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"Desindividuation" in Blake's "A Poison Tree": A Jungian Perspective

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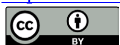

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Abstract

According to the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, literature, like dreams and myths, could be an outlet for the unconscious drives—personal and collective. William Blake's "A Poison Tree" is a case in point. The incidents in the poem, aesthetically, uncover a range of dynamic factors that constitute human inner personality such as Shadow, Persona, Trickster, Anima and Animus. According to Jung, these archetypes ought to be realized by the ego—the conscious part of the psyche. Only then, a person could reach a state of wholeness and self-realization—"individuation". To give the reader an insight into the value of this psychic harmony and balance, the poem, paradoxically, performs a mental situation in which the psyche undergoes a state of "desindividuation", wherein the ego is weak, unbalanced and driven by autonomous energies. The study, however, through the analysis of the metaphoric and symbolic structure of the poem, will demonstrate, as Jung believes, that the psyche is not static; its paradoxical mechanisms could, yet, interplay and reach a synthesizing phase.

Keywords

Carl Gustav Jung, "Desindividuation", The Unconscious, Archetypes, Self-Realization

1. Introduction

From a Jungian perspective, human psyche—spirit, soul or mind—is that power that could envelop one's thoughts, feelings and behavior, whether conscious or unconscious. At the same time, it could regulate and adapt the individual to the external world. "What he [a person] must do throughout his life span, Jung says, is to develop this inherent wholeness… and to guard against its breaking up into separate, autonomous, and conflicting systems" (Hall & Nordby, 1973: p, 33).

This innate process towards wholeness, this ideal state wherein latent potentials are actualized, and all elements of one's unconscious are brought into consciousness and integrated harmoniously into one's personality structure, is what Jung calls individuation. On the other hand, I use the word "desindividuation" to refer to a state in which a person's ego—consciousness—ignores the dynamics of the unconscious levels or is not motivated to discover them and differentiate them. Consequently, the psychic components—consciousness, personal unconscious and collective unconscious, remain disintegrated. Many aspects of the unconscious, therefore, continue to be unknown to the ego, broken, autonomous and even destructive.

As the unconscious part of the psyche is unknown, its constituents, Jung believes, could be manifested through dreams, myths, art… etc. He confirms that "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will, who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him" (Sreekumar, 2017). A poet, then, is not a mere individual but a "collective man." (2017) Based on this assumption, this study selects one of William Blake's poems, "A poison Tree" in order to analyze how this text, metaphorically, dramatizes an experience of "desindividuation", in which the archetypes, particularly, Shadow, Persona, Trickster, being unrealized, turn to be destructive. Taking the poem as a symbolic texture, the discussion will go further to illustrate the splits within human psyche, particularly that between the ego and the "inner voice." Yet, these opposed factors, as Jung believes, and as the textual analysis will demonstrate, could be synthesized and metamorphosed into a harmoniously integrated self.

2. "Desindividuation" in "A Poison Tree"

2.1. "A Poison Tree" as a Visionary Art

Jung divides the work of art into two categories: The "psychological" and the "visionary". Psychological art "deals with materials drawn from the realm of human consciousness" (Sreekumar, 2017). It represents those things that are experienced and understood by human psyche. Real experiences, such as the moral lessons of life, the emotional setbacks, the experience of passion and crisis of human destiny, fall within this realm. Visionary art, on the other hand, is "A primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding" (Sreekumar, 2017). Jung, then, enlarges the scope the artists; they go further to create something that touches human collective unconsciousness. According to Jung, all people share residual primordial memories and experiences from the processes of evolution. Much in the same way physical attributes are carried forward, so are attributes of the psyche. He uses the term the collective unconscious to signify this notion and he suggests that it is a source of great poetry (Sreekumar, 2017).

Based on this concept of poetry, one could list Blake's "A poison Tree" among

visionary arts, performing, through its metaphoric and symbolic fabric, the dynamics of Shadow, Persona, Trickster which Jung considers as archetypes, common to all individuals and could be manifested in human behavior. The shadow, for example, is clearly dramatized in the poem:

2.2. The Dynamics of the Shadow

The notion of shadow can be derived right from the beginning of the poem, "A Poison Tree":

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath; my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veiled the pole;
In the morning glad I see;
My foe outstretched beneath the tree. (Blake)

The first thing to be underlined in this poem is the lines of the first stanza that introduce the problematic situation in the poem:

I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

The speaker cannot express his anger to his enemy. As there is no outlet for this rough emotion, it dives into the personal unconscious, the hidden side of a human being wherein such emotions could flourish and develop into autonomous energies. This dark space is what Jung calls the shadow.

Moreover, referring to the other as a "foe" connotes that the speaker's psyche has already been subject to an accumulation of negative attitudes towards this person. The sense of anger, therefore, finds a fertilized underground—personal unconscious—to grow in. In a metaphoric style, this growth is dramatized through a gradual cultivation of an apple tree. The pronoun "it", then, implies that the tree is detached from the conscious "I", as it incarnates an unconscious growth of wrath. Furthermore, the speaker's "fears" and "tears" show his belief that the other, being a foe, is dangerous and could be harmful, unaware that these negative qualities are growing in his own dark side which he ignores. This

is the speaker's complex; it is this chasm that separates consciousness from the unconscious and which has a negative impact on his psyche. As long as he has not yet reflected on and scrutinized this internal negative side, he cannot control the outcome of the growing monster—revenge: The ending is, inevitably, a fatal incident, the demolition of the foe. One can ask the following question: Why does this unconscious activity—this swelling wrath—burst into an external act, a crime? To answer the question, it is worth discussing the active role of the Persona.

2.3. The Dynamics of the Persona

Persona is the social mask worn by a person, showing a false identity that adapts the latter into the external situation, and through which his/her unconscious mechanisms could affect the other indirectly. Explaining how one could be imprisoned within the constraints of the persona, Sylvie Ducretot says:

> Nous pouvons continuer toute notre vie à nous identifier à notre persona, à notre masque, celui que nous portons pour l'extérieur, et nous continuerons d'être des masques, seulement des masques. Pour être authentiquement libre dans nos limites essentielles et humaines, il faut parvenir à être soi-même (Ducretot, 2021: p. 14).

That is to say, we can continue throughout our lives to identify with our persona, to our mask, the one we wear for the outside, and we will continue to be masks, only masks. To be truly free within our essential and human limits, we must achieve to be ourselves.

The persona is represented in the poem through the speaker's "smiles". Smiles, that are suggesting forgiveness, kindness and good will, are, however, just a mask that adapts the speaker into social interaction. Being incongruent to his deep negative feelings, the smiles become dangerous; they are luring the enemy to be so confident that he dares approach the garden and taste its fruit. The poisonous apple is paradoxical: its 'bright' form stands for the persona; whereas, its poison symbolizes the invisible and negative energies of the unconscious. Such a mask justifies how the "I" could be manipulated by the persona. The "I" in this situation turns too weak to differentiate internal energies. This powerful dominance of the persona implies its being energized by another archetype: The trickster.

2.4. The Dynamics of the Trickster

"The trickster is a collective shadow figure," says Jung, "a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually" (Jung, 2003: p. 177). In the poem, the phrase "soft deceitful wiles" mirrors the trickster's deep cunning and manipulating stratagems. The wiles are "soft," for the Persona succeeds in hiding their vulgarity. This situation is the climactic moment of deindividuation—when psychic ele-

ments are widely opposed.

2.5. The Dynamics of the Anima and Animus

Historically, the apple tree has been associated with man-woman relationship: love, seduction, temptation… This reference to man and woman, from a Jungian perspective, could raise the notions of anima an animus which are the powers that have great impact on both sexes. These deep psychic elements, unlike the shadow, are not clearly manifested in the poem, a fact which indicates that they are not easily realized as Jung himself declared:

> "Though the shadow is a motif as well known to mythology as anima and animus, it represents first and foremost the personal unconscious, and its content can therefore be made conscious without too much difficulty. In this it differs from anima and animus, for whereas the shadow can be seen through and recognized fairly easily, the anima and animus are much further away from consciousness and in normal circumstances are seldom if ever realized" (Eternalized, 2022).

Being archetypes, the anima and animus functionality is not restricted to the people in the poem but transcends the framework of the text. Anima, its being negative or positive, depends on a man's experiences with the opposite sex, beginning with his mother. Animus impact, however, depends on a woman's relationship with her father. The apple tree, therefore, does not only reflect the shadow; it also triggers the reader's reflection on the archetypes that are deeper than the shadow.

3. Towards Individuation

To amplify deeper the poem, it is not only the tree which is an incarnation of or a hint to psychic activities, but the whole text could be taken, symbolically, as a psychological process. We have seen how the "I" represents the ego, and how this conscious part of the self, being mesmerized by the persona, fails to realize how wrath grows into a revengeful and destructive power. Indeed, the foe could represent, too, the speaker's inner voice—inner foe. From a Jungian perspective, one's negative attitudes towards others may be mere projection of one's inner flaws. That is, ignoring the contents of their shadow and make no effort to inquire into this psychic part, people unconsciously project certain profound attitudes onto people with whom they interact. Enmity, being attributed to another person, is indeed a reflection of the speaker's inner foe that he ignores and refuses to open a dialogical interaction with: "I told it not." This Luck of communication, which widens the chasm between two opposed psychic constituents: the ego and the inner voice—the conscious element and the unconscious element, could impede the process of individuation—self-realization.

Being too extroverted, too involved with external life, too obsessed with his persona—the mask of his social life, the speaker seems to be happy social-

ly—"smiles". On the other hand, he has ignored his inner voice, till it becomes unfamiliar, strange and uncanny, a fact which raises his "fears" and "tears." Ignoring the introversion process enlarges the gap between the "I" and the inner voice. The growth of wrath, incarnated in the form of a poisoned tree, does, finally, "kill" the inner voice which turns to be engraved in the unknown realm: the unconscious.

Fortunately, the psychic constituents, according to Jung, are subject to metamorphosis, and thus could gradually undergo the process of rebirth. Defining this genre of transformation, Jung maintains that "rebirth (renovation)… that is to say, rebirth within the span of individual life… may be a renewal without any change of being, inasmuch as the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its functions, or parts of the personality, are subjected to healing, strengthening, or improvement" (Jung, 2003: pp. 54-55).

Consequently, the foe that sounds to be destroyed, or rather alienated, could be resurrected in the form of a friend once the ego manages to communicate with this neglected yet important factor. The inner voice, its being a foe or a friend, depends on the individual as Jung confirms: "We should prefer to be always "I" and nothing else. But we are confronted with that inner friend or foe, and whether he is friend or our foe depends on ourselves" (Jung, 2003: p. 76).

It is, therefore, possible, through communication between the ego and the inner voice that their opposed concerns could settle at a synthesizing point. This act is stated in the first stanza; we are informed that communication takes place between the "I" and the friend, "I told my wrath"; consequently, the wrath, which suggests a rough dispute, is declared to be over: "My wrath did end." The friendship, relating the speaker to the other, represents, symbolically, the harmony between the two parts of the psyche—the conscious and the unconscious. In this regard, Jung has this to say

> It is the representation of a friendship between two men which is simply the outer reflection on an inner fact: it reveals our relationship to that inner friend of the soul into whom Nature herself would like to change us—that other person who we also are and yet can never attaint too completely (Jung, 2003: p. 76).

Nonetheless, for the inner voice to be transformed into a friend is neither an easy procedure, nor is it a permanent state. This is manifested in the structure of the poem. Notice that the interaction between the "I" and the friend is presented in two lines; whereas that between the "I" and the foe is narrated in fourteen lines. This longest narrative has a great role in the text; it sheds light on the complexities of the unconscious realm and its dark energies. In doing do, it drives one to grasp the value of the shorter incident. In one of his interviews, explaining Jung's basic concepts, Frederic Lenoire says that Jung takes alchemy as a symbol of the psychic dynamics, in that he considers alchemy of human being, namely human psyche, as a process of transmuting iron into gold. This echoes Jung's belief that one does not become luminous by looking at light but only

when one goes through one's own darkness (Lenoire, 2022).

Moreover, the brevity of the positive experience suggests, as Jung believes, that the psychic tranquility and balance is not permanent. To put it in other words, being summed up and structured in a parallel form—in the first stanza—the two incidents draw the reader's attention to the idea that human psychic development is based not only on a constant positive state of mind but basically on continuous dialectics between the positive and negative experiences, between accuracy and flaws, between the conscious and the unconscious. It is this fluctuating psychodynamic activity, according to Jung, which energizes a person's psyche, for it contributes to developing, integrating and harmonizing and–above all—synthesizing the diverging flows of the differing constituents and thus maintaining the individuals strive towards the fulfilment of self-realization.

4. Conclusion

The poem, "A Poison Tree," metaphorically, incarnates and hints at Jungian major archetypes: Shadow, Persona, Trickster, Anima and Animus. The implicit interaction among the speaker's shadow, persona and trickster strengthens the negative drives that transform, metaphorically, his wrath into a poisonous tree that kills the enemy. Additionally, the reference to the apple tree which usually alludes to man and woman relationship—love, seduction, redemption…—raises the psychic notions: anima and animus. Being archetypes, these two factors and their functions transcend the limits of the text, for they are the traits of all mankind.

To enlarge the scope of analysis, the study moves from a metaphoric analysis of the tree to a discussion of the symbolic structure of the poem as a whole. This latter dimension reveals how the conscious "I" and the unconscious "inner voice" are presented as opposed phenomena—the "I" and the foe. On the other hand, they are presented as friends when the "I" expresses its wrath. Being structured in such a paradoxical way, the two incidents reiterate the view that the ego, while oscillating between positive and negative energies, could motivate the psychic development; such a dialectic interaction could result into self-realization and transform subconscious constituents into fuels that empower the ego.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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"Deep Psychic Wounds": bell hooks' Healing Methods for African American Communities

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Abstract

bell hooks was a leader in the literary world who was unbashful in expressing her affection for the upliftment of African Americans in the United States. Majority of her works focus on the idea of white supremacy and how it has caused impoverishment and degradation among black communities. People within black communities suffer from low self-esteem, physical and mental health issues due to the racism, sexism and class oppressions that have become perpetual fixtures within society. Therefore, hooks' literature insist that it is important for African Americans to find methods towards overcoming their trauma to end their pain and feelings of inadequacy. A collection of six books is utilized to highlight the advice that hooks provides for African Americans who are distressed and need to recover from the long-term effects of systematic racism and sexism. She offers anecdotes to help black people realize that it is necessary to take an active role in healing from subjugation in order to live a more prosperous life. This bibliographic essay demonstrates that self-reflection and dismantling white supremacy ideals in society is essential in the process of healing and improving mental health within the African American community.

Keywords

bell hooks, Trauma, Healing Through Community, African American Community, Mental Health

1. Introduction

In recent years, more attention has been given to mental health concerns among African Americans. Many medical professionals have conducted studies that show a significant rise in mental health incidents in the black community. For instance, in 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

released a study that informed Congress that suicide rates had increased and were higher among black youth than white youth in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020a). The risk factors associated with higher suicide rates among black youth were children who lived at a low socioeconomic status, in impoverished conditions and experienced racial/ethnic discrimination. What's more, the Center for Disease Control reported that black females, grades 9 - 12, were 60 percent more likely to attempt suicide in 2019, as compared to non-Hispanic white females of the same age. Thus, African American youth are struggling to manage their mental health issues in a positive manner that does not lead to suicide or suicidal thoughts (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020b).

