the ways you are not." Here the homoerotic charge comes to foreground: since Tyler is made to look so alluring and charismatic, initially the narrator is attracted to him (aka his own self, hence, the narcissistic self-love). So, as the narcissist craves for a more vigorous experience, the narrator turns into his own darker self whom he both dreads and worships. In this sense *Fight Club* can be seen as a very graphic, visual dramatization of an individual's mental breakdown.

The burning of the narrator's flesh is a test of endurance, a battle between his Self and his ego. It is a violent fight that takes place nowhere else other than his own mind—Tyler's house on Paper Street. To ease the pain and remove himself from the sensation of the burning flesh, the narrator tries to escape his body, his physical self, through self-guided meditation. Cinematically, this is portrayed as fades of blurred images of green forest with the words "searing" and "flesh" coming off the pages of a dictionary. Since Tyler is the narrator's ego, he has already second-guessed what is happening and encourages him to "stay with the pain". The emphasis on the importance of physical pain in attaining spiritual freedom is clear: "Without pain, without sacrifice, you would have nothing" as "it's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything."

Prior to their first fight, the narrator and Tyler have a conversation, in which Tyler challenges him to "...hit me as hard as you can ... how much can you know yourself when you've never been in a fight?" Tyler's explanation of this weird instruction suggests that only through pain can we experience enlightment. Tyler's desire to undergo a spiritual rebirth through physical pain is visually portrayed by his jumping up and down out of the focus of the camera, while brimming with unrestrained energy, waiting impatiently for the first blow. Despite the narrator's initial hesitations, he is seduced by Tyler's alluring charisma and he punches him. This is the first time we see the narrator channel away his hopeless feelings over his mundane existence through a bare-knuckled, raw fighting. Thus, the idea of Fight Club is born.

Narrator's Self-Revelation and Fight Against the Double

In the scene where Tyler says his goodbye to the sleeping narrator, the cinematic use of numerous dream-like fades suggests that Tyler's existence is only transient and that the narrator might be waking up from his mental pandemonium. Using Tyler's used airline ticket stubs, the narrator embarks on a manhunt across America, all the while experiencing a sort of "perpetual déjà-vu". He meets participants of fight clubs that have sprung up across the country, whom he asks whether they know Tyler Durden. An enigmatic response of one of them—"Is this a test, sir?"—and a wink leave him totally exasperated. Though he has no direct memories of having set up this remarkable chain of fight club franchises, the realization that he is in fact Tyler Durden, the instigator of this mayhem, begins to dawn on him. What follows is the narrator's confrontation with Tyler in his hotel room. The revelation is depicted as a series of scenes shown earlier in the movie, in which both Tyler and the narrator were together only this time the narrator is alone. We see the narrator on the parking lot behind a bar, where he and Tyler had their first fight, but this time the narrator is punching himself. In another shot, the viewer sees the narrator sitting alone in the house on Paper Street, watching his hand burn with lye. It becomes absolutely obvious to both the audience and the narrator that he and Tyler are one person.

"If pain is the most expedient route to feeling alive, then the flirtation with self-destruction is what bonds Tyler and Jack – a bond no woman can set asunder, not even Marla" (Taubin 1999). Tyler's megalomaniacal rampage transgressing all limits (and Marla partially too) causes the narrator to question Tyler's actions. His nihilistic subversion spins out of control as Fight Club turns into Project Mayhem, "a guerilla network that blows up building after building in order to undermine the economic foundations of our credit-card society" (Taubin 1999). When Bob, the narrator's friend from the support group "Remaining Men Together" gets inadvertently killed in an attempt to destroy a piece of corporate art and a franchise coffee bar, the narrator decides to distance himself from Fight Club. But Tyler is not an easy nemesis to just walk away from and that is how we get to the opening scene with Tyler holding the barrel of a gun in the narrator's mouth.

The ultimate act of regeneration through violence comes in the narrator's destruction of Tyler. Since the ego and alter-ego of an individual work at cross-purposes, all the narrator's attempts to stop Tyler fail. Namely, Tyler second-guesses what is on the narrator's mind and is therefore one step ahead of him. The narrator must find a way how to defend himself: "The form of defense against narcissism finds expression principally in two ways: in fear and revulsion before one's own image… or in the loss of shadow-image or mirror-image" (Rank, 1971, pp. 74-75). The narrator's ultimate dissociation from

Tyler comes after his realization that the latest plan of Project Mayhem involves blowing up several buildings of credit card companies. Believing "this has gone too far" the narrator finally gets rid of his "shadow-image" by shooting himself in the jaw, which kills Tyler, but leaves the narrator merely wounded. This act of sheer violence inflicted on the individual's own body completes his coping mechanism. Finally, the film's ending suggests, the narrator becomes a free individual, safe from both the wilderness of his own mind and society.

Conclusion

Dissociative identity disorder is utilized as a structural device of the film and although the development of the disorder is not 100% accurate, many important parallels between the *Fight Club'*s DID and the real disorder may be drawn. As far as the viewer knows, the narrator did not undergo any childhood trauma, which is identified as the most common form of abuse that may set off the split of the psyche. Rather, it was his anxiety and feelings of entrapment, spurred by modern society and its system of superficial values that worked as a trigger for the dissociation of his personality. So in this way the film portrays what a devastating effect materialism and consumerism can have on the individual.

Most importantly, *Fight Club*'s alternate personalities are present as a *coping mechanism* of the individual. Alex Lee points out that "[a] stronger, more confidant personality will often take over for the benefit of the individual: 'I'll bring us through this. As always. I'll carry you – kicking and screaming – and in the end you'll thank me,' Tyler told the narrator" (Lee 2010). Since the childhood trauma is missing, the greatest psychological abuse that the narrator experiences is the hegemony of consumerism and its stultifying effects. Therefore, Tyler being his way of fighting it represents the urge to break free from the "system" and find the sense of lost meaning.

While the narrator manages to break away from the system, he also has to break away from the overpowering Tyler. In this way *Fight Club*'s structural device of DID goes hand in hand with the myth of regeneration through self-destruction, which is hyperbolized to maximum effect. Although the narrator is not the only white male feeling resentful about the modern consumerist society, he is unique in the way he fights his repressed anger. As Tyler summarizes "People do it every day, they talk to themselves… they see themselves as they'd like to be, they don't have the courage you have, to just run with it." While minor symptoms of mental instability may be seen in others too, few will construct a separate identity to fight their anger. What is important (with regards to the use of self-directed violence), DID in the movie is not utilized in a negative

way; rather it is portrayed as a saving grace.

Fight Club seems to suggest that the only way one can experience a "real" sense of being in the postmodern world of a generation of alienated individuals is through wounding. On the other hand, the physical pain that provides the individual with the affirmation of his existence comes down to nothing more than a hackneyed expression of postmodern macho posturing. Although for a while, the violence allows the white male to rise above his innocuous existence, the sense of salvation through pain is ephemeral, and brute force alone does not solve anything. Thus, the men engaged in fight club only perpetuate the banality of their lives. The acknowledgment that the narrator and Tyler are the same person is an essential step in the narrator's mental development: in the final scene the narrator matures and recognizes that violence is, in fact, not the answer. And Tyler in this context stands for violence. It is not Fight Club, or in other words destruction, that saves the narrator, but rather his desire for human connection. What is important is that it is the narrator and Marla who survive in the end, not Tyler.