Along with mental health issues, the African American community is also dealing with their own distrust of the medical system. An article published by *Psychol Trauma* mentions the behavior of African Americans during the coronavirus pandemic. The article states, "African-Americans are less likely than Whites to have ongoing relationships with mental health providers; rather, they are more likely to engage with the mental health care system through emergency departments and primary care visits," (Sneed, Key, Bailey, & Johnson-Lawrence, 2020). African Americans' distrust of the medical system has a history in America that originates from slavery and still continues today. They have endured various discriminations ranging from stolen human cells, maltreatment, and purposeful misdiagnoses, therefore, causing many African Americans to seek medical attention when there is an emergency rather than when enduring a minor episode (Williams, Rosen, & Kanter, 2019).

For these reasons, it is vital to provide African Americans with alternative solutions to assist in improving their mental health and wellness in the United States. African Americans must take control of improving their mental health in the United States before further harm comes to their community. To present alternative methods to healing from mental health concerns, a collection of bell hooks' books is utilized to highlight the advice that she provides for African Americans who are distressed and need to recovery from the long-term effects of systematic racism and sexism. She offers anecdotes to help black people realize that it is necessary to take an active role in healing from subjugation in order to live a more prosperous life. This bibliographic essay delineates that self-reformation and dismantling white supremacy ideals in society is essential in the process of healing and improving mental health within the African American community.

Alongside bell hooks' books, other scholars and professionals have provided solutions to African Americans' mental health concerns. Monnica T. Williams Daniel C. Rosen, and Jonathan W. Kanter's *Eliminating Race-Based Mental Health Disparities: Promoting Equity and Culturally Responsive Care Across Settings* conducted research studies to address the disparities among African Americans in the United States (Williams, Rosen, & Kanter, 2019). Through

their research, these psychologists uncovered the hardships and discriminatory practices that keep African Americans from obtaining adequate health care. Further, these medical professionals provided strategies for clinicians to utilize in order to eliminate the disparities that African Americans experience.

This bibliographic essay's purpose is to address the African Americans and propose methods that will help their community to deal with mental health concerns before they are in dire straits. Thus, *Eliminating Race-Based Mental Health Disparities: Promoting Equity and Culturally Responsive Care Across Settings* does the opposite by not addressing African Americans, but rather speaks to clinicians who are likely to provide medical care to African Americans. The psychologists' work is a helpful aide towards educating medical professionals on how they can present better health care practices for African Americans to eliminate health disparities among their community (Williams, Rosen, & Kanter, 2019).

Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* highlights the white supremacy ideals that exist in the United States and how they have negatively impacted American society (Menakem, 2017). Menakem writes that both white and black people have suffered a great amount of distress from the idea that white people are hereditably superior. She insists that white supremacy thoughts must be eradicated from society so that those thoughts do not affect people in a manner that causes traumatic harm to their overall physical health.

The difference between our scholarship is that this bibliographic essay focuses on just the experience of African Americans in the United States and no other ethnicity. The focus of the essay is to ensure that African Americans are taking the necessary precautions to confront mental health issues when they arrive. Although this essay does tackle the issue of white supremacy ideal affecting the black community, it singularly addresses mental health among the African American community and not other effects that white supremacy thought has had on the body. In recent times, mental health and suicide prevention are among the biggest concerns for the black community, thus it should be mentioned exclusively (Menakem, 2017).

Apart from bell hooks, Toni Morrison is another prominent literary voice among the genre of African American literature. Her novels, *The Bluest Eyes and Sula* both address mental health issues among African Americans (Morrison, 1970; Morrison, 1973). The main character, Pecola, in *The Bluest Eyes* exposes the poor mental health that can develop from the effects of white supremacy ideals as she is obsessed with changing her eyes from brown to blue in order to be beautiful. In Morrison's work, it is apparent that Pecola had a mental breakdown or psychonic episode where she was no longer in touch with reality and only saw what she wanted to see. In *Sula*, Morrison highlights how African American soldiers suffered mental health issues once returning from war and how they were neglected by the health care system. Her novel shed light on the

disparities that African American veterans faced in the health care system and how that negatively impacted the black community overall. Both novels provide a in-depth sentimental description of the plight of African Americans who have mental health issues.

Although both hooks and Morrison are African American literary writers, this collection of essays focus more on hooks' published work that highlights her lived experiences. She has researched and written about the African American experience for many decades and provided books that were meant to uplift African Americans and help them improve their own lives. Her advocacy for improving mental health among the black community is revealed among the six books that are mentioned in this bibliographic essay (Morrison, 1970; Morrison, 1973).

2. Ending Thoughts of Domination

As a feminist and civil rights activist, bell hooks was a leader in the literary world who was unbashful in expressing her affection for the upliftment of African Americans in the United States. hooks studied white supremacy thoughts and how the adoption of those ideas caused impoverishment and degradation among black communities. When acknowledging issues concerning African Americans' mental health, she writes, "It is by now common knowledge that the trauma of white supremacy and ongoing racist assault leaves deep psychic wounds," (hooks, 2001). People within black communities suffer from low self-esteem, physical and mental health issues due to the racism, sexism and class oppressions that have become perpetual fixtures within society. Therefore, hooks' literature insist that it is important for African Americans to find methods towards overcoming their trauma to end their pain and feelings of inadequacy.

For instance, in her book entitled, *Writing Beyond Race,* hooks acknowledges that most people have historically written about class, gender and race in ways that reinforces ideas of domination (hooks, 2013). The most common of those ideas of domination are racism and white supremacy. She insists that racism and white supremacist thoughts are embedded in the subconscious of American society. For decades, African Americans endured racial stereotypes and racist rhetoric used against them in various forms of media and social settings. Even, President Barack Obama experienced overt racist attitudes while holding the highest office in America. What's more, racism and white supremacist thoughts constantly being disseminated throughout society causes African Americans to endure thoughts of inferiority. These thoughts of inadequacy harm and hinder the mental well-being of African Americans.

Therefore, hooks suggests strategies to end the propagation of thoughts of domination in the United States. She believes that African Americans as well as other Americans have the responsibility to end thoughts of domination. Everyone must see the need for racism and white supremacist thought to be eliminated from societal structures in order to heal and create a society that is more

equal and just. An American society that eliminates ideals of dominance provides African Americans with an opportunity to recover from previously experienced trauma (hooks, 2013).

3. Practicing the Teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Another antidote that hooks presents to end thoughts of domination is to practice the teachings and behavior of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King heavily employed love ethics into his activism as a civil rights leader in the mid-20th century (hooks, 2013). Love ethics is the idea to focus on the conditions of human beings and creating a community of caring rather than putting attention on wealth and world domination. hooks argues that there was not a more successful effort in dismantling hate and create a community of love and acceptance than what Dr. King was able to accomplish during the modern Civil Rights Movement. His methods for resisting violent retaliation against assailants proved to be more persuasive in gaining civil rights for African Americans than a brutal militant response. Thus, adopting Dr. King's teachings helps to heal from the effects of racism and white supremacist thoughts. African Americans should utilize love ethics in order to combat social evils and domination that exists in the United States. It is imperative for African Americans to repel and disengage in hateful speech and actions that led to their own mistreatment and degradation in America. Dr. King's teachings help people in the black community become active participants in overcoming their own mental health concerns by engaging in positive strategies to fight against their subordinate treatment (hooks, 2013).

4. Sharing Circles and the Gift of Interdependency

In addition to creating a community of caring, hooks encourages African American women to communicate and form bonds within their work and school environments. In the book entitled, *Sisters of the yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery,* hooks recounts her experience as a professor gathering with a group of black women students (hooks, 1993). She explains that the group of black women grew out of a need for women of color to unite and create a safe place for one another within a predominately white institution. hooks explains that these sister circles or sharing circles help black women to cope with Eurocentric institutions that disengage with people of color. What's more, it counteracts the negative effects of interfacing with people who continue to employ racist thoughts and behaviors at their jobs, schools, and public spheres. Together, black women were able to share their emotions and experiences with each other without the fear of skepticism from those who set out to discredit or are in disbelief about their encounters with racism and sexism. hooks insist that sharing circles recreates a sense of peace and security for black women that they once had living in their childhood homes, where they were frequently supported, celebrated, and loved.

Furthermore, sharing circles provides black women with a positive outlet so

that they are not holding on to stress and anger, which could later lead to physical and mental health issues. These groups allow black women to be heard and respected. Being heard and respected is important when trying to build self-esteem and fighting against racism, sexism and other forms of oppressions. It is especially important that black women value their bodies, as hooks states, "If black women have not learned to value our bodies, then we cannot respond fully to endangering them by undue stress," (hooks, 1993). Hence, a sharing circle is a necessary outlet for African American women to feel empowered and heal. Black women who feel empowered often lead healthier and more valuable lives. A significant part of leading a healthy life for black women is their ability to create a defense against the notions of white supremacy that bombarded them on a continued basis.

In the book entitled, *All About Love: New Visions,* hooks warns people against thinking that gathering together to talk about traumatic experiences creates a co-dependency among each other (hooks, 2018). Communities are created by people who share the same neighborhood, environment or common views and lifestyles. It is helpful if communities come together to create a healing environment where people can find love and support. hooks suggests that people within their own communities should examine healing-community models like Alcohol Anonymous (AA) to understand how to create a community of healing. When referring to AA hooks writes, "This community offers to individuals, some for the first time ever int their lives, a taste of that acceptance, care, knowledge, and responsibility that is love in action. Rarely, it ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion," (hooks, 2018). Developing sharing circles and healing communities is important aspect of life. People can recover from their past experiences if they are surround by a community of people who are sensitive to their distress and willing to listen and understand their pain. Thus, it is essential for African Americans to seek the same kind of community when they are faced with racist and sexist oppression. African Americans must willfully form communities that will allow them to heal from their traumatic experiences that they have endured by living in a society that suppresses their lived experiences. This healing process should lead to improving the mental health of the black community.

5. Black Men Defining Masculinity for Themselves

Albeit, black men living healthy and prosperous lives is contingent upon their ability to develop an identity for themselves independent from societal structures and mainstream media's depiction of masculinity in the United States. hooks' book entitled, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity,* addresses the pressure that is placed on men to uphold a tough-masculine persona in America (hooks, 2004b). American societies frequently promote patriarchal ideas of men and boys displaying toughness and anger in order to showcase their strength and dominance. She explains that both white and black men, when they are children,

are taught to only communicate fury and violent emotions openly in public. Further, they are restricted from showing fear, tenderness, and overt joy. However, African American boys and men are more often penalized and criminalized for their outwardly expression of rage than their white counterparts. The failure of black men to express their full emotions, while being victimized for their bouts of anger leads them to feel loss, depressed and confused about their own place in society.

For this reason, it is best for black men to liberate themselves from the confines of patriarchal masculinity that puts them in an unfair position to be identified as dangerous and violent. Black men must create their own definition of what it means to be an adult male. They should be able to display their own thoughts of manhood without it being seen as weak and insufficient. African American males' new-formed identity must showcase full ranges of emotions that provides them a sense of freedom and self-determination. This newfound freedom will allow them to flourish and thrive in their manhood. Moreover, black men who construct their own self-identity will rid themselves of the toxic behavior that hinders their mental health. Much like black women, black men's mental health is attached to their capacity to behave in a manner that allows them to feel emboldened and not marginalized (hooks, 2004b).

6. Acknowledging and Dismantling Institutional Racism

While highlighting the relationships between black men and women, hooks recognizes how African Americans' low self-esteem is connected to negative depictions of the black family. In the book entitled, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-esteem,* hooks mentions how black families have never fitted into the mold of the patriarchal family in the United States (hooks, 2004a). During the time of slavery in America, Africans and people of African descent were separated from their blood relatives and discouraged by law from forming familial bonds. African Americans were forced to form kinship-like bonds outside of the patriarchal family framework in order to survive the effects of the institution of slavery. Even more, hooks insists that continuous efforts were made to disrupt black families after slavery ended.

In the 20th century, hooks believes one of the main contributors to the negative portrayal of black families was Daniel Moynihan's "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." The Moynihan Report, as it is commonly referred to, reported on the impoverished lives of African Americans in the mid-sixties. hooks revealed that Moynihan compared lower-class black families to middle-class white families instead of white families with similar economic background. The report describes most black families as being matriarchal due to the fact that there was no father at home or the father was jobless. The idea of a matriarchal family is seen as a negative in comparison to middle-class families who often were patriarchal families. Americans were persuaded to believe that black families were inadequate because they did not have the same family structures as

white families. What's more, hooks believed that many black civil rights leaders began to adopt the same rhetoric as the Moynihan report to gain equal rights during the Civil Rights Movement in America (hooks, 2004a).

Consequently, leadership within the black community mirroring the same sentiments as the Moynihan Report eventually caused doubt and thoughts of failure among black men and women. Black men and women began to feel inadequate because they were not seemingly living up to the standards of modern society. hooks captured the common sentiments among the black men and women as she writes:

> If masculinity could only be achieved by protecting and providing for one's family, then under this system black men could never be "real men." Concurrently, if femininity could only be achieved by the emotionally fragile, fair-skinned, long-haired angel in the house who is unable to work outside the home, then black women could never be "real women." Prior to racial integration black folks developed their own modified versions of these standards, more fitting to the reality of black life. Had they not done so, no black families would have been places where healthy self-esteem could emerge (hooks, 2004a).

hooks provides helpful insight into how the promotion of the patriarchal family as the ideal family structure for African Americans threatens the self-esteem of black families. Moynihan and similar sociologists are unfair and only set out to harm black families' emotional and mental well-being by measuring them by unrealistic standards. It is vital for African Americans not to measure their lives by white supremacist ideals. As an alternative, black families should embrace the loving kinships and communities that they have formed for themselves. People loving themselves and those around them improve self-esteem, which aids in the development of positive mental health (hooks, 2004a).

In her book entitled, *Salvation: Black People and Love,* hooks recognize colorism as an issue that African Americans should resolve in order to heal from racist wounding (hooks, 2001). She acknowledges the historical significance of colorism on African Americans as she wrote:

> White supremacist practices of breeding through rape of black women by white masters produced mixed-race off-spring whose skin color and facial features were often radically different from the black norm. This led to the formation of a color caste aesthetic. While white racists had never deemed black people beautiful before, they had a higher aesthetic regard for racially mixed black folks. When that regard took the form of granting privileges and rewards on the basis of skin color, black people began to internalize similar aesthetic values (hooks, 2001).

African Americans have been conditioned, from the time of slavery in America, to believe in a color caste system that rewards light-skinned African Americans over their darker hued brethren. This caste system has caused low self-esteem

and divisiveness within the African American community that still exist today (hooks, 2001).

Hence, it is important for African Americans to disengaged from promoting colorism because it has a negative impact on how they value themselves, which result in poor mental health. hooks suggests for African Americans to continue the celebration of all various black hues that derived from the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s. African Americans should embrace one another's distinct beauty instead of letting it separate them. Furthermore, African Americans must be conscious of the historical social dynamics, like colorism, that continue to impede their mental well-being. Being unaware of how historically white supremacist thoughts have traumatized and harmed African Americans' mental health leaves people in black communities at risk of upholding racist systems that seeks to disrupt and violate their quality of life (hooks, 2001).