At the start of his journey through the dark territories of his mind, we find the narrator isolated in "*faux happiness*" (qtd. by Shumsky, 2009, p. 57), surrounded by materialistic possessions and superficial concerns. A slave to circumstances, burrowed in his own helplessness, he is frustrated and resentful about his very existence. Through his crisis he becomes stronger and eventually overcomes what oppresses him. He comes to reject the masculine testosterone-drenched brutality and instead refocuses on forming a fruitful relationship with another human being. By rising against his alter-ego he demonstrates his agency, capability and independence. He is no longer crippled by fear, but filled with new hope and on the way of becoming a new individual, healed and ready to engage with the world around him. Just as violence is necessary for the men in Fight Club to feel "saved" and "reborn", the narrator is saved from his nihilistic self and the society through pain. Scott Ash suggests "the body as the pyrotechnic element of Palahniuk's work ... becomes the site of a battle for the individual in postmodern, hyper-capitalist America" (2009, p. 76). The myth of regeneration through self-destruction explains his healing process: the narrator had to destroy part of himself, both metaphorically and figuratively, to be born again.

Works cited:

» Ash, S. 2009. Going to the Body: The Tension of Freedom/Restraint in Palahniuk's Novels. In: Sartain, J.A. (ed.), 2009. *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub, pp. 73-88.

» Johnson, A. 2009. Bullets and Blades: Narcissism and Violence in *Invisible Monsters*. In: Sartain, J.A. (ed.). 2009. *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk.* Newcastle upon Tyne : Cambridge Scholars Pub, pp. 61-72.

» Kavadlo, J. 2005. The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist. In: *Stirrings Still, The International Journal of Existential Literature,* 2005, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 3-25.

» Kimmel, M. 1996. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press.

» Lasch, Ch. 1978. *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York : W. W. Norton and Company.

» Lee, A., Bucsko, C., Pan, D., Cheng, F. 2010. Fight Club and Dissociative Identity Disorder. In: psychology2's blog. Psychological Disorders [online]. 2010 [qt. 2012-07-29]. Available at: <http://psychology2.wordpress.com/2010/04/30/fight-club-and-dissociative-identity-disorder/>.

» The Mythology of Violence. In: American Studies at the University of Virginia [online]. [qt. 2012-07-29]. Available at: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma02/freed/fightclub/violence.html>.

» Palahniuk, Ch. 2008. Choke. London : Vintage.

» Palahniuk, Ch. 2006. Fight Club. London : Vintage.

» Palahniuk, Ch. 1999. Invisible Monsters. New York : W.W. Norton.

» Rank, O. 1971. The Double. Tucker, H. (ed.). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

» Shumsky, T. 2009. Tracking Conversion: A Structural Analysis of *Survivor* and *Choke.* In: Sartain, J.A. (ed.). 2009. *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub, pp. 40-60.

» Taubin, A. 1994. Edward Norton Information Page. Fight Club Articles: So Good It Hurts. In: Sight and Sound [online]. 1999 [qt. 2012-07-29]. Available at: <http://www.edward-norton.org/fc/articles/sight.html>.

» Uhls, J. (screenwriter), Fincher, D. (director). (1999). *Fight Club* [film]. USA/Germany: Twentieth Century Fox.

Zuzana Starovecká
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského
Gondova 2
814 99 Bratislava
email: zuzana.starovecka@yahoo.com

The Fall of the Communist Regime. (Re)presentation of National History in the Form of Subtitles.

Emília Janecová

Emília Janecová has participated in various research projects and cultural events focused on intercultural communication and (re)presentation of minorities via film and literature. In the academic year 2011/2012, she initiated the systematic specialized training of students in the field of audiovisual translation at the Department of Translation Studies, CPU Nitra. Besides academic activities she also deals with audiovisual translation in practice, cooperating with several domestic and foreign film festivals and dubbing studios. Additionally, she was a coordinator of the presented subtitling project for the Nation's Memory Institute of the Slovak Republic.

Abstract

The article deals with various aspects of intercultural communication in the translation and subtitling of documentary films. Basing examples on a documentary project undertaken in cooperation with the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute entitled The Power of Witnessing, which reflects upon the period of oppression in the country in the second half of the 20th century, various translation and subtitling strategies and procedures are considered. Subsequently, practical aspects and the applicability of these strategies are evaluated.

"The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history."

— George Orwell

Maintaining and understanding the history of a country, a state, a nation or history of a human being is generally appreciated as a crucial tool thanks to which one can learn and thanks to which one has the possibility to avoid mistakes. It might be questioned, however, whether such an ideal scenario has ever taken place, but it is still important not to forget, not to let go. The history of every nation, indeed, lists a period not to be proud of, which in democratic regimes cannot be denied but instead should be dealt with.

In the history of the Slovak nation, one of these periods might be the period of the reign of the communist dictatorship

that can be dated to the years 1948-1989. Even though this period is nowadays—almost after a quarter of a century—presented with its negatives in manifold historical, didactical or audiovisual materials, our teaching experience with the generation already born into a democratic Slovakia shows that the knowledge on the problematic issues of the period is limited to only a few historical facts—often presented without any historical, political or socio-cultural context.

The aim of the article is not to deal with these issues but to introduce an interesting aspect related to their representation in two documentary films—produced in the form of oral testimonies of the witnesses of the regime, and their transfer into English and subtitles. The project *The Power of Witnessing*, of which the films are a part, was elaborated by the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute and within the project a book and DVD with nine short documentary films were made. The whole project, however, encompasses the era 1938-1989 and introduces not only issues related to the communist regime. For the scope of our article we therefore choose two documentary films: *The Year 1968 and the Normalization Period* and *November 1989*. In these we observe various layers on which thematic issues are presented and consequently ponder upon the possibilities of their transfer into a foreign language but also into a foreign socio-cultural context in translation and subtitles.

Audiovisual work in interpretation and translation

When considering an audiovisual work in interpretation and translation, the crucial characteristics of such work must be understood. A very important matter to be respected is that any audiovisual work presents certain meaning via three interconnected layers of the work: the layer of the spoken word (dialogues, monologues), motion (what can be seen) and the layer of sound (not only spoken dialogues and monologues, but also various sounds, music, hums, etc.). All of these must be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the film, and also in order to transfer the key elements adequately into translation. In the case of translating an audiovisual work all these layers must also be considered, whether the work is supposed to be dubbed or subtitled, even in cases of audiodescription for the blind or close-captioning for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

When we think about the two most common types of audiovisual strategies in our region—dubbing and subtitling—various communicational strategies in these can be compared. While dubbing as the most common strategy used in media and films creates in the recipient an impression that the work is "originally Slovak", subtitling on the contrary maintains the presence

of both source and target environment, since the original soundtrack is preserved. From the point of view of cultural communication in translation, the recipient is thus always aware of the source culture—no matter whether he or she is familiar with the language and context or not. Therefore such a viewer is always aware of the *foreignness* and *otherness* of the work.

In this region, subtitling of films was usually related to accepting foreign works into the domestic environment; however lately, as a result of the attempts of nations to present themselves within a globalized Europe and world, translating from Slovak into a foreign language is more and more common. Since in our case we deal with translation (and subtitling) of films with a culturally specific value, it is interesting to observe how the specific cultural-communication strategies used in an original can be preserved in the translated work. The works we are going to deal with introduce particular matters related to Slovak history, which are not always easy to identify without knowing the wider socio-cultural and historical context. Furthermore, the form of subtitles strongly limits the possibilities given to a translator, meaning the key meanings and communication tools must be chosen precisely.

Subtitling (Cultures)

As mentioned before, an audiovisual work represents particular meanings on three layers—speech, motion and sound. Understanding such work as a source "text" in the process of translation, it could be defined as an original product, which lives on semiotically through images and sound/text in a certain culture, since the notions presented on particular layers might be known in their full extent only in the environment in which they are embedded. The process of translation of the work then might be understood as linking the message of the original work to the minds of the foreign audience, where the image and sound situates the narrative within a specific geographical, historical, temporal and cultural context. An audiovisual text thus offers a cultural representation of the world, both through language and the image or sound. Therefore, a translator of such work mediates between two linguistic and cultural systems not only verbal but also non-verbal information transmitted aurally or visually.

Getting back to the works we have chosen for the scope of the article, it can be observed that besides the layer of speech, the remaining two layers carry dense meanings related to Slovak history. The film *The Year 1968 and the Normalization Period* focuses on the period related to attempts to establish so-called "socialism with a human face" which "involved an

attempt to launch qualitative reform and 'humanise' the communist regime" (Fiamová – Speváková, 2013. p. 199). This process was however repressed by the so-called normalization, which from 1968 was to restore the strict political and social conditions of a Brezhnev-type communism in what was then Czechoslovakia. Such activity led to stronger isolation from those other than communist countries, forcible oppression and persecution related to politic opinions and beliefs as well as a number of manipulated political processes and victimization. This period of history is in the film introduced via testimonies by witnesses of the regime's persecution and their relatives. Powerful personal encounters are supplemented by various graphics introducing the events within historical context, as well as various archival materials, photographs of the representatives of the events, newspaper cuttings, posters or certificates and also distinctive songs with lyrics related to the events, moods or ideals of the period.

Similar film strategies are also used in *November 1989* which represents the events of November 1989, calling for the principles of freedom and humanity and leading to the fall of the communist regime and commencement of democratic governance. After a contextual introduction, testimonies are given by representatives of that movement, remembering the November revolution, analysing its consequences and assessing the present situation. Again, the presented meaning occurs not only in the form of the spoken or written word (in graphics introducing the context) but also in pictorial material (photographs, posters, slogans), songs in the source environment closely connected to this period but also many other characteristic sound motives which are used in order to express the mood or are included as an alternative way of representing meaning.

There is no doubt that the film strategies described served as valid elements of expression. The question stands, however, which of them are known to the anticipated recipient in translation communication— particularly in our case to a widely diverse audience from countries in the European Union, mainly young people and students. Our own experience while elaborating the English translations and subtitles to these films with Slovak students reflected important information—that many of the meanings presented on any one layer of the film were not familiar even in the source text. In trying to discuss the meanings of various slogans, abbreviations, songs or sound motifs and symbols, it turned out they are (for the younger generation) not always easy to identify and interpret. Manifold communication situations in this realm led to a discussion whether these are really crucial for the viewer and to what extent it would be possible to present them to the target viewer. The problematic meanings and references were mostly culturally determined and therefore it was possible to divide them into the following three groups:

- cultural signs and references that do not exist in the target cultural environment, for example various institutions or organisations, such as *VPN* (the Public Against Violence association, which was usually presented only in abbreviated form in the speech of persons appearing, but also in text graphics or slogans);
- cultural signs and references that are not familiar to the target cultural environment or target audience (for example general public, children, learners), such as *collectivization, normalization, kolkhoz,* but also meanings presented on other layers—such as songs by popular singer and songwriter Karel Kryl criticizing the communist regime; or the motif of jingling keys which is related to the Velvet revolution and became a symbol of peaceful protest;
- cultural signs and references which are different in the target cultural environment, such as *dekulakization* or the *Vienna Award*, which can be interpreted slightly differently in other countries.

In general, Slovak translation theory offers us three ways of handling such specific communicational translation situation: naturalization, exotization and creolization. Obviously, a creolization strategy introducing and explaining the "foreign" or "unknown" elements would be an optimal solution. That would enable us to present that, for example, *normalization* was a process restoring Brezhnev-type communism or even explaining what the term "Brezhnev-type communism" implies. We could also itemize the abbreviation *VPN* as *Public Against Violence* and infer that it was an anti-communist group that played an important role in the events of November 1989. Furthermore, we could probably also suggest that the song *Bratříčku zavírej vrátka* (*Close the Gate, Little Brother*) by Karel Kryl was originally composed after 1968 as a reaction to occupation and later in 1989 was played as one of the anthems of the revolution. It would probably be also possible to imply that the sound of jingling keys appearing in the background without any keys shown on the screen represents the call for freedom and symbol of peaceful demonstration, and in the film is used in order to foreshadow the revolutionary events.

These strategies would be of much help and would enable the translator to preserve as much of the culture-communicational value of the source text. However, since in our case this "text" is an audiovisual text—which bears numerous restrictions regarding the form and extent of the translation—they cannot always be used. In the case of translation for subtitles the possibilities are even more limited.

(Re)presentation of National History in the Form of Subtitles

With regards to subtitling and the possibilities of using certain culture-communication strategies within that process, various influencing conditions must be reflected. These can be introduced in relation to five main aspects, including[1]:

- linguistic aspect (communication possibilities at the linguistic level)
- psychological aspect (influencing translator's choice of what is transferred into target environment, how and why)
- artistic-aesthetic aspect (aesthetic function)
- technological aspect (which defines mainly the constraints and limits of transferred meaning)
- semiotic and cultural-communication aspect (defining translator's decision on what is transferred into target environment, how and why in order to provide desired culture-communication expression value)

While linguistic, psychological, artistic-aesthetic and cultural-communication aspects are also present in the translation of e.g. literary texts, the significance of semiotic and technological aspects is increased in the case of subtitling. An audiovisual text represents particular meanings on three already mentioned layers of the work, which should also be maintained in the form of subtitles. However the elaboration and parameters of subtitles restrict the possibilities of the translated version, mainly because of the three crucial characteristics that must be maintained. These are related to the length and duration of showing the subtitle. According to generally known recommendations, subtitles should:

- have a maximum of two lines presented at a time; this would guarantee that no more than 2/12 of the screen image would be covered by subtitles at one time;
- allow around 35 characters per line (depending on language, the maximum number of characters used might sometimes go up to 42 characters per line) in order to maintain the readability of a subtitle;
- not be shown for more than 6 seconds—this would cause automatic re-reading of the subtitle, especially by fast readers.

In order to provide subtitles that are adequate as language support, but which should also not interfere with the viewer focusing on the other layers of an audiovisual work, these principles must be strictly respected. What possibilities are there then to present the meanings expressed in all three layers of these films? What should be translated in cases in which a meaning is presented on each of these layers simultaneously?