7. Conclusion

Overall, this compilation of bell hooks' work is in no way proposing that African Americans should refrain from seeking medical assistance and instead read American literature. Instead, these works present African Americans with a starting point towards addressing their mental health. By reading the selected six books, African Americans will comprehend the importance in creating a community for themselves that allows for healing and protection from mental as well as other abuses. They can begin to understand the importance of addressing their mental health and reaching out to others to heal. Mental health is a serious issue that must be addressed within the African American community. Traditionally, African Americans have not pursued help for undergoing traumatic experiences. Many people within the black community avoid reaching out to mental health professionals because their suffering, due to racism and sexism, is often a shared experience. These shared experiences cause many black people to not want to appear weak or unusual to others who have endured the same mistreatments. Hence, African Americans are refusing to seek treatment for their minor episodes of anxiety, stress, and depression far too often. Although their reasons for distrusting the medical profession are valid, black communities must find alternative solutions to manage their mental health. What's more, African Americans must learn to rely on each other to effectively resolve mental health issues that are the result of systematic oppressions. More research should be conducted on African Americans' mental health in order to increase their participation in addressing mental health concerns that are prevalent in their community.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Noah's Ark in *A History of the World in* 10 1/2 *Chapters*

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Abstract

Noah's Ark serves as the thread patching up the seemingly disorganized stores in this unique one of Julian Barnes' master pieces. A biblical symbol of "the grace in the eyes of the Lord" to the "righteous," the ark is nevertheless interpreted in a different way than in traditional exegetics. By close reading of each of the chapters in the novel, we hope to sort out the series of metamorphosis of the ark in different ages and Barnes' hidden theme from among the wrongly targeted criticisms. While the novelist confuses readers in juxtaposing contradictory comments frequently, we try to lay bare how the fleeting images he creates in the work reflect his agnostic hesitation in view of the moral implications imbedded in the biblical references and clarify the religious ambivalence behind his writing.

Keywords

Noah's Ark, Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in* 10 1/2 *Chapters*, Religious Ambivalence, Agnostic, Ethics Of Belief

1. Introduction

A History of the World in 10 1/2 *Chapters*, a novel in the form of a collection of related essays by the British novelist and Booker Award winner Julian Barnes, has been hailed as a brilliant masterpiece since its publication in 1989. Of the ten and a half chapters (half because one chapter carries the title of "parenthesis"), three stories either directly relate to Noah's Ark or indirectly to the event by two independent expeditions on top of the Mt Ararat in eastern Turkey in search of the remnants of the ark. Other chapters revolve around the biblical event by narratives referring to figurative repercussions resulting from either shipwrecks or vessel disasters. The remaining chapters all refer to the related issues. Although Brian Finney believes that the novel "is nothing but a series of digres-

sions from the supposed mainstream of history" (Finney, 2003), it sticks to the ark nonetheless, as it has nothing to do with the professional chronicling of history. Be it discursive, as many reviewers find the topics to be, the novel begins with a stowaway's version of the biblical event and ends with an updated heaven of our own time, with the intermediate chapters working on diversified aspects of the central theme of salvation.

Many a reader and critic alike can easily get misled by the title as to Barnes's real interest in the book. The first half reminds people of Sir Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World,* especially because Raleigh's history book also begins with *Genesis*. However, Chapter one sets up the note of a serious apology with the disguise of an irony or sarcastic style. Heavily reliant on Roland *Barthes'* ideas about discourse of history, Finney still emphasizes the importance of discursive issues revolving around history. "He would appear to agree with Barthes's objection to what he calls 'the fallacy of representation' attaching to traditional historical discourse."(Finney) In like manner, "A cursory reading of *A History*, even its mere title, suggests that the most prominent theme which threads through the novel is history, with love trying to provide an alternative to it," (Candel, 2001) as Daniel Candel says in *English Studies*. Gregory Salyer refuses to be solely attracted and fooled by the misleading title of the novel; he insists on threading all the chapters in the biblical image of the ark, improvising greatly whenever possible. It is interesting to find that all three critics quote one remark in the novel, as if to support the legitimacy of their points.

We fabulate. We make up a story to cover the facts we don't know or can't accept; we keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them. Our panic and our pain are only eased by soothing fabulation; we call it history (Barnes, 1989).

The reason why most critics become interested in a discussion about Barnes' views of history from the perspective of postmodernism does not only lie in the fact that the title itself is indeed intriguing, but also in the fact that Barnes does have either concentrated or occasional comments on the issue of history, directly and indirectly in many pages of the novel. It causes Gregory Salyer to believe that "Barnes does not present history as being trivial. On the contrary, he believes it to be vitally important." (Salyer, 1991) And for this reason, Salyer is able to discern that "Barnes' presentation of history as power has affinities with the work of Michel Foucault," (Gregory) and that the chapter ("Parenthesis") "is about the tension between love and history," and "that sacred history and truth are at war with love," etc. However, this same Salyer comments on the last chapter and has the following interpretation:

God can be created if he is desired, because God is just a question of what we want. Heaven is not imposed; instead, its existence and nature are determined by desire. There are some "old heaveners" who insist on the old structures of heaven such as prayer, churches, and worship, but old heaven is pretty much closed down. After all, the desire for old heaven is nothing more than one more desire leading to another.

Salyer's interpretation to Barnes' chapter about dreams may very well have stricken him as an insightful initial understanding to this one of Barnes' novels. His precise explanation of the idea in the last chapter should have shed him greater light in the appreciation of Barnes' real intention in the whole novel. It is true that sacred history is talked about in great detail and variety, but the sacred history and the stories about the ark lead us to lots of questions that need to be answered by any contentious readers. Who is Noah, indeed? What do the vessels mean? Does salvation mean salvation at all the times? What about Barnes' religion? How do we make sense of the disparate chapters in one masterpiece?

2. How the Noah's Ark Threads up the Stories

A reader's discerning power is often made visible by showing how she relates the seemingly scattered parts of a work with the whole narrative. Fortunately, we have a comparatively objective layout of the plot of the work by Salyer.

The book begins with a revisionist account of Noah's Ark then moves successively to: a story about terrorists taking over a luxury cruise liner; a transcription from a 1520 French courtroom which recounts why a specific group of insects were excommunicated from the church; a woman's story about the apocalypse of which she is the only survivor (or is she simply the victim of a schizophrenic delusion?); an account of the wreck of the Medusa with a subsequent deconstruction of Gericault's painting; an expedition by a young woman to Mount Ararat to intercede for the soul of her father; a re-examination of the story of Jonah and the whale; a look at the meanderings of the St. Louis, which in 1939 earned a group of Jewish refugees all over the Atlantic before finally returning to Europe; letters from an actor who is filming a reenactment of an historical event that recreates itself in the act of filming; a parenthesis about love; a project to recover Noah's Ark by an astronaut who receives a revelation while playing football on the moon; and finally, a new vision of heaven.

Salyer's excellent summery of the plot indicates that the whole work has indeed very little to do with history proper as a discipline. The ark and substitution of ark, the reincarnations of the ark—the rafts or other vessels, present themselves time and again for an unmistakable purpose of religious instigation: has the wickedness of humankind really been purged thoroughly since Noah's time? Does not the very reason why the ark was made in the first place persist that "the Lord was sorry that he had made mankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart"? (Genesis 6:6) This brings us back to Noah's Ark itself. As a microcosm of a three-layer Hebrew conception, the ark pivots the story of creation, as can be found in many other cultures. (Gooder, 2005) Biblical scholars have agreed that the Noah's story is based on much older Mesopotamian models, (Kvanvig, 2011) and the primary source is the Epic of Gilgamesh. (Nigosian, 2008) Quite contrary to the woodworm's complaint about the tyrant Noah, some version insists that Noah was engaged both day and night in feeding and caring for the animals, and did not sleep for the entire year aboard the ark. (Nebenzahl, 1997)

Today, in the Visitors' Center at Noah's Ark National Park, Turkey, you can find startling geographical facts about the suspected ark. Here are the top points to consider about the excavation according to the organization Ark Discovery International, Inc.:

1) The shape of a boat with pointed bow and rounded stern;

2) Exact length as noted in biblical description, 515 feet or 300 Egyptian cubits (Egyptian not Hebrew cubit would have been known to Moses who studied in Egypt then wrote Genesis);

3) It rests on a mountain in Eastern Turkey, matching the biblical account, and

4) It contains petrified wood, as proven by lab analysis… (Arkdiscovery, 2019)

Even so, very few contemporary believers would stick to the verbatim understanding of the Scripture for their faith. There is no scientific evidence for a global flood, and despite many expeditions, no evidence of the ark has been found. (Cline, 2009) Most of the expedition resulted in pseudo archaeology; the others are but natural sedimentary formations. (Collins & Fasold, 1996) What makes us most interested is why Barnes should have the woodworm's view of this part of the sacred history. The Noah's Ark, one of the numerous parables in the Holy Bible, would challenge the most intelligent ones, once taken to mean literal history. One obvious problem is, for instance, the water supply. No one would imagine that the ark should have miraculous fittings to make tap water supply available as absolutely needed. The great difficulties in housing all living animal types, and even plants, would have made building the ark a practical impossibility. (Moore, 1983) The parable carries with it a simple teaching that God once became resentful of human wickedness and man should repent for his deeds. If this is the case, then, Barnes' disparate chapters make a lot of unified senses. Let's look at these chapters from a different perspective.

Chapter one sets up the tone for the whole book. As it is an account of the same event in the Genesis, the stowaway's perspective makes it possible to confound everything without having to defend oneself. Let us hear the woodworm of its complaints. First, the ark is not one single boat, but a flotilla of eight ships, making it possible for Noah the patriarch to entertain his family with pleasures. Secondly, Noah and his family bring extinction to many species on the flotilla with gluttony. Thirdly, Noah's youngest son (never mentioned in the Genesis) Varadi died at the age of eighty-five on the voyage that brought a great loss to the human gene pool (one fourth) and to the earth's species (one fifth). And fourthly, this same God-fearing man of Noah "was a monster, a puffed-up patriarch who spent half his day groveling to his God and the other half taking it out on us." (Barnes, 1989) As if these have not been enough, "Ham's wife had been putting its horn to ignoble use," (suggesting bestiality) and this "bad-tempered, smelly, unreliable envious and cowardly" Noah and his family casseroled the unicorn to show their gratitude for saving the life of Ham's wife in a gale. Numerous other instances show the same idea that Noah's Ark is a leaky one, hu-

mankind needs a grain of salt to believe the narration.

Chapters six and nine are two stories about the search of Noah's Ark, the former search coming as a result of Miss Fergusson's Deist belief and the latter from God's direct calling on top of the moon. "In the world of divine intent, benevolent order and rigorous justice," Colonel Fergusson saw "only chaos, hazard and malice." (Barnes) The deist daughter decided to intercede for her atheist father on top of Mt. Ararat, for she believed that her father failed to have recognized God's eternal design and its essential goodness,

> For instance, trees bearing edible fruits were made easy to climb, being much lower than forest trees. Fruits which were soft when ripe, such as the apricot, the fig or the mulberry, which might be bruised by falling, presented themselves at a small distance from the ground; whereas hard fruits, which ran no risk of sustaining an injury by a fall, like the cocoa, the walnut or the chestnut, presented themselves at a considerable height. Some fruit-like the cherry and the plum—were molded for the mouth; others—the apple and the pear—for the hand; others still, like the melon, were made larger, so to be divided among the family circle. Yet others, like the pumpkin, were made of a size to be shared amongst the whole neighborhood, and many of these larger fruits were marked on their outer rind with vertical divisions, so as to make apportionment the easier. (Barnes)

We quote these lengthy sentences to suggest that as an agnostic, Julian Barnes may very well agree with such Deist observations that God's plan is so manifest in nature and that the moral law and natural law must have the same law maker. Barnes does not proclaim anything concerning his personal belief, though he frequently shows us the dichotomy of belief in the characters. Take this chapter for instance. While the daughter holds it to be self-evident that "the sin of the world was purged by the waters of the flood," his father scolds her for the "myth of the Deluge (the reality of Noah's Ark)." The daughter dies on top of Mt. Ararat.

Not entirely a coincidence, Barnes has his ninth chapter "Project Ararat" to present us an equally absurd and dogged search for the same ark. After hearing the divine command of "Find Noah's Ark" and ruling out any possibility of hallucination, the former famed astronaut Spike Tiggler commenced his project. Here is the list of "payload" he has for the prolonged search (after throwing away his comrade's box of rubbers) as against the simple device carried by Ms Fergusson a hundred and fifty years ago:

> Light-weight camping equipment, vitamin pills, a Japanese camera with one of the new zoom lenses, credit cards, American Express travelers' checks, running shoes, a pint of bourbon, thermal socks and underwear, a large plastic bag of branflakes to keep them regular, anti-diarrhea tablets, an infra-red night-sight, water-purifying pills, freeze-dried vacuum-packed food, a lucky horseshoe, flashlights, dental tape, reserve batteries for their electric

> razors, a pair of scabbard knives sharp enough to cut gopher-wood or disembowel an assailant, mosquito repellent, sunburn cream and the Bible.

One and a half centuries in time do mean great differences in the kind of mountaineering equipment available, but does the lapse of time also bring hopes to a mission impossible in the first place? Barnes does not answer such a question. We are succinctly informed, however, of the fact that the skeleton they found in one of the caves on top of Ararat belongs to Ms Fergusson instead of Noah. The proclamation that "We found Noah" Spike Tiggler made in the cold darkness has its repercussions time again since then.

Chapter two and the third story in chapter seven make a good pair. The hijacked cruise liner poses an embarrassing dilemma to challenge our moral judgment on the age-old strife between Christianity and Islam. Likewise, the story about the liner St Louis (in fact a death boat) tortures the conscience of not only Havana, but that of most Christian countries. Barnes makes the Arabic terrorists proficient in English and well educated, sensible whenever possible. They separate the Americans from the Japanese and Canadians, for example, in custody, "separating the clean from the unclean," as if fitting these animals into their respective Gopher wood partitions. For negotiating, they convince the victims that shooting is a must; while at the same time, the turn of shooting is logically arranged so that those who harm the Arabs the most must take the blame first. Problems in the Middle East are thus summed up in such a way:

> European guilt over the Holocaust being paid for by the Arabs. The Jews having learned from their persecution by the Nazis that the only way to survive was to be like Nazis. Their militarism, expansionism, racism. Their pre-emptive attack on the Egyptian air force at the start of the Six Day War being the exact moral equivalent of Pearl Harbor. The refugee camps. The theft of land. The artificial support of the Israeli economy by the dollar. The atrocities committed against the disposed. The Jewish lobby in America. The Arabs only asking from the Western Powers for the same justice in the Middle East as had already been accorded to the Jews. The regrettable necessity of violence, a lesson taught the Arabs by the Jews, just as it had been taught the Jews by the Nazis.

It is inspiring of Barnes, after the above pouring out of troubles on the side of the Arabs, that the number of Arabic hijackers is made eight: the number that reminds us of the Noah flotilla: the Noah couple plus their three sons and wives. Equally ironic is the voyage of the liner St. Louis. The more than 900 Jews on board the swastika boat for the half-dozen Gestapo agents to "dispossess, transport and exterminate" are like attractive bait to poison the conscience of the host nations along the way. But why Julian Barnes is so cautious so that "the Germans with whom they had dealings were courteous, attentive and even obedient," like the hijacking Arabs in the liner cruise, remains answered. The clue provided is a casual comment: "Perhaps their escape from Germany felt as miraculous as that

of Jonah from the whale." Havana promised to take in the Jews, but finally everything turned out to be blackmail, "in which money is no less important than principles or laws, and often sounder than either of them." As if being afraid of readers' forgetfulness, when a small number of Jews have an opportunity to disembark the boat, Barnes quickly asks: "But how would you choose the 250 who were to be allowed off the Ark? Who would separate the clean from the unclean? Was it to be done by casting lots?" The casual mentioning of casting lots surely refers to the biblical accounts of the same act between Saul and his son Jonathan, and also of the Roman soldiers casting lots for the crucified Jesus' garments.