In relation to translation and subtitling of audiovisual texts with

culturally specific expressive value, Theresa Tomaskiewicz (1993, pp. 223–227) offers a brief discussion of the strategies in film subtitling, noting that some culture-specific terms are untranslatable. The strategies are:

- omission
- literal translation
- borrowing
- equivalence
- adaptation
- replacement of the cultural term with deictics
- generalization
- explication.

Obviously, the least problematic in our situation were the specifics presented at the level of language, which were often explained in the film itself or it was not that difficult to somehow bring them closer to the viewer. The most challenging, however, were the culture-communication specifics presented simultaneously—when at the layer of speech, sound and motion a meaning most probably unknown to the viewer was introduced. That happened for example in the film November 1989 when the activities of the *VPN* were mentioned, photographs of personalities of *November 1989*—which might be unknown in the target environment—were shown, Karel Kryl's song was played and in the background the sound of jingling was heard. Since we explained all these meanings above it can be understood that they all are closely interconnected. Although, since they are most probably not known to the anticipated percipient, in an ideal situation they should be introduced to the viewer in an acceptable way. Anyway, we have to recall here the basic strict parameters of subtitles which simply do not allow the translator to use any more extensive strategies. Therefore, the most commonly used procedures in these cases were adaptation, replacement of the cultural term with deictics, generalization and – mainly – omission.

Conclusion

Considering audiovisual work in translation as both a medium and space for intercultural communication in which the cultural specifics of the source environment are presented to the target environment, it should be noted that the cultural-communication value of the work is presented not only at the level of the spoken word but also at the level of sound and visual effects which shape the meaning of the work. Identifying the cultural signs and then transferring them into a different socio-cultural context might, however, not

always be simple. The task of a translator in such a process is to try to maintain the key culture-communicational meanings in the process of translation, but as was presented, in the case of translation for subtitles, the options of a translator are rather limited. In such cases, the translator often lacks the special and more demonstrative possibilities that could be applied for example in the case of translation of literary texts. Undoubtedly, some of the meanings are consequently neutralized, but it is important to remember that the audiovisual text operates on all three layers also in the foreign environment, and image and sound very often at least partially supplementary to what could not be presented in verbal (in the case of subtitles, written) form.

Endnotes

1 The first four aspects were introduced by Lucien Marleau (1982). The semiotic and socio-cultural aspect was added by Dirk Delabastita (1989).

Works cited:

» Delabastita, D. 1989. "Translation and Mass Communication: Film and TV Translation as Evidence of Cultural Dynamics." In: *Babel,* vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 193-218.

» Díaz Cintas, J. 2008. *Didactics of Audiovisual Translation.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

» Díaz Cintas, J. – Remael, A. 2007. *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling.* Manchester, UK, Kinderhook (NY), USA: St. Jerome Publishing.

» Fiamová, M. – Speváková, J. 2013.*Sila svedectva – The Power of Witnessing.* Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa.

» Gromová, E. – Janecová, E. 2012. "Preklad pre audiovizuálne médiá na Slovensku: prekladateľské kompetencie a oborná príprava." In: *Preklad a kultúra 4*. Nitra: UKF, pp. 135-143.

» Marleu, L. 1982. "Les sous-titres: un mal nécessaire." In: *MET,* vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 271-285.

» Pettit, Z. 2009. "Connecting Cultures: Cultural Transfer in Subtitling and Dubbing." In: *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation (Topics in Translation)*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 47 – 60.

» Szarkowska, A. 2005. "The Power of Film Translation." In: *Translation Journal*, vol.9, No. 2. [cit. 2013-03-01]. Available at: < http://translationjournal.net/journal/32film.htm>.

Emília Janecová
Department of Translation Studies
Faculty of Arts
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia
email: ejanecova@ukf.sk

Nordic Literatures in Slovak Culture

Reviewed by Edita Gromová

The monograph by Milan Žitný examines the works of significant representatives of the Nordic culture, philosophy and literature in the 19th and 20th centuries. He focuses on the Slovak reception of Nordic literatures of the above-mentioned period, discussing the reception of translations from these literatures into Slovak. The author provides a systematic reflection of the first Henrik Ibsen's dramas and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's work connected with Slovak political development before World War I. The author also discusses various aspects of Slovak translations of Nordic literatures and gives portraits of the Slovak founders of literary translation from Nordic languages in Slovakia (Karol V. Rypáček, Gustáv Viktory, Josef B. Michl, Oto Obuch, Jaroslav Káňa, Ladislav Obuch, Peter Hrivnák, Helena Dobiášová).

The book consists of an introduction and three main chapters: *General Remarks on the Reception of Nordic Literatures in Slovakia; Nordic Authors of the 19th and 20th Centuries and Their Reception in Slovakia; The Translation Reception of Nordic Literatures in Slovakia. Reflections, Portraits, Medallions.*

The first chapter discusses the relationships between the Slovak and Nordic literatures based on milestones in Slovak history. Special attention is drawn to the reception of Nordic literatures after the Second World War as a problem of literary history.

Chapter Two is concerned with significant Nordic authors—representatives of the Nordic culture, philosophy and literature of the 19th-20th centuries and their reception in Slovakia. Milan Žitný discusses chosen aspects of Kierkegaard's, Andersen's, Bjørnson's as well as Lagerlöf's works and their reception in Slovakia.

In Chapter Three the author emphasizes the translation reception of Nordic literatures in Slovakia. Special attention is drawn to the beginnings of translating Henrik Ibsen's works into Slovak. Milan Žitný focuses on Ján Burian's translation of *Et Dukkehjem* (A Doll's House) into Slovak, opening the questions of second-hand translation and the interliterary position of Burian's translation as the first Slovak translation of Ibsen's drama. Žitný's considerations serve as a basis for discussing later periods of the Slovak approach to Ibsen. In this chapter Žitný also pays

attention to the phenomenon of translating culture-bound expressions. He discusses the theoretical works by different scholars in Slovakia and abroad (Skopostheorie) approaching this problem and gives examples of different solutions in translating culture-bound expressions from Nordic literatures into Slovak. In this chapter, there is also a study devoted to the Slovak reception of translations from Finnish literature in the 20th century. The author discusses the translations and their translators (Oto Obuch, Mária Kaňová) directly from Finnish as well as indirect translations from other languages (German, Swedish, Russian, Polish). A considerable part of this chapter is concerned with Josef Michl (1918 - 2001)—an outstanding scholar and expert in the field of Nordic languages and literatures in the former Czechoslovakia. Milan Žitný states that the Czech scholar Josef Michl worked in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a guest lecturer in Bratislava giving lectures on the history of Swedish literature. He points out that Josef Michl contributed to the formation of a young generation of Slovak experts in Nordistics and played an important role in awarding the Nobel Prize for literature to Seifert—a Czech poet, in 1984. Žitný appreciates Michl's cooperation with Slovak publishing houses in translating poems by Edith Södergran (1892 – 1923), the founder of Finnish-Swedish Modernism, in cooperation with Milan Kraus and Július Lenko. The final part of Chapter Three consists of portraits of eight translators as well as scholars who had an impact on the reflection of

Nordic literatures in Slovakia in the 20th century. He names Helena Dobiášová, Peter Hrivnák, Jaroslav Kaňa, Josef B. Michl, Ladislav Obuch, Oto Obuch, Karol V. Rypáček, and Gustáv Viktory.