The boat that "shamed the world" had to leave off Miami, the Dominican Republic, many South American coastal countries, almost proved that the world's supposed concern was mere hypocrisy before the boatload was taken jointly by Holland, Brittan and France. "Their wanderings at sea," Julian Barnes does not forget to add, "has lasted precisely forty days and forty nights." This reference of the biblical period of time coincides precisely the duration of Moses' stay on Mount Sinai and of Jesus' stay in the wilderness.

Three more stories, "the Survivor," "Shipwreck" and "Upstream" are about boat or raft too—the ark in a somewhat different sense. This avowed escaper from an imminent nuclear disaster experienced a schizophrenic seizure when this newly-wed woman could not tell her personal disaster from an imagined natural catastrophe. What with the pairs of southern-moving reindeers from Chernobyl (carrying with them a radioactivity level of more than 42,000 Becquerel) "like the animals that went into the ark," and what with a husband who fooled around in nightclubs, the woman herself escaped into a small boat with her pet cat under imagined and real pressures. In "shipwreck," exactly four vessels (the Noah family take up four vessels too) comprised a French expedition for Senegal, with the frigate striking the reef at high tide and finally getting lost. A raft was made, 150 personnel went into it, but after two weeks of mutiny and cannibalism, only one tenth survived and was saved. Then at great length, Barnes labors on "how [do] you turn catastrophe into art?" "Upstream" portrays an actor enacting a missionary in the rain forest. When the raft capsized in the cold stream, killing his partner and repeating an age–old disaster, this love-letter writer revealed himself as a monster type.

Chapter three, "the Wars of Religion," seems to be an independent one from the rest of the chapters, one that deals with a medieval case against a woodworm. But this time, the Bishop's throne is at stake, which crumbled after being eaten away by the woodworm. A bishop's throne may not be a raft or an ark, but in some sense, it serves the same purpose of saving the dignity and therefore humanity. The trial is to excommunicate the woodworm and bring them under control, but Barnes makes use of it to exemplify other "wars" of religion that try to ridicule anyone (in this case anything) and show the kind of absurdity established religion can incur.

The half chapter, "parenthesis," and the final chapter of "the dream" get overly concerned about love and paradise; they concurrently and expressively labor on the theme of the whole novel. While love serves as one way to prove the existence of God from a metaphysical point of view, the paradise explains in a weird way why the sinners can never be saved in other ways other than a belief in His word.

3. The Various Images of the Same Ark

Reworking the Noah's Ark literarily, Barnes has some alteration and complaint without overt blasphemy (it's only a woodworm's view, after all). The ark was more like a prison ship full of stool pigeons instead of a nature reserve; The woodworm was not specifically chosen, therefore its survival should be against God's will; It rained for about a year and a half and the waters were upon the earth for a hundred and fifty days; Noah's family comprised a whole flotilla of eight boats that were as oppressive as any royal family today; God should have wrath with his own creation. All in one: the Noah's Ark is a mission impossible!

But what does Genesis, the Word of God tell us about Noah's Ark? We know that God "saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth" and "was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth and it grieved him to his heart;" (Genesis 6:5,6) that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God;" (Genesis 6:9) that Noah is to "make yourself an ark of cypress wood;" (Genesis 6:14) and that "God blessed Noah and his sons." (Genesis 9:1) Attempts to stretch the exegetics to irrelevant applications have all ignored the essential element of revelation. In "The State-contingent Approach to the Noah's Ark Problem," for instance, Neil Perry and Sriram Shankar labor on how the standard Noah's Ark model assumes only one state of nature, how a state-contingent approach to the Noah's Ark problem is developed, how the state-contingent species-ranking equation is derived, how different species are boarded on the ark and Noah prepares for climate change and how the state-contingent approach leads to a more explicit and detailed allocation (Perry & Sriram, 2017).

St Peter once compared this salvation through water to one in baptism. (1 Pt 3:20-21) St. Hippolytus of Rome believed that the ark was a symbol of the expected Christ. Hippolytus furthermore stated that the ark floated to and fro in the four directions on the waters, making the sign of the cross, before eventually landing on Mount Ararat. (Lanier, 2018) The dove and olive branch came to symbolize the Holy Spirit, the hope of salvation and eventually, peace. (Cohn, 1996) But, on the whole, science denies the Deluge. Flood geology contradicts the scientific agreement in geology and paleontology as well as that in related disciplines such as chemistry, physics, astronomy, cosmology, biology, geophysics and stratigraphy. (Young, 1995) Barnes need not worry about how the event of Noah's Ark worries the stowaway of a woodworm because even revealed human beings have problems understanding God's grace in the Deluge. Our ap-

preciation of the obedience of the righteous and God-fearing Noah is proportional to our belief that to an all-mighty God, there should not be any mission impossible.

In the two searches for Noah's Ark in the novel, one taking place in the beginning years of the 19th century when the Enlightenment was still on its peak years, the other after the moon landing. The hunting for relics has a lot to do with psychology, but very little to do with religious truth, if there be any religious truth or any absolute truth to speak of. Searching for Noah's Ark has never been any sanctified effort organized by any established religion, the latest of which took place in 2010 when a united expedition from Hong Kong and Turkey found the remains of a petrified ark on top of Mt. Ararat. Though Ms Fergusson died before getting any nearer to the truth about the ark, and though her body more than a hundred and fifty years later was almost mistaken to be that of Noah's, her Deistic eloquence should have convinced a lot of atheists of his father' kind. In "Project Ararat," the former astronaut was transformed on top of the moon, believing in the reality of an entirely different world where providence rules over everything. In both these two searches, the point is not the discovery of Noah's Ark itself as described in the Genesis, it is the searching for something steady, reliable and everlasting as religion promises to guarantee that enabled these two spiritual hunters to overcome inconceivable difficulties. In a sense, Barnes seems to suggest, the self-incurred failure in finding the physical ark through Project Ararat, is by no means outwitted by the national scientific expedition of Project Apollo.

The cruise liners in chapter two and the third story in chapter seven suggest a Noah's Ark in irony. The hijacked cruise liner stopped short of finding and enjoying the forsaken Minoan civilization. Showing no signs at all of the so-called Stockholm syndrome, the tour leader spouts an eloquent speech about why they hit on this liner and why they have to kill in order to talk with the western governments for the release of their freedom-fighter brothers. To the hijacking and hijacked parties, the cruise liner serves as a safe vehicle where the short stay on the high sea can lead to a purpose. Although the hijackers failed at a great price at last, the meeting on the sea leaves a lesson to be learned, one that those not on board Noah's Ark must also bear in mind: the human wickedness that once enraged God can surface time and again to incur similar disasters.

The other liner, St Louis, narrates a story much as a contrary one. More than 900 Jews, half of which were children and women fresh from concentration camps, booked on the transatlantic voyage and became "tourists traveling for pleasure," only to be dumped along the coast of America with no more than ten Reichsmarks in their pockets. The Nazis Germany flew the swastika on the ship, but the real stigma was carried by all those Jews on board to see how the "shabby Untermenschen scuttling away like rats." (Barnes, 1989) Reporters from major news agencies shouted to the shameless world for the outrageous humiliation, but to those desperate Jews, the liner was no less than a contemporary Noah's

Ark, embodying the only hope of survival. When some of the passengers turned themselves into real pleasure-seekers, they are described as feeling "miraculous as that of Jonah from the whale." This intentional reference to the biblical source serves in turn as a mockery to the doomed Jews. By this symbolic ark, God is seen again purging the world of wickedness in a metaphorical way.

Then the "survivor" who loved reindeer and who "imagined that each pair was man and wife, a happy couple, like the animals that went into the ark." The south-going reindeer that have been poisoned by overdose radiation signify a heavenly warning that a hiding place must be found. But where to find a better place than a boat out to the sea with herself and the pet cat? This is, too, an ark, notwithstanding only one human and one animal within. Why does she have such great confidence in the one-passenger ark? "If only you could believe that the reindeer can fly, then you'd realize anything is possible. Anything." Why, again? Because "they butted and raged at one another, charged headlong, tangled horns. They fought so hard they rubbed the skin off their antlers." Aren't the wicked human beings doing the same thing? Haven't they been doing so since Noah's time? The building of the original ark was incurred by the same wickedness that we see today, so the perennial problem has been instilled into our nature, or so this woman believes.

Human beings go upstream sometimes as salmons often do. In the "Upstream," the eighth chapter, two Jesuit missionaries argued about how to baptize the local Indians in a Venezuela rain forest. When the raft poled by the Indians capsized, the two missionaries disappeared, never to be found anywhere. About a couple of hundred years later, when a production team came to the same site enacting the unfortunate scene on the raft, one of the two actors died, with assistance and witness of the descendants of the original Indians here to play their ancestors. Even with facilitating safe devices and precaution, the raft proved to be anything but a reliable vehicle. The rain forest hailed earlier by the crew as paradise now turned into hell. The same big trees and the same primitive Indians, but the capsizing of the raft made all the difference. To the narrator of the story (one of the two actors), his personal affair went down, too, as a synchronous occurrence. Then Indians are "so open, so direct. There they are, not a stitch on them, they say what they mean, do what they want, eat when they're hungry, make love as if it's the most natural thing in the world, and lie down to die when they reach the end of their lives." They don't know the difference between reality and acting, though agile and sympathetic at the same time. The narrator experiences such great spiritual changes as to think of giving up his performing career and moving into real nature with the woman he loves. But pondering over the incident of a capsized raft, he changed again, into one confused more about the differences between civilizations. In the jungle, he once thought of sacrificing for art as the missionaries for their religion. Now,

> There's another possibility—that the Indians were actually following the argument between the Jesuits and understanding it a lot better than we

> thought. […]So maybe the Indians understood this and tipped up the raft because they were trying to kill Father Firmin (me!) so that Father Antonio would survive and baptize them. […] and the second time round they saw they'd killed Antonio, which was quite the wrong result for them so they ran away because it had all gone wrong.

Then back into civilization, back into Caracas, he is found slipping again into his creepy love triangle and is restored into his former self. Julian Barnes labors to suggest that a raft, either on the high sea or in the thick forest, does not distinguish itself from Noah's Ark, whatever use it may be put into.

4. The Hidden Theme of Religious Nostalgia

"Despite the book's chronological and narrational irregularities," Brian Finney says of the book's structure, "the reader's natural urge to make connections between these disparate segments of text, to convert this sequence of varying narratives into a larger overarching narrative, is given encouragement by various connective devices in the book." (Finney, 2003) We might as well entitle this narrative as "a history of the world from the perspective of the ark." In analyzing the keynote that reverberates in many seemingly discursive chapters, Finney continues to say, "An ark/ship that is supposed to protect its occupants from the storms of the world turns into a prison ship for animals and humans alike, both of whom are victimized by being categorized as the other by those in control." To such overarching metanarrative attempts, Hayden White the 'demythologiser' of history comments that the narrative qualities of history enforce narrative patterns like beginning, middle, end, or closure, which may not always reflect accurately the 'real' historical processes. (White, 1989) About the themes of the book, it is interesting to take note of a warning by Daniel Candel: "However, it is open to question whether with *A History* Julian Barnes is ultimately able to present issues which are at present satisfying from an intellectual point of view. It may be that the predominance […] threatens the balance of the novel." (Candel, 2001) But obviously, Candel bases his observation on a wrong premise that Barnes centers on history and science in the book. To this, Gregory Salyer has the candid statement: "Barnes is becoming quite adept at this tactic […] pulls back the curtain at times to peer into philosophical and religious theory via the expression of his characters." (Salyer, 1991) He further distills that "The problem of history is foregrounded, but the problem of the holy is nearly always in the background pressing to be heard. It is with an eye toward this problematizing of the sacred along with history that the novel will be examined."

In an inspiring book of a triptych story, Julian Barnes wrote the following comment on what the ascending of man in terms of their understanding to the concept of God means to Europeans then and now.

When we killed—or exiled—God we also killed ourselves. Did we notice sufficiently at the time? No God, no afterlife, no us. We were right to kill Him, of course, this long-standing imaginary friend of ours. And we weren't going to get

an afterlife anyway. But we sawed off the branch we were sitting on. And the view from there, from that height—even if it was only the illusion of a view—wasn't so bad (Barnes, 2008).

To a reader unfamiliar with Barnes' religious views and changing concerns about life and death, the above-mentioned paragraph may puzzle her greatly in that the messages in it seem to contradict one another. Simply put, what Barnes intends to convey to the readers is but the psychological need in the ethics of belief. When he refers to God as the "long-standing imaginary friend of ours" and believes that "we weren't going to get an afterlife anyway," he nevertheless does not rule out other possibilities and therefore refuses to "saw off the branch we were sitting on."

Barnes' obsessions with the fear of death and his related worries about the truthfulness of the existence of God reveal themselves in the opening statement he makes in the first chapter of *Nothing to be Frightened of*. "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him. [...] I asked my brother, who has taught philosophy at Oxford, Geneva, and the Sorbonne, what he thought of such a statement, without revealing that it was my own. He replied with a single word: 'Soppy.'" (Barnes, 2008) The same "soppy" psychological undertone, however, pinpoints in fact Barnes' logical elimination of the legitimacy of choosing among the prudential, moral and epistemic norms.

In practices of belief formation, we follow the three different types of norms and attach corresponding values to each of them. Most scholars, the English philosopher John Locke and Cambridge mathematician and philosopher William Clifford, for instance, insist on the epistemic and therefore moral norms that govern our belief practices; but William James the American psychologist stresses the prudential norm. (Andrew, 2018) If a certain proposition helps us to a beneficial purpose and promotes us toward that goal, then believing that proposition is something prudent to do at first sight. In such cases, sufficient evidence could and should not hinder us from taking it as true or acceptable. In other words, James' pragmatism looks to the results or consequences of an action to justify belief ethics. For instance, numerous medical facts are created by the application of different belief norms, especially in cases when patients are diagnosed as terminally ill. Faith does create facts.

Of course, when Julian Barnes improvises the belief dilemma into the metaphor of sawing down the tree branch, he is actually referring to an ancient series of questions concerning our belief system.

Is it ever or always morally *wrong* (or epistemically *irrational*, or practically *imprudent*) to hold a belief on insufficient evidence? Is it ever or always morally *right* (or epistemically *rational*, or practically *prudent*) to believe on the basis of sufficient evidence, or to withhold belief in the perceived absence of it? Is it ever or always obligatory to seek out all available epistemic evidence for a belief? Are there some ways of obtaining evidence that are themselves immoral, irrational, and imprudent?

It is one thing that one has faith in one or the other of our everyday introspection; it is quite another cup of tea when we contemplate on something so fundamentally critical like our faith in the existence of God. Such choice is what James termed as a "momentous" decision. We have every reason to believe that Barnes has full understanding to the very nature of our intellectual or moral capacities enabling or disabling our attempts at securing a sense of substantial justification. Logically, James believes that our habits of belief formation, maintenance and relinquishment are not always dependent on evidences that are in many cases either unavailable intellectually or contrary to each other but equally compelling. People "have both an intellectual and a moral right to believe in God, even though by their own admission they lack sufficient evidence to justify this choice."

In view of the disputes on the ethics of belief and in regard of the many contradictory religious comments in his works, we might as well draw a conclusion that Julian Barnes is actually on a typical process of belief relinquishment. He has full sympathy with those in psychological need of the existence of an almighty God, but considers it morally and intellectually wrong to believe in the omnipotence of God without sufficient evidence—the Omnipotence Paradox, as is traditionally postulated.