The book also incorporates a select bibliography of important scholarly works in Scandinavistics by Milan Žitný proving the author's expertise in the field of Nordic literatures and their translations as well as their reflection in Slovakia. It also includes a detailed summary of all chapters and sub-chapters in English translated by Eva Bubnášová (pp. 189-209) that makes the book accessible to the English-speaking reader worldwide.

In my view, the book is an important contribution to the literature on Scandinavistics in Slovakia and worldwide. It fills the gap in the scholarship of the reflection of Nordic literatures in Slovakia and, at the same time, is a valuable resource for researchers, students as well as translators with an interest in this field of study.

On the Challenges of Drama Translation

Reviewed by Mária Kiššová

Preklad a divadlo (*Tvorivé prekladateľské reflexie II.*) *[Translation and Theatre* (*Creative Reflections on Translation II)*] Nitra: UKF, 2013. 195p. ISBN 978–80–558–0226–8.

The publication *Preklad a divadlo (Tvorivé prekladateľské reflexie II.)* [*Translation and Theatre (Creative Reflexions on Translation II)*] is a unique attempt to approach the discourse on translation and theatre in the Slovak context. The book was inspired by the event *Creative Reflexions on Translation II* organized by the Department of Translation Studies and the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication at the Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra on 24 October 2011. Its publication was funded as part of the project *Education Through Theatre* led by Professor Dagmar Inštitorisová from the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication.

As Emília Janecová notes in her introductory text *When Translation Transforms into Play*, the publication provides readers with a complex perspective on translation and theatre; it includes its development in Slovakia, the contemporary situation in drama translation as well as the possibilities and challenges for novice translators. This collection of scholarly articles, interviews and the winning text of the translation contest, is aimed at a wide spectrum of readers. While the first part of the book is more academic, the second and third parts may well also appeal to theatre enthusiasts with no professional background in the field.

The four scholarly articles are overviews, historical perspectives and text-focused studies of translation and dramatic works. Edita Gromová in her study discusses a historical overview and current trends in scholarly research on drama translation. In the Slovak context, she emphasizes the contribution of Ján Ferenčík (p. 24-25), whose works published in the 1970s and 1980s have been visionary to some extent and are still up-to-date and thought-provoking (see p. 25). Martina Borodovčáková writes about new strategies and approaches to the translation of drama texts. According to her, the texts of ancient drama are often considered old fashioned and culturally and historically distant (p. 34). Borodovčáková mentions the importance of cooperation between the translator, director and dramaturge as one of the key factors for adequate translation (p. 42). Jana Bžochová-Wild focuses on the translated works of

127

William Shakespeare. She recommends some specific translator's techniques be used in order to understand the peculiarities and characteristics of Shakespeare's style, such as horizontal reading, which means finding key words repeated in the text (see p. 53). The article by Barbora Kráľová discusses aspects of intersemiotic translation and stage adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Heart of a Dog*. Kráľová deals closely with the textual and ideological challenges of the novel and also mentions the 2005 creative postmodern adaptation by Dodo Gombár. Anna TaŠká writes about new forms of a dramatic text and focuses on Northern Drama, namely the Swedish playwright Lars Norén and the Norwegian author Jon Fosse.

In the second part of *Translation and Theatre* a reader finds five interviews with contemporary Slovak translators. Emília Janecová conducted interviews with Oľga Ruppeldtová, Jana Cviková and Ján Štrasser. Barbora Kráľová talked to Milan Richter, and Martina Petáková interviewed Juraj Hubinák. The interviews offer detailed biographical, professional as well as personal (in some cases even intimate) portraits of distinguished Slovak personalities. The interviewers ask questions related not only to translation and drama, but they also try to provide a complex picture of each translator. It is also interesting to observe how translators reflect on the challenges they face in their work, what advice they give to novice translators and why are they fascinated by their profession. The interviews—due to their depth and scope—are also a great

source of inspiration since there are many references to dramatic works as well as to other artistic genres.

The final part of the publication presents the winner of the translation contest, Dominika Kozubová and her translation of Caryl Churchill's *A Number*.

At the beginning of the book Emília Janecová states that there has been no monograph publication dealing with the relation between translation and drama in the Slovak context (p. 10). We may conclude that this publication is an excellent introduction to the further scholarly exploration of this *terra incognita*.

Craig Thompson's Habibi: Islam, Calligraphy and the Sacredness of the Word and Image

Reviewed by Mária Kiššová

Craig Thompson: *Habibi.* London: Faber and Faber, 2011. 672p. ISBN 978-0571241323

After the great success of his 2003 autobiographical work *Blankets*, the American graphic novelist Craig Thompson embraced in *Habibi* (2011) a far more distant territory. *Habibi* is set in an unspecified land of Islamic and Arabic culture and can be read as a love story, a critique of the postmodern consumer world, a historical exploration of the religious narratives or as an alchemical quest for the Unity of the Self. Its major appeal lies, however, in Thompson's extensive use of the visually impressive calligraphic words-images.

In calligraphy, the word (its verbal expression) often *becomes* the thing (in a graphic form), though the verbal and the pictorial do not have to be necessarily semantically related. In our cultural context, calligrams are probably the most common example of writing arranged to create a visual image. In this way, *Habibi* is a reverence of the power of word and image, or—if expressed in more general terms—a tribute to imagination and creativity, when words transform into images and vice versa. On pages 30 and 31, for instance, the image of a meandering river changes into the letters and into the story which slowly vanishes and ends in 'a muted voice' (p. 31) and a desert. Another example can be found on pages 137 – 140, where the snake transforms into the letter 'B', shows Zam the way to the river and the waves of the river turn into Arabic letters and words. Later, on pages 178 and 179 the rain (an indispensable gift of nature) changes into the words and stories falling from the sky (a gift of soothing and tranquillity).

Due to its inspiration by the traditions of Islamic art and Arabic calligraphy, *Habibi* contains frequent references to the sacredness of the writing (since Islam considers a figurative representation of God as idolatrous, calligraphy is an attempt to express devotion to Allah). *Basmala* or *bismillah*, for example, is the first verse in the *Quran* and the most usual calligraphic motif. The verse means 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate' and it is the most significant sutra used in Muslim life. In calligraphy, it can have various graphic forms although the verbal expression and its

essence remain intact. Thompson also accentuates *bismillah*, one of its finest examples is on pages 37 – 38 where it takes form of a palace, a pear or a bird.

Habibi contains plenty of religious 'mini-stories', but unlike in *Blankets*, where the story focuses on Thompson's personal spiritual quest, in this novel, Islam and its spirituality are used mostly to illustrate and extend the central love story of the beautiful girl Dodola, who bears the name of the rain goddess, and Zam, a boy whom Dodola finds and looks after. Their relationship slowly changes from a bond between a mother and a child, to a brother-sister relation and ends with Dodola and Zam as lovers. It is not a coincidence that in the black-and-white illustrations, ink and blood are of the same colour. Although they finally find peace with each other after tormented times of being apart, the stories of Dodola and Zam are full of suffering, injustice, cruelty and oppression (Dodola loses her child, Zam has been castrated).