In the bulk of works by Julian Barnes, religion has been playing a key role; the loss of religious dimensions is a theme that preoccupies Barnes ever since his first novel *Metroland* (1980). However, only in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* can we find that the issue of religion has moved to the very fore and has incurred numerous discussion about the author's reflections upon art, mortality and the sense of living a good life. Meandering between the lines are his illustrations and lamentations for the consolations of religion which are probably the most conspicuously present. By juxtapositions, parallels and contrasts, by connections that depend on irony or accident, instead of the traditional chronological ordering favored by historians, Barnes illustrated numerous examples of disbelief in such revealed truths as the existence of God and sacred history, but nobody's fear gets really allayed by such disbeliefs. The problem lies, as Barnes reiterates in many chapters, not in the promises of religion, such as a paradise, but in human nature, in the excessive desires within that can never be satisfied.

The stories narrated in various forms in *the History* raise questions that need to be answered. For this reason, Julian Barnes jumps in and talks in the first person about love. He spares no efforts first of all in negating love as a concept for conjugal union, "a promised land, an ark on which two might escape the Flood. It may be an ark, but one on which anthropophagy is rife; an ark skippered by some crazy greybeard who beats you round head with his gopher-wood stave," (Barnes, 1989) but then he slips into the following affirmations:

The history of the world becomes brutally self-important without love. Our random mutation is essential because it is unnecessary. Love won't change the

history of the world, but it will do something much more important: teach us to stand up to history, to ignore its chin-out strut. […] Love makes us see the truth, makes it our duty to tell the truth.

We've been talking about the history of the world, but, except for a blind power of instinct, Barnes appears to believe, there can be found no better word than love to explain the driving impetus behind the movements of human societies. Love may not be a "transforming wand," but "a random development, culturally reinforced, which just happens to be love rather than something else? I sometimes think so." He cites Tertullian to support his belief that love is essential because it's unnecessary, the same way Christian belief holds true because of its impossibility. Finney insightfully concludes that "his book appears to indicate that there are as many versions of history as there are forms of discourse, and yet that certain characteristics of human nature persists in surfacing no matter what discursive formation is employed." (Finney, 2003) In other words, arks, rafts, ships and the like may provide temporary safety to human beings; certain characteristics of human nature have never changed since Noah's time. The biblical message sent to us through the fable of Noah's Ark, and also through numerous reincarnations of the ark, is but the love in the revealed teaching. These events suggest in various forms continuity beneath the bewildering variety of human activity over the ages.

Once confessing "a happy atheist," (Barnes, 2008) Julian Barnes demonstrates his ambivalence toward religion throughout his texts. On the one hand, he longs for the sense of order, harmony and safety, in all, the harmless illusions that religions guarantee to provide; on the other hand, the metaphysical dimension in his pondering of life prevents him from lingering on the impossible. The tension between the two finds its expressions in most of his works, yielding to the metaphor that one should not saw down the tree branch on which one sits.

5. Conclusion

The seemingly disparate chapters in *The History of the World in* 10 *and* 1/2 *chapters* are in fact well-balanced semantically and metaphorically, through implied connections and hidden images, all revolving around the religious image of the ark and its numerous reincarnations—all-embracing but not delusively abstract at all. As in most of his major works, the religious ambivalence finds its expressions in various forms and genres. The central image of the ark represents one of the most striking forces behind Julian Barnes' creative writing and his preoccupation with the lingering problem of the loss of religiousness. The Noah's Ark, the hijacked and outlawed ships, the rafts of escape and various attempts to locate the lost ark reveal the lurking longing for a metaphysically justified religious sense of order, security and significance of life. This religious ambivalence originates from Barnes' rationality as an atheist in his younger years, but also from his nostalgia and spiritual experiences with history and art in his more mature writing.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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"Memory Is Identity": Probing into a Persistent Barnesian Obsession

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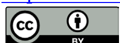
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Abstract

Most of the fictional and nonfictional works by Julian Barnes deal with identity-related memory. By raking up the theme of memory, we are led to some interesting discoveries about the author's persistence in his postmodernist literary investigation into the nature of narrative art and the ethical implications thereof. A logical development is expected to be found between the two through close textual analysis, so as to reveal aspects of his unique moral concern.

Keywords

Memory, Personal Identity, Julian Barnes, Ethical Implications, Postmodernism

1. Introduction

When Julian Barnes affirms that "memory is identity" and "identity is memory" (Barnes, 2008) in his memoir *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, his obsession with myriad of issues related to memory is stretched to its last full measure. Right within this 68-chapter and 138-page soliloquy, while the word identity appears 5 times, memory does 35 times, where "the balance between surgical reminiscence and deprecating self-knowledge is abetted by the suave irony that drives the narration". (Callus, 2012) In fact, memory in its broadest sense spans the entirety of his oeuvre. Maricel Piqueras, for instance, unveils the implicit attempt in Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* as "a tendency to take stock of our lives", so as to "manage those bad memories". (Piqueras, 2014) Piqueras rightly concludes that "memory is a double-edged weapon," and that feelings and emotions "give subjectivity to our memories" and "require constant reconsideration and rewriting of who we are." In "Julian Barnes and the Postmodern Problem of Truth," Abigail Dalton examines *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.*, two fictional

works that "zero in on memory as the theme". (Dalton, 2008) "The folly of memory and reliability" is emphasized instead of "the unreliability of human interpretation and point of view" in previous novels like *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*. In *Arthur & George*, 25 words of memory have been used to refer to the root cause of the confounding of reality and imagination.

In an earlier 1986 novel, *Before She Met Me*, Barnes tints his inquiry into the delicacy between memory and past events with violence as a result of jealousy. While the protagonist, one Graham Hendrick, an academic historian, surreptitiously digs into the erotic past of his new-found love, his sense of uncertainty is increasingly aggravated by the curiosity about the truth of past events in her former career as an actress out of his own excavation, by the faulty representations of this spoiled sweetheart, and by the often contradictory arrays of traces of memory from two people of the conflict of interest--Anne his second wife and Jack his close friend, the two having been sexually involved formerly. "The events described in the novel are distinctly contemporary", Anthony Giddens believes, as "today it is commonplace for a woman to have multiple lovers prior to entering a 'serious' sexual involvement", (Giddens, 1992) which explains the underlying impetus for the protagonist's confabulations in memory.

While Piqueras and others become intrigued in the practical disciplinary significance of the Barnesian preoccupation with memory, narrative gerontology and literary gerontology for instance, still a few care about the ingenious ways in which Barnes keeps the understated Englishness intact as he unfolds the emotive landscape in many fictional and nonfictional works; nonetheless, Barnes seems to have much greater aspirations in laboring for a profoundness in the understanding of memory and identity, a sustained empirical British tradition. Nothing can more poignantly stab into a desperate son than a failing father hesitating about his wife's identity, "I think you're my wife". (Barnes, 2008) On the other hand, however, Barnes reveals an intention to balance between truth and narrative art, "pretending that the solidity of narration is a proof of truth." To enhance his insightfulness, Barnes lists in a compendium of historical instances incorporating Plato, Rachmaninov, Flaubert, Turgenev, Daudet, Zola, Edmond de Goncourt, Gide, Shostakovich, Jules Renard, Montaigne, Larkin, Arthur Koestler, Dodie Smith, Maugham, and a lot more. He makes his own memoir an intermittent but full-fledged recollection of illustrative memoirs to prove that "we talk about our memories, but should perhaps talk more about our forgetting." He even made the narrator Tony remark that "memory equals events plus time" (Barnes, 2011).

How much, then, we wonder, has Barnes become interested in this ancient problem of memory, both as a postmodern British writer and a well-informed moral preacher on the subject? Has he been "trying to work out how dead they are" because "[N]arratively, they survive in the memory, which some trust more than others"; (Barnes, 2008) or is it a universal need for contemporaries to re-

concile themselves with distorted personal and emotive bearings so as to justify past events in their life? If so, what are the suggestions Barnes offers us as moral guides?

2. The Barnesian Concerns about Memory Issues

Memory makes us who we are regardless of age and what stage of life we presently live. In other words, memory is the key to personal identity—a sense of true self depends so much on it. Obviously, the memory-dependent issue of personal identity is directly related to ethics, which can mean how we should live our lives, what lurks under our desires for survival and immortality, where our moral responsibility lies in relation to other people and a myriad of practical concerns. In this age of great advancement of both medical science and technology, our much prolonged lifespan increases both in number and variety of the anxieties we rarely met with formerly, adding insult to injury. This does not suggest, of course, that memory has never troubled great minds as remote in history as Socrates. Since Locke's time when memory became a serious metaphysical issue, technical challenges have in fact kept boggling the mind of so many contentious souls. Traditionally, identity-related memory has been investigated from two opposite perspectives, the one setting psychological criterion of personal identity, the other physical—both centering on the significance of the connections with memories, intentions, beliefs and the similarity of character. When one stresses the psychological side of the issue, it becomes such a phrasing as Parfit's: "X at t_1 is the same person as Y at t_2 if and only if X is uniquely psychologically continuous with Y, where psychological continuity consists in overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness". (Parfit, 1984) However, other thinkers like Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid favored a substance-based view of identity against the Lockean idea of association.

Today, technological progress in genetic engineering complicates the problem and difficulty in technical discussions grows exponentially. There are puzzle cases, for instance, that threaten to nullify even temporary prepositions. As Kwok-Choi Lau explains in an M. Phil. thesis,

Puzzle cases are cases in which a person has gone through physical or psychological changes after which his identity becomes ambiguous, in which one finds it difficult to apply ordinary criteria of personal identity to settle the issue, or in which the competing psychological criteria (personality, memory, etc.) and physical criteria (bodily identity, etc.) weigh equally against each other to produce contradictory results (Lau, 1976).

Summing up the various serious but also intriguing hypotheses, Lau comes up with three groups of puzzle cases:

1) Cases that involve a. change of personality, character traits and memory claims without apparent alteration of the corporeal body;

2) Cases of personality or memory change as a result of brain transplantation;

3) Cases in which the reduplication of personality is brought about either by

transplantation of hemispheres of the same brain into two bodies, or by transplantation of memory cells, or by induction or feeding of memory information from one brain to another.

The persistent Lockean influence can always be felt however the discussions proceed. This is so because memory per se presents newer metaphysical challenges along the way. For instance, about the accuracy of memory, there have been increasing controversies. On the one hand, commonsense agrees that memory does not necessarily provide us with accurate representations of past events; on the other hand, memory in written and unwritten forms remains to be the only faculty by which we associate the present with the past. Such controversies lead us naturally into more poignantly felt divides between the ways to discern how one's experiences of past events correspond to their reliable representations (let aside numerous cases of wishful forgetting), which suggests that accuracy of one may not guarantee that of the other. As an agnostic and one well informed of British empiricism, Julian Barnes refers to such controversies in his own highly illustrative ways, though in more cases than not, he shunned abrupt affirmations.

The issue of personal identity, one that obsesses Julian Barnes, finds itself meander along Barnesian works at different stages. Like anyone interested in the issue, scholars have never bothered about the real memory disorders. Barnes has not demonstrated any trace of scrutiny into the physical aspects of the issue; he is more concerned about the psychological part rather than the biological memory criterion in making certain of one's personal identity. Beginning from *Flaubert's Parrot*, the quest for identifying the true self takes place in both historical figures and the fictional narrators themselves, either in one concentrated case or in multidimensional endeavor. Of course, Barnes extends the issue to sequential topics covering both individual and historical memories to ease out his real brooding over one's moral choice. He does not take side with anyone over the debate, for instance, about the nature of autobiographical memories, though intuitively, he sees it as an active construction of one's life narrative. For another instance, Barnes rarely discusses about emotions of past events like nostalgia. Not that affect does not play a role in his fictional works, nor that Barnes himself as a writer has never experienced traumatic events in his personal life, it is simply the art of narration that has averted his attention to such technical considerations. In many cases, it is the remembered anger that prevents one from remembering a certain past event in it entirety. When our true sense of a decent self is at stake, we often choose to forget, at least certain about the critical details.

Talking about memories beyond individual persons, things get event more complicated. In social sciences and history, what are remembered by a nation, a tribe or a special group of people as facts have begun to be checked more rigorously, producing large amount of literature that aggravates the disciplinary embarrassment. Amnesia of a human society runs along the systematic confabulations of particular human groups, which facts draw enduring attention from

Julian Barnes who demonstrated such historical events in his various forms of works. Although we are not sure whether Barnes proves the unreliability of personal memory through faulty representations in the form of documents in human history or vice versa, most of the tittles of his work point obviously to that intention. Unresolved debates renew themselves over the problem of forgotten evidence, defeat and stored beliefs (Moon, 2012).

Likewise, the existence of a duty to remember is controversial; and by the same token, some believe we have the duty to forget in many cases. (Rieff, 2016) In view of proponents of the ethics of memory, remembering as mental time travel to both past and future events (in the form of imagination) entails a moral responsibility: subjects with deficits in episodic memory and episodic future thought make moral judgments similar to those made by normal subjects, (Craver, 2016) as Craver et al. explain*. And* such an obligation holds true at the individual and the collective level, as not just a few believe (Blustein, 2008). What might have intrigued Julian Barnes the most is a proposition that we have a duty to forget so that some people may have a new start after inappropriate words and deeds. To Barnes, these "some people" can be ourselves who, especially in leisurely retirement, prefer to choose between remembering and forgetting to ease out the remaining years of restlessness.

3. Decades of Barnesian War over Memory

From *Metroland* (1980) on, Julian Barnes has become obsessed with the miracles memory can work. A man deep in the middle-age crisis should attribute his mundane marriage and dull daily routines in the suburb of London to a different choice when he was young in Paris as a graduate student. The prejudice in one's memory (as is usually found in many similar recollections) surely links an either/or dilemma with the carefree youth without a just treatment of those lonely moments when life decisions were so difficult. Fortunately, Christopher Lloyd the protagonist balances the obviously wry observation of life with a choice of denying the offer from a childhood friend Toni who proposed to have an exciting experience as a Bohemian vagabond. Youthful contempt for the bourgeois establishment or a secure job and career, which is a better choice? And if so, are there really meaningful choices in this life? Many of the considerations over the choice for one's self-identification from the perspective of conscious memory are already overshadowed in this debut novel.

Then, if *Before She Met Me* (1982) is a thriller-like novel about a commonplace scandal among friends that ends in bloody slaughter, the superimposition of one's own memory on top of a jealousy-driven investigation into the privacy of a beloved carries Barnes's obsession with memory into a new pattern. This time the protagonist's investigation is frequently confirmed by the woman in question, with a large area of unknown history hidden somewhere. By doing so, "some long-broken line of communication to a self of twenty years ago had suddenly been restored", (Barnes, 2011) which means he is actually digging a

ditch for both defense and burial. The fury incited by memory of his own frustrations in the past can only end up in a stabbing, into his own self rather than the torso of an unfortunate rival in love, purely of his own imagination.

In *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), Julian Barnes's sense of wonder about memory grows into a full-blown kaleidoscope of fantasies. The digressive and cuckolded amateur Flaubert biographer aims at no truer portrait of the French novelist than an appeasement to his own shattered self. This unprofessional biographical study by an experienced doctor Geoffrey Braithwaite constructs obviously a professionalism that aims at the wrong target, which is often the case in most of Barnes's works to serve his purpose. To avoid confounding from the point that "the narrator may be a betrayed husband who finds difficulty in accepting it", (Dobrogoszcz, 1999) Barnes makes the doctor confess straightforwardly in a monologue,

> Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself. My own is the simplest of the three—it hardly amounts to more than a convincing proof of my existence—and yet I find it the hardest to begin. My wife's more complicated, and more urgent; yet I resist that too. Keeping the best for the last, as I was saying earlier? I don't think so; rather the opposite, if anything. But by the time I tell you her story I want you to be prepared: that's to say, I want you to have had enough o f books, and parrots, and lost letters, and bears, and the opinions of [critics], and even the opinions of Dr Geoffrey Braithwaite. Books are not life, however much we prefer it if they were. Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead (Barnes, 1985).