The fictional world of *Habibi* is based on many references to Frank Herbert's 1965 novel *Dune,* one of the most fundamental and influential fictional works, and which opened the discourse on the importance of planetary ecology, of the 20th century. In *Habibi*, the purity of nature presented in contrast with the disastrous consequences of human corruption and exploitation creates strong ecological awareness. Since this aspect of the novel is profound and extremely relevant, the concept of the sacredness of nature in *Habibi* (nature in American cultural history that Thompson comes from versus Islam's

approach) may be worthy of further exploration and interpretation.

As a novel and a narrative, *Habibi* is predictable in some parts and readers familiar with Thompson's visual poetics of *Blankets* may find a few aspects of the story slightly repetitive, superficial and vulgar. As graphic art, however, *Habibi* is, thanks to its intercultural links with the calligraphic art and spiritual tradition of Islam, a unique achievement. Thompson makes extensive use of the *Quran*, both in the retelling of stories as well as in numerous allusions. These—as it has been noted—do not always work well in relation to the main story, but their mere presence in the book can be interesting for those who are not well read in the *Quran.* Stories used in the book are part of the common heritage of the People of the Book and demonstrate how much Judaism, Christianity and Islam actually share.

In the current world where the popular image of Islam is obscured and distorted via 'digested' presentation in the media and far too often connected with political ideology, *Habibi* simply shows the richness and spiritual greatness of the tradition closer to us than we realize.

It Is Not Easy Being a Daughter… Alison Bechdel's Search for a Parent

Reviewed by Mária Kiššová

Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama is a graphic memoir by the American cartoonist Alison Bechdel. After *Fun Home*, where Bechdel focuses on her relationship with her father (for a complex interpretation of the book, see Simona Hevešiová's article in this issue), her second book continues the exploration of Bechdel's family life and deals with her mother. Compared with *Fun Home*, Bechdel's relationship to her is not a bit less challenging.

Generally speaking, memoir is a very delicate genre whose openness and intimacy reveal not only 'the secrets' of the writer but also affect the relatives and close friends who become part of the narrative. *Are You My Mother?* is an extremely intimate book that exposes Bechdel's close circle of family and friends, and its openness is an issue which Alison's mother often reflects on in the book. Similarly to *Fun Home*, Bechdel has no restraints and inhibitions, which is actually one of the strongest aspects of her narratives. She undresses metaphorically as well as literally and often mercilessly castigates herself for what she is, what she was and

even for what she would like to be. She makes her readers welcome voyeurs, invites them to her bedroom and shows herself in most intimate acts.

As memoir is in its essence a narcissistic genre, it is interesting to observe how the memoirist defines herself and relates to the 'self'. Bechdel identifies herself through relationships; to move on and to live she needs to be confronted, challenged and caressed, depending on the person. As a motto for the book, Bechdel chose a sentence by Virginia Woolf: 'For nothing was simply one thing.' And it is indeed so. In Bechdel's web of real (mother, psychoanalysts, therapists, lovers) and semi-real (Freud, Woolf, Winnicott) relationships, she is never 'one thing', she is not an island.

The title of the memoir implies the framework of Bechdel's quest. The question can suggest, for instance, either that Alison is still waiting for an answer and still searching for her mother, that she is unsure about her mother's identity, or readers may as well feel that the question is addressed to them (as potential mothers…) since

the fact that Bechdel 'has' her natural parents does not prevent her from searching for other (adoptive) fathers and mothers. In the book, she mentions her desire that an English paediatrician and psychologist Donald Winnicott become her parent, and a few 'parental complexes' related to Bechdel's doctors can be also found.

Are You My Mother? is written for an educated reader. The text is fragmented, and while *Fun Home* is abundant in allusions to literary modernism, this book makes an extensive use of psychology and psychoanalysis combined with literature. There are the thoughts of Freud, Jung and Winnicott together with a literary discourse which includes Virginia Woolf, Silvia Plath, Ann Bradstreet and others. As far as psychoanalysis (and Bechdel) shows us, there is always more in ourselves than we are able and will ever know; there will always be parts hidden from us. On the other hand, however, the fact that the borders between the conscious and the unconscious are blurred may be both fortunate and unfortunate, depending on the personality concerned. Although Bechdel does not always sound so, her exploration of the mind becomes actually thrilling, playful and 'comic'. In the book, Alison's psychoanalytical and therapy sessions are depicted in detail and—if we read this text as a diary—we are actually holding a concrete outcome of the therapy in our hands.

A few more words need to be added about Bechdel's memoir as a work of art. A literary work of art should offer a new, fresh insight; it defamiliarizes the ordinary and its reading offers not only a superficial identification but presents 'ideas' in unique and at the same time universal ways. Does this memoir do that? Bechdel repeatedly mentions that she 'must' write and it is obviously her internal need which motivates her to create this narrative—'a transitional object' itself. Yet, the question remains left for literary history. It will show whether *Are You My Mother?* is to be read as a personal chronicle of a troubled daughter or whether its artistic significance will inspire other literary and cultural narratives.

The Power of Witnessing

Igor Tyšš

You who come after us dare to dream.
Together, we never were alone –
There were quite a few of us, you know.
And we enjoyed the company.
(I. M. Jirous)

Collective memory is a phenomenon difficult to describe and evaluate. It is a synthesis of historical events, personal creeds and national mythology. The 20th century was a century of permanent war, a war which afflicted Central Europe two times directly. For the rest of the period, however, war was an implicit, cold reminder of what might happen. Thus, one can say that the history of the 20th century is a history of tension and terror, both of which had become institutionalized and socially accepted in the course of time. This is the reason why the repercussions of contemporary history can be felt even today.

Being the youngest generation, we are a bit too open and public nowadays – and gullible. History might as well repeat itself, not as a rule, but because we are not earnest in learning about it. We need to ask about our past in order to question history. Historian ĽubomírLipták put it well, although he was originally referring to a narrower issue. He wrote that we should get rid of "the rose-colouredlooking glass" through which "we filtered out the entire period and what was left is only

pinky kitsch which nobody who had lived through the era will own up to".

We often ask our elders howsand whys, but the answer is all too unequivocal: "You cannot understand". Such a reply underlines the paradox of the grey spots in collective memory where History has hit hard on personal past. We may find guilt, perhaps unfairness or even sheer helplessness, but – all the same – we do need to raise questions about history.

We welcome initiatives by the Nation's Memory institute (ÚPN). One of them was the collaboration between ÚPN and the Department of Translation studies, FA CPU, in May and June last year. The aim of the joint initiative called The Power of Witnessingwas to create subtitles for a series of ÚPN short historical documentaries that covered the period of totalitarian oppression in Slovakia 1939 – 1989. A DVD with the films was planned to accompany a book on the topic. The publication has come out recently. At the FA, EmíliaJanecová, PhD., started the project and coordinated it.

As to the films, they represent the genre of oral history, which is characterized

by authentic spoken testimonies by the protagonists of notable events in history. In this case, most of the witnesses are senior citizens. They are former concentration-camp internees, political prisoners from the socialist period, unlawfully convicted priests, or people who saw no other option than to leave Slovakia after the Soviet invasion in August 1968. What these people had to say was no objective, official history. They had personal stories of pain and suffering that they told in a personal, non-stylized manner.