In reshuffling the above cards, he finds his perfidious wife a stranger, "someone I feel I understand less well than a foreign writer dead for a hundred years." Digging deeper into the French writer's life might provide some kind of a consolation he needs badly; for while protruding into his wife's past might reveal himself as a cuckold, doing so into Flaubert's past should definitely result in a preferred leveling of an unbalanced selfhood, because "Braithwaite perceives a special kind of unity between himself and Flaubert, but the obvious proofs of his reluctance present in the story show his real reasons for discussing the French writer," namely his married life parroting that of the protagonists of Bovary. (Dobrogoszcz, 1999) The very first time the word memory appears in the novel is Flaubert and his young pal's "final, favorite" visit to a brothel. As no one can ever be so sure about the fact (not noted in any professional Flaubert biography), Braithwaite confounds the biographical sketches with many unsolicited conjurations such as Flaubert's suffering from syphilis, intimate involvement with both male and female partners, and a labyrinth of weird sayings nowhere to be proved. The ostensible unraveling of the many mysteries in the French writer's life amounts to "Barnes's central premise that identity is a mercurial consequence of discourse". (Scott, 1990) In other words,

> ... what knowledge is useful, what knowledge is true? Either I have to give you so much information about myself that you are forced to admit that I could no more have killed my wife than Flaubert could have committed suicide; or else I merely say, that's all, that's enough. No more (Barnes, 1985).

The many roles Braithwaite plays: biographer, scholarly essayist, omniscient narrator, existential philosopher, lead him into one purpose to serve: "I have to invent my way to the truth," (Barnes, 1985) the truth of his wife, Flaubert and himself. But this very fact of altering through the shifts of discourse, his selfhood becomes unsettled and questionable—a point in Barnes's narrative design. In view of this, the search for Flaubert's parrot (which is never to be ascertained literally), the starting point of the biographic exploration and also the final episode of the book, leads readers into a dead-lane inquiry no more of Braithwaite's identity than of the unprofessional biographer's thirst for consolation. The narrator's purposeful digressions from readers' concern sets up a successful stage on which a labyrinth of actual and possible meanings can be performed and demonstrated. Dazzled readers can have but one conclusion: there can never be objective history, nor can there be any absolute truth in anything of our great concern, except for the shrapnel of scattered documents, fragmentary and incomplete.

A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters (1989) echoes the same message that "[w]e make up a story to cover the facts we don't know or can't accept." (Barnes, 2009) The collective memory about the stage prop of Ark, for instance, persists in its anamorphosis in the remaining parts of the novel, from *Santa Euphemia* in the second chapter to the Bishop's collapsed throne in the third, the struggling boat in the fourth, the unfortunate boat of Medusa in the fifth, the planks of Noah's Ark in the sixth, the Titanic, the whale and the liner St. Louis in the seventh, and elsewhere. There could be no view than this panorama of the Ark that can express Barnes's sarcasm more poignantly about so important an event in the Old Testament. If the two daring women, Miss Logan and Miss Fergusson, fell short of the top of the Great Ararat where angels take the shape of white clouds, then the Sino-Kurdish expedition in the same place could not have yielded any more promising results in 2010. What Barnes has in mind in this sarcastic portrait of the reckless adventure by two frail women is but a joke, as is succinctly described in a discussion between the Fergusson father and daughter about the "divine intent, benevolent order and rigorous justice" after "examining the same world." How can one make sense of the Noah's Ark? The young Fergusson has the following.

She believed in the reality of something ordained by God and described in a book of Holy Scripture read and remembered for thousands of years; whereas he believed in the reality of something described in the pages of Saunders' News-Letter & Daily Advertiser, which people were unlikely to remember the very next morning.… [w]hich of them…was the more credulous?

The collage of chronicles, historical records, court proceedings and personal accounts speaks of the unreliability of history in a convincing way. The accusation of woodworms, for instance, offers an irony about religious truths that is reinforced by other genres. The very fact that court proceedings accusing a woodworm of murder are juxtaposed against personal accounts pokes fun at the nature of so-called historical truths, as the placid and seemingly rational narration runs against the wild stream-of-consciousness to illustrate the same idea. Historians may talk in similar ways, but they tell lies in their respective ways, just like the various narratives in the novel all refer to the same Ark: fiction, prose, comments, fable, essay and even theses. This is so because all these narratives come from roughly the same uncertainty in human memory. If Noah's Ark can be such stage props to be employed and disposed of at will, what trust can we have in any kind of redemption, even it is assured in the Holy Scripture?

Again in *Staring at the Sun*, he has phrases like "false memory," "a sharp memory," "a tangy memory," and "a clear-cut memory," phrases that continue to show his obsession with problems caused by the faulty memory. Barnes can't help but make his direct statement on the cause of memory failure in *Talking It Over*:

> The point about memory is this. I've noticed that most people over the age of forty whinge like a chainsaw about their memory not being as good as it used to be, or not being as good as they wish it were. Frankly I'm not surprised: look at the amount of garbage they choose to store. Picture to yourself a monstrous skip crammed with trivia: singularly ununique childhood memories, 5 billion sports results, faces of people they don't like, plots of television soap operas, tips concerning how to clean red wine off a carpet, the name of their MP, that sort of thing. What monstrous vanity makes them conclude the memory wants to be clogged up with this sort of rubbish? (Barnes, 1991)

Obviously, "[i]n fourteen hundred and ninety two Columbus sailed the ocean blue. And then what? She couldn't remember". (Barnes, 2009) With this, "[m]y way with memory is to entrust it only with things it will take some pride in looking after", (Barnes, 1991) because "I don't remember. I won't remember. Memory is an act of will, and so is forgetting".

Then in *England, England* (1998), in addition to historical facts, Julian Barnes alters old English folklore, customs and legends too into a new myth, confounding the lines between truth and fiction, reality and art, history and memory. The last part of the novel features Martha pondering about her past in the rural setting, ostensibly justifying her experiences in the land of replica with chosen memory materials. This satire, shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1998, carries with it a postmodernist sense of subversion and the characteristic dystopian and farcical elements. The farce about Anglia posts a serious challenge to our understanding of nationality in its tradition.

As a sequel to *Talking It Over*, *Love, etc* (2000) brings our attention back from

nation-wide megalomaniac projects to an interpersonal tragicomedy, both based on wishful thinking and emotional prejudice of memory. The personal memory issue is soon picked up in *Arthur & George* (2005); but this time again, the book does not aim to stick closely to the historical record: two very different and fictional British men are intertwined in a story with the world-famous author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. By tracing personal stories, Barnes allows memory to have a full play of itself, so the "contemporary novel set in the past" can carry his obsession with memory to a new case.

The Sense of an Ending (2011), the title of which novel taken from another book by Frank Kermode and dedicated to "making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives," (Kermode, 2000) illustrates Barnes's attempt to wake up one's buried memory and begin a new life of moral awareness. It is again on the memory which personal truths are built to know exactly what happens. By re-evaluating the story already narrated, and by clarifying embarrassing events in his younger days, the protagonist sees through himself as a guilt-ridden coward, but tries to reconfigure his memory. Barnes suggests that realizing our own malicious and unpleasant past deeds that have been erased from our memory presupposes a conscience that bridges up many of the gaps between ourselves and the people living around us. It is precisely the reason why *The Guardian*'s Justine Jordan said "[w]ith its patterns and repetitions, scrutinizing its own workings from every possible angle, the novella becomes a highly wrought meditation on ageing, memory and regret." (Justine, 2011) In this novelette, there are 32 words of "memory" in addition to 54 words of "remember" to affirm that "[H]istory is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation". (Barnes, 2011) He has the following to elaborate his idea:

> We live with such easy assumptions, don't we? For instance, that memory equals events plus time. But it's all much odder than this. Who was it said that memory is what we thought we'd forgotten? And it ought to be obvious to us that time doesn't act as a fixative, rather as a solvent. But it's not convenient—it's not useful—to believe this; it doesn't help us get on with our lives; so we ignore it.

And finally, "I was so ill at ease that I spent the entire weekend constipated: this is my principal factual memory. The rest consists of impressions and half memories which may therefore be self-serving," which in fact repeats the opening remark: "but what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed." And in another paragraph,

> How often do we tell our own life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but—mainly—to ourselves.

As a wry account of both national and personal anecdotes narrated by a Francophile, Barnes's *Cross Channel* in 1996 has twisted historical accounts unnoticed, ostensibly portraying figures and events for their own sake. The kaleidoscopic perspectives all build on a chosen segment of his memory to further blur the demarcation between truth and fiction. The intended blurring is again found in the in provocative scenarios in *The Lemon Table* (2004), a collection of eleven short stories mostly published in *The New Yorker* and other highbrow magazines. For instance, "A Short History of Hairdressing" sounds pretty much the same with a budding beginning, a youthful period and a middle-aged last phase of any literary movement. "The Things You Know," for another instance, records two reminiscing women who cheat each other by their respective half memory, with a lot unsaid. You find too many pieces of surrealistic images in the collection to forget about Barnes's wonderful play of the frailties of memory behind the sharp and comic pleasures.

In *Levels of Life* (2013), Julian Barnes relates three true stories that epitomize three pairs of lost love in reminiscences, one ended by a crash, the other by a spear-thrust through the neck and the last by the loss of his agent wife. Again, this memoir features a one-sided extraction of past experiences. The category-defying book compares couples of people soaring toward the sky, courting fruitlessly and lamenting and complaining non-stop. A major part of the *Levels of Life* "describes descent—no upper air, no perspective, just darkness and despair". (Morrison, 2013) While suffering from great grief, Barnes refuses to let out more information about his wife than needed. The despair out of the lack of true consolation does not outweigh one's desire to protect privacy, adding one more example of the unreliability of personal accounts.

4. Memory and Its Ethical Implications

When Julian Barnes asserts that memory is identity, he is actually referring us to a fact that memory makes who we are, since a great deal of our memory is associated to our selfhood. The question is roughly what is necessary and sufficient for a past or future being to be someone existing now. Traditionally, memory has been the most important criterion of personal identity. The Barnesian assertion that "memory is identity and identity is memory" pertains to the statement that memory presupposes personal identity and vice verse, since it is the memory that convinces us that we are the same person as who we were, say, 20 years ago. Although the connection between personal identity and memory has been robust, it suggests ongoing substantive and methodological problems. On the one hand, one's memory presentation may not correspond to the subject's experience of the past event due to misperception of the past event, therefore unauthentic; on the other hand, the memory presentation may not correspond to the past event itself, therefore untrue. In the two cases, neither the authenticity nor the truth of the correspondence between memory and personal identity is guaranteed.

When setting memory as the criterion of personal identity, the declaration memory is identity runs into greater problem, not least because one's amnesia does not rule out her existence. That is why Parfit and others keep upgrading the psychological criterion to allow more elements to be included like memories, intentions, beliefs/goals/desires, and similarity of character, thus arriving at a formula: "*X* at t_1 is the same person as *Y* at t_2 if and only if *X* is uniquely psychologically continuous with *Y*" (Parfit, 1984).

Scholars insisting on the psychological criterion have been trying to thwart the problem, because this criterion provides a better and more satisfying account of such a condition: one is not responsible for the actions of some person if he is not the inheritor of that person's psychology. Presently, the other theories—biological, narrative, and "anthropological" accounts, explain the relevance to ethics in their own ways, each leaving their respective unsatisfactory parts to be tackled with.

Fortunately, the thought experiments that stagger the correspondence between memory and personal identity fall short of Barnes' serious notice. We have every reason to believe that appealing to the scholarly rigidness concerning memory issues does not justify his literary efforts in the bulk of his writings. To Julian Barnes, how to hold one morally responsible for his/her past action depends on a process of reidentification that transcends one's hesitation about her own memory of a past event, that is: what are the conditions under which a person at one point in time is properly reidentified at another point in time? Like John Locke, Barnes rejects the substance-based view of identity that persons at different times are identical to one another in virtue of their consisting in one and the same substance. Rather, a relational account of identity makes more sense because persons at different times are identical to one another in virtue of some psychological or physical relation between them—a person or a moral agent *Y* at t_2 is identical to a person *X* at t_1 just in case *Y*'s consciousness "can be extended backwards" to *X*. (David, 2016) *Or,* in Locke's word, one sober man should not be accounted responsible for an action committed when he was mad and vice verse. Since human law emphasizes the necessity of continuous consciousness, theorists on identity and ethics must stick to this point whatever their arguments are.

In not a few of the works by Barnes, the narrative criterion of personal identity seems to be an intended effort to illustrate the idea, although Barnes expresses his intention in scattered phrases. This narrative criterion seeks to clarify that what makes an action, experience, or psychological characteristic properly attributable to a person (and thus a proper part of his or her true self) is its correct incorporation into the self-told story of his or her life, as explained by Schechtman. (Schechtman, 1996) The narrative criterion bypasses the pitfalls in previous criteria of identity and holds more water in the arguments. Many works by Barnes best illustrate his attempt to thwart the problems in traditional psychological criterion of personal identity. All of his attempts are built on a belief that

memory in large-scale groups (history collective memory) and small-scale groups (individual) can both be faulty. In *The Sense of an Ending,* for instance, Barnes convinces us that traumatic memories are formed after an experience that causes high levels of emotional arousal and the activation of stress hormones, but one's sober moments (especially after retirement) can heal up by rearranging the episodic memories. An ethical life begins with such rearranging.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Louise Erdrich and the Quest for a Cross-Cultural Identity

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to explore, by the means of cultural studies which is a theoretical approach avowedly and even radically interdisciplinary, the many instances in the novels of Louise Erdrich in which the author seems to be creating interconnectedness between cultures rather than emphasizing the dividing lines. Indeed, based on the assumptions of biculturalism and cross-culturalism, the works of Louise Erdrich aim at discussing how the writer succeeds in connecting the cultures of the white and the Ojibwe formerly presented as antagonistic. In this perspective, our work addresses the questions of the transgression of the boundaries between western and Native Americans' values, beliefs and culture through the depiction of the experiences of several characters with mixed identities.

Keywords

Cultural-Interconnectedness, Biculturalism, Cross-Culturalism, Ojibwe, Transgression

1. Introduction

Most native writers such as Louise Erdrich, Sherman Joseph Siko, James Welch, Simon J Ortiz and many others implicitly or explicitly depict the American period of time during which the United States government implemented policies that subtly force the assimilation of their communities within its borders. Among other communities merged into this cultural mosaic that characterizes America, the Ojibwe tribe is struggling not to extinction. Louise Erdrich, born into this tribe on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota, writes to reinvent the torn memory of this community who lives on the rubble of a mythical past. She represents the voice of a forgotten America, one that dances with the wolves on the now-sacred territories of Indian memory. These policies

outlined previously entail the existence of a pluralistic of cultural backgrounds citizens on its soil. Many recent novels explore transcultural connections and point to the instability of ethnic and national identities by tracing affinities (including transatlantic ones) between people beyond culture, ethnicity, and nationality (Georgi-Findlay, 1998). The fostering of the multiculturalism prompted in this statement encounters the assent of Louise Erdrich who chose to seriously challenge the comfortable idea of the "pure Indian" by focusing on the cross-cultural identity. Erdrich clearly addresses the matter of the dynamics of biculturalism and cross-culturalism in her novels. These novels we are referring to are entitled: *Tracks* (1988) showcases the tension between traditional Anishinaabe culture and beliefs and the Westernizing influence of white, Christian America; *Love Medicine* (1993) is about the enduring verities of loving and surviving. it stares more bodly at many of the truths of Native American life in America; *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001) captures the essence of a time and the spirit of a woman who felt compelled by her beliefs to serve her people as a priest. In particular, it focuses on miracles, crises of faith, struggles with good and evil, temptation, and the corrosive and redemptive power of secrecy; *The Round House* (2012) tells the story of a boy on the cusp of manhood who seeks justice and understanding in the wake of a terrible crime that upends and forever transforms his family, society and culture.