We who had to translate these testimonies are practically the ones who could learn most from them. Each and every one of us faced a barrier. The barrier was not of language differences and not of cultural nuance, although, at times, it was difficult to render some specific terms into English. We encountered an even deeper rupture: an incomparably dissimilar way of life. It is plain and simple to translate the Slovak *deportácie* into English as *abductions*, but how can we render the horror of railroad wagons and of an unknown destination? We translated *Strana* as *the Party* with a capital letter, but there is still room to ponder what impact the capitalized Party has had on the society. And what about the bleak word *Normalization*? Is it really just the opposite of the hopeful *socialism with a human face*, even if both of them were introduced by mostly the same people? How can we expand the word *conform* to sufficiently convey the banality of the unimaginative bureaucratic socialism of the 1970s? The sole possibility of translation has been a prominent

concern since the very beginnings of the practice. When subtitling for The Power of Witnessing project, we felt we needed to rephrase the problem. As we saw it, the aim of translation was not only to convey a meaning but to convey what life meant. In this case we had to talk about a life we never knew in a language which we would never master well enough.

As translation goes, subtitling is not linguistic translation. Film is a multimedia text in which speech, visuals and sounds effectively intertwine. Regardless of the fact that subtitles are only a secondary rendering device (they are regarded merely as a second language 'commentary'), the multiple layers of a film text need to be accounted for. Using films has become a very 'up-to-date' teaching method in schools and in academia today. However, without a full view of what film actually is, such endeavors clearly miss their point. In the documentaries we subtitled there were many examples to illustrate this. For instance, the films often contained songs relating thematically or historically to the given period, e.g. a KarelKryl protest song in a documentary about the August '68 invasion or socialist work brigade brass band 'classics' in a film about the 1950s. Many inscriptions on buildings or the like were also the case, for example a 'Work sets you free' slogan over a socialist labor camp front gate. There were also many photos, shots of important documents, etc. These elements were an integral part of the film text and performed various functions. They needn't have been just illustrative of the era. Many of them helped to voice

an ironic undertone to the whole film, which helped to debunk the hypocrisies of official historiography. As subtitlers, our primary task was to evaluate to what extent such hints can be rendered effectively within the narrow scope of subtitles.

Being educated in translation studies, you often come across many theoretical metaphors which highlight a particular aspect of translation. Translation may be regarded as a product or, conversely, as a process; you may view it as creation or as a trade and so forth. While working on the subtitling project, we had a chance to view translation in a new way. Translation seems to be an opportunity to reassess images of history. Translating takes place in history, and the translator, thus, helps to create it.

The following three work groups of students participated in The Power of Witnessing project:A. Kovalíková, M. Petáková, A. Viderňanová; J. Balážková, L. Domaracká, J. Cinková; K. Sabová, M. Šimo, I. Tyšš. On behalf of all of us I would like to thank E. Janecová for her help and support, M. Perez for proofreading and advice on English usage, and the entire Department of Translation Studies for their enthusiasm. Participation in the project was a great professional and personal experience. Audiovisual translation is one of the newest and most progressive fields in translation studies. This is why we hope that there will be more projects like this one in the future. We also hope that Ms. Janecováwill carry on with her audiovisual translation seminars and organize even more AVT conferences and workshops like the Creative Reflections on Translation and the Audiovisual Translation Studios.

Nonverbal Communication and Its Importance in Interpreting

Reviewed by Emília Janecová

Katarína Welnitzová: *Nonverbal Communication in the Light of Consecutive Interpreting* (*Neverbálna komunikácia vo svetle konzekutívneho tlmočenia*). Nitra: FF UKF, 2012, 116p. ISBN 978-80-558-0077-6.

The interest in nonverbal communication that has arisen in recent decades mainly in linguistics, theory of communication, cultural studies, sociology and psychology has also found significance in the field of interpreting theory and practice. In analysing the usage and role of nonverbal communication during various types of interpreting situation it has become apparent that manifold nonverbal signals influence the communication encountered in the interpreting process and to a high extent affect its fluency and comprehensiveness. However, despite the fact the importance of nonverbal communication within face-to-face interpreting situations cannot be doubted, there are only very few works concerning this issue in academic environment.

The monograph by Slovak translation studies researcher Katarína Welnitzová Nonverbal Communication in the Light of Consecutive Interpreting assembles the very few partial findings related to interpreting and applies them to the particular situations that are present in consecutive interpreting. These are first introduced in connection to the theory of communication and later examined in light of particular aspects of voice characteristics and their role in nonverbal communication as well as in terms of body language elements relevant in consecutive interpreting.

As Welnitzová points out in her publication, it is consecutive interpreting that merges the main factors influencing the intensity, frequency and used expressions of nonverbal communication (see Welnitzová, 2012, p. 10), which has a strong impact on various aspects of the interpreting act. Compared to the previous less comprehensive works by domestic and foreign researchers, Welnitzová approaches these aspects systematically and thus reveals the ways of using the knowledge of nonverbal communication in order to support and facilitate the interpreting processes and communication. Her publication thus might be useful not only for translation studies scholars and interpreting trainees but also for novice and experienced interpreters.

Literary and Visual Dimensions of Contemporary Graphic Narratives

Reviewed by Zuzana Žilová

The monograph ‚Literary and Visual Dimensions of Contemporary Graphic Narratives' reflects a current need of the postmodern visually-oriented society. Although previous decades considered the ‚comic' a marginal and second-rate genre, the graphic novel has become a relevant medium with the possibility to convey much more information than the written word, moreover with an attraction suitable for a postmodern reader. Typically, the monograph reacts to the change in literary preferences in two parallel lines. Firstly, it introduces the graphic novel as a medium open to taboo topics by which it creates a competitive environment to other means of representation (fiction, movies). Secondly, it comments on a unique way of recording them in the dynamic connection of a visual image and a written text.

The work consists of six essays, each specifically contributing to the topic. The opening study by Mária Kiššová introduces the graphic novel as a unique genre with its specific features. As the author states, the comic started with stereotypical or cult figures (*Batman, Spider-Man or Superman*); however, it has gradually developed reliable characters who encounter important events of the Western world's history. Totalitarian regimes, racism, cultural and moral relativism, homosexuality, nudity, and a challenge to parental and religious authorities are topics fully recognized by the graphic novel.

The monograph puts an emphasis on the relation ‚image-word' that gives the comic novel its specific essence. There are various models described suggesting how these two could be combined in order to stress a significant advantage of a visual over exclusively written text. As Dana Mihăilescu shows, framed or frameless panels (images) could reflect the inner world of the child-protagonist *Marzi* and her attitude to communism in Poland. In this respect, as she claims, images serve as a great tool of capturing emotions, especially through the sensitive souls of children. In continuance of the ‚image-word' topic Marek Tomášik discusses the placement of the text and the image in a particular (right or left) part of the panel. The specific location made

a narrative dynamism move through visual pictures rather than a written text and separation of textual and pictorial elements may result in two-fold narratives. As all the studies confirm the panels' structure, their arrangement and contextual (in)coherence create a significant element in how to process, reflect and (re)interpret the world outside as well as inside. On the contrary, Michał Szawerna examines the reader's possibilities to construct the meaning of the visual stimuli from a cognitive perspective of top-down and bottom-up approach to pictorial representation.

The graphic novel accomplishes a goal of intersexuality, interdisciplinary and multi-layered structure to a great degree. As the study by Mária Kiššová and Simona Hevešiová indicates classical myths are means in which to express intimate dreams and desires, or biblical truths may question the infallibility of the big Truths. As many other postmodern genres, the images of the graphic novel are accompanied by other materials: family albums, newspaper articles, and diaries—reports enabling a reader to play with the textual and visual possibilities of the text.

The closing essay by Dan H. Popescu depicts the passionate adventure of the author in penetrating *Batman's story* evaluating metamorphoses of the genre that this character has been presented in. A comic, a graphic novel, a blockbuster movie and finally a task to novelize it made *Batman* a phenomenon crossing boundaries of a period, culture, age and fashion. This development indicates that the comic has suppressed

its marginality, focusing on the very centre of literary art. The monograph is meant to be a great contribution to its study for both groups: for academic scholars as well as for those concerned with the latest trends in literature.

Events

Public and Media Practices in the Era of New Media

Peter Mikuláš

International scientific conferences organized by the European and Interdisciplinary Network for Stakes and Uses of ICT (EUTIC) have a strong tradition and are always carried out in different European cities. Last year the conference took place at the University of Lorraine (Université de Lorraine) in Metz, France, on October 17th, 18th and 19th. EUTIC 2012 was organized in collaboration with the Research Centre on Mediations (CREM).

The theme of the eighth edition of the conference was *Publics and media practices*, and in this sense it was a systematical continuation of the previous EUTIC conference in Brussels entitled *Transformations of Organizations, Changing issues.* The organizers decided to focus on the question of how current information and communication technologies (ICT) transform the practical operation of media organizations in connection to the public. The conference was open to various approaches that had already been addressed at previous conferences (the informational, communicational, didactic, linguistic, sociological, cultural and psychological).

The event was attended by leading experts on media communication, particularly from the Francophone environment. As the conference took the form of a three-day event there were quite a large number of papers presented. Organizers created a total of 17 thematically specified sections. Among them the most attractive and interesting sections were devoted to social media, politics in the context of current media practices and new forms of journalism (especially participative journalism) resulting from the use of ICT.

The presented contributions opened up wider problems of creating the public at the present time with increasing domination of new media. The leitmotif that was carried throughout the conference was the thought that ICT clearly affect all phases of media-produced communication: they affect the production of media texts, their transfer to the audience, and also a character of social reality perceived by the audience. The interest of contributors was also focused on the young audience, "digital natives" who were born into a new digital environment (especially social media), so their relationship with new forms of communication is significantly different from the older generations. The conference had an ambition to provide answers to many questions related to ICT. Special attention was focused on these questions: are the possible differences more visible among young people? Do ICT create new publics? Can we observe radically different behaviours compared to

previous practices? How is it possible to organize the attendant measures of the public? As these and similar questions are related to the development process that takes place at the present time, the importance of the conference lies primarily in the right identification of current and future problems, which will allow media scholars to better focus their research.

Events

Word and Image in Contemporary Culture

Simona Hevešiová

November in Nitra (Slovakia) is never dull. That is when the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Constantine the Philosopher University organizes its *week for students*—a week-long project of lectures, workshops, discussions and seminars aimed at the students of the faculty that has been organized for the past six years. Each year there is a different thematic focus, and scholars and artists from Slovakia and abroad come to discuss their views on the given topic. The current trends of our daily postmodern reality, marked by the emphasis on visualization and images, inspired the organizers to provide space for an open discussion exploring the relations between visual and literary art. Therefore, during the week of 12-16 November 2012, the invited guests examined the symbiosis of word and image in contemporary art and literature.

The event was supported by several Slovak and foreign scholars and two prominent writers: the Slovak author Daniel Hevier and his American contemporary Steve Tomasula. Most of the presentations, some of which are published in this issue, focused on questions of literary representation and imagery in selected literary works or their film adaptations. The phenomena of graphic novels and digital literature,

which the students found highly engaging, were not omitted either. Moreover, Steve Tomasula, a well-known representative of multimedia fiction, introduced some of his experimental novels and thus opened a passionate discussion about the formal transformations of literary texts. Students thus had a unique opportunity to become familiar with current trends in literature and witness its creative metamorphosis firsthand.

This year's event, planned for 11-15 November 2013, will focus on the issue of imagination and fantasy in contemporary literature and art. Selected papers will be published in the next issue of *Ars Aeterna*, entitled *Lure of the Magical: Imagination in Contemporary Arts and Literature.* More information about deadlines and participation can be found at the Department of English and American Studies website (www.kaa.ff.ukf.sk).

Events

Creative Reflections upon Translation III.
Text Editing in Practice.

Emília Janecová

The third year of an annual event held by the Department of Translation Studies and Department of English and American Studies, CPU in Nitra, was again focused on actual issues in translation practice. After introducing interesting topics related to translation of literary texts (Creative Reflections upon Translation. Literary Translation in Theory and Practice, October 18, 2010) and translation for theatre (Creative Reflections upon Translation II. Translation and Theatre, October 24, 2011), this year's programme provided encounters with personalities of Slovak translation and editing practice.

The one-day event offered a number of lectures and workshops. Core issues of editor's work were discussed by experienced Slovak editors Anna Šikulová and Jaroslav Hochel. The situation and position of editors in current Slovak society was approached by the head of the Slovak Literary Translators' Society (SSPUL) Oľga Ruppeldtová; a famous publisher of Slovak literature Koloman Kertész Bagala contemplated the future of both domestic and translation writing. Inspirational was also a creative workshop with Janet Livingstone, a translator from the USA who translates from Slovak into English.

The great attendance as well as positive response show that cooperation between the academic environment and translation practice has become a crucial trend not only abroad but also in Slovakia. Therefore it is hoped it would be possible to continue with this event in the coming years.

Events

Atelier of Translation for Audiovisual Media II:
THEORY – DIDACTICS – CRITIQUE – PRACTICE

Emília Janecová

The scholarly and cultural event organised by the Department of Translation Studies, CPU in Nitra, the Slovak Non-Literary Translators' Society and the Slovak Literary Translators' Society has become one of the few domestic forums for discussion in the field of audiovisual translation. Therefore, as well as the previous year, its main aim will be to provide a platform for translation theoreticians, practitioners and translation studies students to present actual outlooks in this area of translation and initiate discussion on its further direction in the academic, institutional and commercial environment.

The programme will offer numerous lectures and discussions with translators and authors of film dialogues, film producers, directors and subtitlers, as well as with theoreticians and critics of audiovisual translation. The event programme will include famous personalities from the field of media and audiovisual translation, besides others, for instance dubbing directors Štefánia Gorduličová and Zoro Laurinc, and the famous translators Miroslava Brezovská and Rudolf Lesňák. Useful information will be provided during the practical workshops for novice translators and the three-day-long programme will be enlivened by film screenings with subtitles elaborated by students of the department.

The event will take place on 22-24 April 2013 in the Tatra Theatre Café, Old Theatre, Nitra. The programme will be published on the organisers' websites, social networks and translation forums at the beginning of April 2013.