If each of these works reveals a particular dimension of the issues of biculturalism and cross-culturalism, it should be noted, however, that these novels give a common prism to these topics that a pluralistic theoretical approach primarily anchored to Cultural studies could help to better figure out. Indeed, based on the assumption of interconnectedness, this work aims at discussing how Louise Erdrich succeeds in connecting two different cultures formerly presented as antagonistic. Better, this entry addresses the questions of the transgression of the boundaries between western and Indians' values, beliefs and culture through the depiction of the experiences of several characters with mixed identities. It is effectively in order to make this transgression more legible that we have based our work on analyzing Louis Erdrich's quest for a syncretic Spiritual society firstly, then explain also how she questions the immutability of gender boundaries in her novels, and finally find out the way she handles cross-cultural image to render this transgression.

2. A Lookup for a Syncretic Spiritual Society with Erdrich

The most appropriate and logical personification of Christians in relation to the Natives are missionaries, priests and nun who work in direct contact with them. As many Native writers, Erdrich uses such religious characters in her works. She mostly uses nuns and priests. She has been guided by her grandfather who she often refers to as her religious role model to portray characters like Father Damien either in *Tracks* or in *Last Report*. This character appears as someone who, "had a mixture of old time and church religion (…) he would do pipe ceremo-

nies for ordinations and things like that. He just had a grasp on both religions" (Howard, 2000: p. 110).

In *Tracks* and *Last Report*, Father Damien redeems the church considerably. Thanks to him, the church on reservations has become more tolerant, and many priests engaged in the campaign for Indian rights. The devotion of Father Damien to the Native community is so acute that in the first chapter of *Tracks*, he steps in to replace the priest who succumbed to the same devastation as his flock in the middle of a rampant epidemic. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Father Damien is a white priest character. In the same spirit of his devotion to the Native community, he rescued Nanapush and Fleur from yielding to the deadly interaction with the spirits of the dead which were so near that at length they just stopped talking. Nanapush confesses it through, "But one day the new priest, just a boy really, opened the door. A dazzling and painful light flooded through and surrounded Fleur and me" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 58). Father Damien displays a less oppressive aspect of religion opposite to those priests who used Christianity to persecute the Natives. In *Tracks*, when Fleur sets foot in Argus for the first time, she primarily visits Father Damien to get a job, "Fleur Pillager returned and the first place she went once she came into town was to the back door of the priest's residence attached to the landmark church" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 13). Furthermore, Father Damien also financially contributes to rescue Indian's allotment as it appears in these words, "he added the final quarter from his own pocket" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 191). That is the reason why Nanapush refers to him as "our friend Father Damien" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 61). In one way or another, Father Damien wanders between Indian and white worlds creating a syncretic spiritual society where a narrow-minded Catholicism has no chance to prosper (Howard, 2000: p. 118).

Just as in *Tracks*, Father Damien represents a complete spiritual syncretism in the *Last Report* as well. In this novel, Father Damien does not present the Chippewa religion and the Christianity as priori opposing or competing. Instead, like *Tracks*, the novel reconciliates both religions.

More importantly, the numerous actions of Father Damien in support of the Native help to destabilize the order prescribed by the Christianity. For instance, while dutifully observing liturgical practices, he, nevertheless incorporates Fleur's medicine into this daily routine. Besides, Father Damien while preaching with western words, he uses the Native ones as we can see in this quotation:

> He preferred the Ojibwe word for praying, anama'ay, with its sense of a great motion upward. He began to address the trinity as four and to include the spirit of each direction-those who sat at the four corners of the earth. Whenever he prayed, he made of herself a temporary center of those directions (Erdrich, 2001: p. 96).

Progressively, Father Damien articulates both Catholic and traditionalist behaviours. He recognizes that the Ojibwe are engaged in the ordinary as well as esoteric forms of worship which are even compatible with the teachings of Chr-

ist. It is on the basis of this interconnectedness that Father Damien aims to reach that he started correspondence with pope. Unfortunately, he will be hampered in its momentum by the attitude of the Pope. Indeed, after decades of a one-sided correspondence with pope, he did not receive reply from the Vatican. So that he starts doubting the Christian universal truth. He confesses it in these words, "one couldn't hope for a reply, oh no that be all too human" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 3). He concludes that it is in the Chippewa community that he will find this humanity and understanding. Thus, he fully integrates into the Chippewa culture, assimilates the new cultural beliefs and religion practices, and forms bonds with Chippewa families in the reservation. Father Damien thereby illustrates this statement which claims that, "hybridity is precisely about the fact when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them" (Bhabha, 1994: p. 216). Father Damien becomes a righteous member of the Chippewa community. He is transformed from the Western Other into a Chippewa self. The missionary becomes the convert. Father Damien changes his perceptions, he adopts a lifestyle which eliminates homogeneity and calls for heterogeneity. However, this state does not make him forget about his catholic roots which shows the "in-between" life he experiences akin to June Kashpaw in *Love Medicine*.

Indeed, being the first person the reader is introduced to in the novel the representation of June Kashpaw is construed as a spiritual syncretism that points some similarities in Christianity and the religion of the Native. The novel draws a parallel between the effects of June's death on her fellow human beings and those of Christ in the Bible. Indeed, it is in this perspective that he will figure throughout the novel as a touchstone for the other characters (Howard, 2000: p. 121). Cleverly, Louise Erdrich succeeds in applying the biblical pattern in Native context. The biblical miracle of Christ walking on water is alluded in the depiction of June journeying homeward, "The snow fell deeper that Easter than it had in forty years, but June walked over it like water and came home" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 7). The phrase "walked over it like water" implies that June is like Christ who walked on water according to the Bible. Given all the obvious Christian reference, one might feel the urge to consider June as a Christ like figure, one who has been sacrificed to the sins of history" (Stookey, 1999).

The Christ-like feature of June also appears in the opening scene of *Love Medicine* which takes place on Easter Week-end, when June undertakes the last homecoming. Easter Week-end refers to the moment when Jesus Christ died and came back to life, and the last homecoming refers to her death as June attempts to walk home during a snowstorm in the night to Easter Sunday. This moment in the story is overflowing with images and symbols that allude to the death of the Christ and his resurrection. As well the imagery in the scene of June's homecoming offers references to Easter combining with the feeling of June that she is going "underwater." This scene is alluding to the historic Chippewa legend of the water deity who brings death. It is also the opportunity to

point out that going underwater means death for the Chippewa. As a result, the story of June appears as a combination of Christian and Chippewa mythology which breaks the boundaries of religion as we can also see in the behavior of Lipsha, the son of June.

Indeed, like in the portrayal of his mother's liminal spirituality, Lipsha exists in a state of in-betweeness. He is caught between traditional Native beliefs and the pervasive Christianity on the reservation. The narrator Albertine, who is close to Lipsha, notices how the latter is caught between the two states of being when she describes him as "being both ways" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 36). As matter of fact, Louise Erdrich states that, "Lipsha is born with the shaman's healing touch". He has inherited a special gift from his ancestors, which he calls the touch. He can relieve physical suffering by laying his hand on people; he confesses, "the medicine flows out of me" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 231). However, this ancestral heritage does not obscure the fact that Lipsha is influenced by his Catholic upbringing, as well. This Christian education is symbolized by the Cree rosary beads given to him by his grandmother Marie. Thus, equipped with a mixed education, he gains some benefit from his knowledge of both religions. Erdrich argues that, "He can easily combine the two religious' systems" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 157). This would imply that he neither completely abandons his native faith, nor refuses to accept change. The inability of Lipsha to claim one belief system over another is perceived when Marie asks him to make a love medicine for her; It means that Marie urges Lipsha to rekindle the love between her and Nector. Mindful that he lacks the knowledge required to fully understand the old Chippewa speciality is being asked, Lipsha compensates this lack about traditional shamanic practices with Catholicism. Then he takes the love medicine to be blessed by a priest, who refuses, and by a nun at the convent who refuses too. Faced with these various refusals, Lipsha dips his fingers in holy water and blesses the love medicine "with his (own) hand" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 205). It is obvious that Lipsha uses cunningly both religions practices to balance what he wants to obtain.

In light of the way June and Lipsha synthetize the practices in these two religions in *Love Medicine*, we notice that the cleric crossbreed process leads to a third space, where the natives are able to refuse "to wholly condemn the Christian or the traditional" and instead, embraces a hybridization of the two religious worlds" (Howard, 2000: p. 128).

Modelled after June Kashpaw, Marie offers a perspective that bring together the two religions. In fact, Marie's appearances in *Love Medicine* also reveal the twofold reliance on both the Catholic and the Chippewa religions. For instance, in the chapter entitled Saint Marie, she is presented as a "reservation girl" who strongly desires to enter a sister convent at the age of fourteen. She introduces herself as a girl who "had ever prayed so hard" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 43), "a girl from this reservation as a saint (the sisters of the convent)'d have to kneel to" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 43). So in the Chippewa community she is known for going to

church, she states that, "I had the mail-order Catholic soul you get in a girl raised out in the bush, whose only thought is getting into town" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 44). Later on she provides her children with a Christian upbringing. Moreover, at the most difficult moments of her life, such as when she finds out that her husband had left her, it is within the Christian framework that Marie seek solace.

Nevertheless, the attempt of Marie to embrace catholic wholesale at the expense of discarding her Chippewa background proves to be impossible. This failure is the outcome of a series of disappointment connected to Catholicism and at the core of which is Sister Leopolda, the nun who takes on her monitoring. Though, instead of switching from the Chippewa religious code to the Western, it is the blending of the two religions that ultimately defines her.

Indeed, Marie's amalgamation of religions becomes visible through a symbolic object, namely the chain of beads that she takes from June Morrissey's neck upon welcoming her into her family (Harper, 2012: pp. 17-38). It should be noted that, with a few differences that can be observed, the practice of the rosary is the prerogative of these two cultures. From this perspective Marie associates those beads with Native belief, as well as Catholicism. Marie initially calls the beads a rosary, which is also how her grandson Lipsha refers to them. Marie reinforces the connection between the beads and Catholicism when claiming that the chain substitutes the act of praying for her, "I don't pray, but sometimes I do touch the beads…I never look at them, just let my fingers roam to them when no one is in the house" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 96). This passage expresses Marie's connection to Catholic practices despite the fact she displays a strong belief in the Chippewa spirituality. The beads become the epitome of Marie's simultaneous reliance on the elements of both religions. Above all, the symbol of the beads bridges the two religious frames of reference which traverse in Marie's figure, revealing Marie's awareness of her own liminality" (Harper, 2012: p. 31). Thus, the beads illustrate the bicultural identity of Marie and also they demonstrate the permeability of the two understandings.

As proved with the previous characters, Louise Erdrich offers with the religious experience of Pauline Puyat in *Tracks* the solution of a perspective that brings together the Catholic and Chippewa religions. A daughter of a mixed-blood father and half-white mother, Pauline Puyat is confronted at her early age with Catholicism and decides to become a nun, as she confesses it here, "I was chosen to serve" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 137).

However, despite her deep belief in Christian God, Pauline continues to see the world in her Chippewa spiritual terms. That is why she is depicted as, "covertly syncretic" and "Like most converts, Pauline retains many aspects of the religion she attempts to leave behind as 'pagan'" (Howard, 2000: pp. 114-116). She keeps on believing in shape changing, one of the tenets of Chippewa religion. Before Pauline and Napoleon, Morrissey clashed in a merciless battle, she is convinced that Mishupeshu, the lake monster enters the body of Napoleon as

she describes it here, "He had appeared to me as the water thing, glass breastplate and burning iron rings" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 203). Also, this quote confirms the vision of Pauline during the wrestling:

> I kicked and kicked away the husk, drove it before me with the blows of my feet. A light begins to open in the sky and the thing grew a human shape, one that I recognized in gradual stages. Eventually, it took on the physical form of Napoleon Morrissey (Erdrich, 1988: p. 207).

While killing Napoleon, Pauline even describes herself as having taken the form of kokoko, the Owl, "I snapped him in my beak like a wicket-boned mouse" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 73). This shape changing and association to the Owl allow to understand that Pauline believes in Manitous or spirits. These spirits function as both good and evil forces in Chippewa daily life. Therefore, it is not surprising to see Pauline as a nun "addressing different Manitous a longside with Blessed Virgin and Her heart" (Howard, 2000: p. 122).

As she is tenuously connected to her Indian beliefs, Pauline regarded herself as one chosen to sacrifice her health after the example of Christ crucifixion; for the advantage of the church and the general good of her people (Howard, 2000: p. 123). It means she uses white religion for the welfare of Indians. That is why Pauline is perceived by others as a "savior…. a creature of impossible contradictions" (Howard, 2000: p. 123).

In the perspective of Friedman, we can assert that Pauline Puyat despite being a nun, she is deeply implicated in the framework of her Chippewa heritage. By weaving Indian and western beliefs, and because she does not adhere to limiting definition of religion, Pauline Puyat is revealed to be a religious syncretic character.

3. Questioning the Immutability of Gender Boundaries in Erdrich's Novels

The unjustifiable inequalities that exist between women and men is based neither on sex nor nature; it is pure historical constructs (Rosenthal, 2003). To that extent, Erdrich tries to challenge those inequalities by the means of her female or male characters who are viewed by Caroline Rosenthal as having a mixture of gender roles and behaviors. In the works of Erdrich, not only female characters challenge the stereotypical view of women, but male characters also transgress gender barriers by taking on the characteristics of females. It is with this in mind that Erdrich attempts to break down her readers' notions of traditional gender roles by creating characters who crossover traditional gender role (Rosenthal, 2003). For example, in *Love Medicine*, Marie Kashpaw defies male supremacy by proving that being a woman is not limited to the role of childbearing. Better, she tells anyone who will listen that she is the driving force behind the prominence of her husband, Nector Kashpaw. She leads him, and she proudly declares it, "he is what he is because (she) made him" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 154). She adds that she "had decided…to make him into something big in this reservation" (Erdrich,

1993: p. 189). It is clear that the behavior of Marie contradicts this patriarchal view of the wife where women are expected to take care of children only. Marie upset the gender role in the novel of Erdrich when she "take money from Nector Kashpaw's hand that was lighting on the bar. (She)'d leave him nothing. He'd have to come home and beg when he needed more" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 86). When also she "kept him from the bottle…dragged him back each time he drank and tied him to bed with strong ropes" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 89).

The ability of Marie to transcend gender binary is seen also through the subversion of western families' structure where a family is supposed to be composed of biological children only. For Native Americans, the family is not only the key factor of traditional tribal identification, but it is also a network of relations transcending borders. That is why she is seen as "both a biological and adoptive mother" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 131). Despite her large family to be raised, she accepts two adoptees: June and Lipsha. Marie loves her two adoptees unconditionally and treats them like her own. Through her actions, she disregards the principle of biological kinship fundamental to Western family structure.

As matter of fact, the act of raising large family is imbued with significance in Native American tradition. It is an effective response against extinction and cultural loss (Sanders, 1998: p. 142). Marie in *Love Medicine* eloquently plays this role of bringing children together whatever their social, religious and cultural backgrounds.

Like Marie in *Love Medicine*, Geraldine Coutts is a Chippewa woman in the novel *Round House* who has been raped by a white man at the beginning of the novel. Because she is a Native American woman, violence on her is highly symbolic. This rape can be construed as a weapon which aims at destroying Native American societies, as women represent the core value of Indian culture.

However, Geraldine Coutts endures the brunt of this trauma, as she resists the efforts of men to impose their will on women, to claim woman as the objects of men, their desire or to define for women the condition of their being. She leaves the hospital and resumes her daily activities as usual. This way she proves that she is fine and brave, "I'm all right….. Look at me. See?" (Erdrich, 2012: p. 3). Geraldine is aware that she constitutes the beam of her family, so that according to the narrative, "her absence stopped the time" (Erdrich, 2012: p.3). Without Geraldine, her son and her husband are seriously disturbed. And her son Joe as a narrator confirms it through, "women don't realize how much store men set on the regularity of their habits. We absorb their comings and goings into our bodies, their rhythms into our bones" (Erdrich, 2012: p. 3). The fighting spirit of Geraldine Coutts has strengthened solidary among women of the community (Stookey, 1999). A community where women like Fleur Pillager always defies traditions of masculine authority. Clearly in *Tracks*, this character appears as doubtlessly the chief figure of female mixed-gender character:

> Fleur is one of the most distinctive female characters in Native American fiction, because she breaks the boundaries between male and female. In

> other words, Fleur challenge(s) conventions or traditions that circumscribe the choices available to women (Erdrich, 1988: p. 141).

Fleur is engaged in different activities normally associated with the masculine. With Fleur, Erdrich subverts (this) rigidity of patriarchal taxonomy (Rosenthal, 2003). Thus, Fleur serves as a potent healer in addition to be a hunter. The gender lines are also blurred by Erdrich when she presents Fleur playing cards with men, knowing that, "women didn't usually play with men" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 18). She is so talented that she constantly beats men, who cannot hide that they are, "shock of surprise" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 18). The government is also shock of surprise when it notices that Fleur fights fiercely to keep the land of her ancestors. She rejects the government decision to take her land, "she said the paper had no bearing or sense, as no one would be reckless enough to try collecting for land where Pillagers were buried" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 172). Fleur's heroism goes further when she does not accept government commodities, although her community has nothing to eat, "The day the rations arrived, we knew that one of us would have to go into town and register for food with the Agent, and nobody moved" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 174).

Fleur openly opposes to meet western society's standards. She clearly reclaims the true status of Native American women like Lulu Nanapush in *Love Medicine*. Indeed, in this novel, Lulu challenges the traditional construction of femininity by breaking free of westernized norms that have impacted Indian culture. For instance, she subverts the western nuclear family by having illegitimate children with different men. She admits that:

> There were eight of them. Some of them even had her maiden name. The three oldest were Nanapush. The next oldest were Morrisseys who took the name Lamartine, and then there were more assorted younger Lamartines who didn't look like one another either (Erdrich, 1993: p. 109).

Having multiple sexual partners is something prohibited by patriarchal system, but Lulu transcends this judgment. Lulu makes love with Moses Pillager, the cousin of her mother and gives birth to a son. She even has a child with Beverly, the brother of her deceased husband Henry, "When Henry's brother Beverly comes for the funeral, he and lulu make" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 112).

Lulu is sexually uninhibited, this is why on the reservation she is regarded as a slut and called the "heartless, shameless man-chaser" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 277); She is also named "the seductive mother" (Smith, 1991). But Lulu transcends these judgments. She does not blame herself or feel sorry for her actions. She is not disempowered by her community's gossip.

Yet, Lulu does not dedicate herself exclusively to unconventional love affairs; she has leadership skills. Her son Lyman Lamartine, with the help of Lulu becomes the head of the Tomahawk Factory. Lulu guides Lyman on how to run the establishment smoothly and make the workers and community satisfied. She helps him figure out how to offer and spread jobs equally to families on the res-

ervation and quickly establish equal pay. In addition to her leadership skills, Lulu is politically involved in a woman's rights activism. So that, when the tribe wants to take her land for factory they want to build, Lulu is not going to stand idle (Smith, 1991).

In her fight to try and stay on her land and her continuation to fight back against the oppressor, it is obvious that Lulu is breaking up the unjust pattern of the historical reputation Native Women have been given and contradicts the preconceived assumptions that, "that a woman is not supposed to assume a male position" (Smith, 1991).

With Lulu we realize that the androcentrism which favors men over women is challenged, and completely lost as we can also notice in *The Last Report* with Agnes De Witt.

Indeed, Agnes is a woman who disguised herself as a priest called Father Damien. The latter on his way to the Objiwe reservation, is unfortunately taken away by a flood and dies. So, Agnes who finds out his dead body, adopts his disguise and identity. She puts on the original robe of Father Damien and keeps it for the rest of her life:

> It was nearly twilight before she rolled him in her heavy night-gown was his shroud. His clothing, his cassock, and the small bundle tangled about him, a traveler's pouch tied underneath all else, Agnes put on in the exact order he had worn them (Erdrich, 2001: p. 44).

Through this "shape-shifting" (Stookey, 1999), Agnes defies the western constructs of gender based on the Catholic principle which stipulates that, "a woman cannot be a priest" (Howard, 2000: p. 120). Agnes transforms herself each morning with a feeling of loss that she finally defines as the loss of Agnes.

However, despite her huge efforts to give up her nature as a woman, Agnes is still known by the people for her "girlish earnestness" and noticed as an "unmanly priest" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 88). This is aptly illustrated through the reaction of a fellow priest, Juder Miller who, "saw, inhabiting the same cassock as the priest, an old woman. She was a sly, pleasant contradictory-looking female of stark intelligence. He shook his head, craned forward, but no, there was Father Damien again, tottering into the comfort of his room." (Erdrich, 2001: p. 139).

Furthermore, the non-binary thinking is made clear that, "the use of both masculine and feminine pronouns when referring to Agnes highlights the way in which Damien and Agnes exist as separate people dwelling in the same body" (Rosenthal, 2003). In other words, the use of "he" and "she" to depict Agnes in the text suggests her transgendering according to Rosenthal. In the quotation, Agnes is depicted as both a man and a woman, since her process of transgendering is not replacing one gender for another, but acknowledging that both comprise her identity.

In addition, the transformation of Agnes reveals the privileged position that men possess in a patriarchal system. So, Agnes argues that, "she realizes quickly what it feels like not to be subordinated" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 30). Because, there

are things that she easily gets or does as a man. For instance, being treated with much more respect. Indeed, as a man Agnes found that Father Damien was free to pursue all questions with frankness and ease. Something that was impossible or denied in her former life.

For sexual relationship, Agnes unfortunately reveals her true nature to Father Gregory Wekkle, a fellow priest sent by the Vatican to assist her. From that time, he starts treating her as "somehow less" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 103), as an inferior being, "there was another thing: that tone in his voice when they were alone. An indulgent tone, frankly anticipating some lesser capacity in her-whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, she could not say" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 103). As we can notice, Father Gregory emphasizes his Western conception of womanhood in these words: "you're a woman (…) a woman cannot be priest" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 106). As a response to the allegation of Gregory, Agnes utters this, "I'm a priest (…) I am nothing but a priest" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 107). These words are an appeal to consider her existence beyond gender barriers.

The case of Agnes favors another analysis of the concept of feminism in the perception of Louise Erdrich. In fact, with her characters, Louise Erdrich discloses that the feminist concept that claims the fluidity of gender is also related to men. Observing her male characters nurturing offspring and rearing childlike, "They deconstruct gender norms" (Rosenthal, 2003). It is clear that the whole philosophy is based on the fact that, "Tasks distributes according to biological determinants are not always viable" (Rosenthal, 2003). As a matter of fact, it is in the perspective of Rosenthal that Erdrich challenges gender categories by endowing male characters with some characteristics generally attributed to women. So to substantiate our comments on this case, we have arbitrarily chosen one male character among many others who manifest these female traits in the works of Louise Erdrich. This character is Nanapush in *Tracks*.

Indeed, we notice that this character explores the fluidity of gender by taking care of characters named: Fleur and Lulu. Nanapush was in some ways the book's most maternal character. He wondered wistfully how it feels to be a woman, tended Fleur, brooded over Lulu's delivery, agreed to rear her, and gave her long monologues of advice (Rosenthal, 2003).

At the very beginning of the novel, Nanapush discovers Fleur who is helpless, "Fleur… was so feverish that she'd thrown off her covers, and now she huddled against the cold wood range, staring and shaking" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 3). Despite the fact that he is a man, he provides her with assistance, "I was the one who struggled to lash her to the sacks of supplies and to the boards of the sled. I wrapped more blankets over her and tied them down as well" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 3). He treats her with great care. Since Nanapush's "own family was wiped out one by one, leaving only Nanapush" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 2). He calls her "daughter" (Erdrich, 1988: p. 38).

Like Fleur, Nanapush adopts her daughter Lulu. He becomes both a father and a mother for her. In fact, Lulu's father is unknown and she is abandoned by her biological mother. So again, Nanapush acts as her mother, by giving her ad-

vice, telling her stories as grandmothers do in Native American tradition.

Actually, by choosing Lulu as his audience while telling his stories, and by regarding Fleur as "the funnel of (his tribe's) history", Nanapush is resisting patriarchy and longs for the praising of gynocracies defined as "woman-centered tribal societies in which matrilocality, matrifocality, matrilinearity, maternal control of household goods and resources are present and active features of traditional tribal life" (Beidler & Barton, 1999: p. 235).

With the example of Nanapush, who is representative of the characters of the kind, we can see in the novels of Louise Erdrich that the imposition of borders, especially as they relate to gender can be overthrown by human beings. In her play with gender, Erdrich is attempting to break down her reads notions of traditional gender roles by creating characters who crossover and through tradition gender definitions (Rosenthal, 2003). It becomes obvious that through her character, Erdrich seeks to redresses the imbalance of power that has traditionally divided the genders. And also, by the means of Nanapush, she investigates the concern of gender binaries transgression.

4. Cross-Cultural Image

Creating cross-cultural figures based on the lore of her Native American and German immigrant origins, Erdrich blends the seemingly opposed cultures into a mixed form. It is in this same spirit that she questions the construction of a culturally pure identity in her novels.

In *Tracks* for example Nanapush, who is a tribal head of the past, tries to bring the cosmogony of the Native back to life through short stories that he acknowledges to the members of the community. In spite of his strong attachment to his Indian culture, he knows more about the connection between White and Indian culture. With this knowledge, he takes advantage of this situation, that he expresses here, "There were so few of us who even understood the writing on the papers. Some signed their land away with thumbs and crosses. As a young man, I had made my reputation as a government interpreter" (Erdrich, 1988: pp. 99-100).

Nanapush also benefits from a Jesuit education to have an excellent command of English language. This mastering of the colonizer's language enables him to ensure his community's survival, to save his people from the government misdeeds; it also reveals Nanapush's ability to accept the new and the old (...) guarantees his survival (Stookey, 1999). It is clear that for Nanapush, the survival of its community remains a priority. It is in this perspective that he claims the white priest Damien as the friend of his people. It is in this regard that during the baptism of Lulu that Nanapush complies with this Christian ritual out of politeness. He finds no drawbacks in it; Nanapush reclaims his adhesion to cultural coexistence. It is also in the name of this adherence to cultural coexistence that Nanapush deepens his relationship with Father Damien when taught him how to make bear paw snowshoe frames and lace them with moose guts and sinew and

how to build a brush shelter to conserve the heat. His attitude towards Father Damien testifies both to the greatness of his heart and especially to the way he made his own the cultural values advocated by his tribe.

In view of the quality of the friendship that binds Nanapush and Father Damien, we can see that contradictory elements can coexist without the need to eliminate one another (Howard, 2000: p. 117). The life of Nanapush demonstrates obviously that the two cultures can get along harmoniously, as we can also notice in the life of Albertine Johnson in *Love Medicine*.

Indeed, Albertine is the only child of an Indian mother Zelda and a white Swedish father Johnson. As such, she appears as "one-half Swedish" and "approximately one-quarter Chippewa" (Sanders, 1998: p. 149). This dual cultural belonging, leads Albertine to display marks of blending two cultural components: white and Indian ways of life and values. This illustrates the notion of living "in-between" space which is about living in-between two cultures (Bhabha, 1994). It implies that persons who have lived in more than one culture or who straddles two or more culture are hybrids (Bhabha, 1994). This is what we find at Albertine who has discovered through this "in-between" space a new cultural way to survive. She adopts some cultural practices of the host culture while keeping her cultural tradition and customs. She finds it hard to get over them, for she considers herself a part of the Indian community, even though her father is white.

Obviously, the attachment of Albertine to her Indian culture does not overshadow her white ways and manners. Indeed, as well as being traditional, she is also westernized. She is opposed to having children before completing her education. Her opinion does not change, even when her mother complains, "At this rate, I'll be old and stiff to take care of my own grandchildren" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 15). For Albertine, education comes first, not marriage. This is why when her mother puts her the following question: "Have you met any marriageable boys in Fargo yet?" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 14). Albertine "shook (her) head no" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 14) and responds in these words: "I'm not interested anyway; I've got other things to do" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 15). For her, "marriage's not the answer to it all" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 15). Albertine's western lifestyle also appears in her way of dressing. She is seen wearing a trademark blue costume while dancing at the powpows on the reservation. At her arrival on reservation, she is so "good-looking" that even her parents "hardly acknowledged her" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 12). In addition to that, she goes to the reservation with her own car, "a dull black hard-driven car with rusted wheel wells, a stick shift, and a windshield wiper only on the passenger side" (Erdrich, 1993: p. 11). Like a westernized girl, she is also involved with alcohol and drugs and rejects the previously defined role of women within her Native American culture (Beidler & Barton, 1999). However, beyond the observations of Beidler, Gay and Rosenthal, we can see her striving to maintain the delicate balance requirement for one who walks in two different cultures (Stookey, 1999). It is also this balance that Father Damien is seeking in reversing

the self/other dichotomy in *Last Report*.

In the reservation, Father Damien reflects a fierce willingness to learn the local language: The Objiwan. He is so confident that the language constitutes an essential part for inter-racial relation, Father Damien first action once on the reservation is to learn "Ojibwe words and phrases" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 51). In his outstanding decision of learning the host language, Damien is assisted by Nanapush, an old man in the community. Damien declares that, "the old man was my teacher" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 210). During their talks about everything, Ojibwe language instruction is effortlessly exercised, because Father Damien always "took out a small bound notebook and recorded words and sentences" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 212). Damien is aware that if he succeeds in overcoming the impediment of the language, he will break up at the same time his otherness, his distinction from the local inhabitants. This interest in acquiring the host language clearly reflects his motivation to integrate into Indian culture, and by the same token he wants to demonstrate his intention to bridge the distance between Indians and white kept apart by centuries of colonial history and cultural dominance.

In addition to breaking down cultural barriers through the acquisition of the Native Americans language, Father Damien effectively shows a totally different purpose while doing his job as a priest. Indeed, while earlier priests focused on the church's insistence upon the conversion of Native Americans in their mission and conceived indigenous people as subaltern individual, Damien is very open to the issues of Native people. He deeply cares for his parishioners and forms bonds with them, as he confesses it here, "I am becoming one with them" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 215). Actually, Damien has an inclusive rather than an exclusive view of Christianity. For when he sets foot on the reservation, he immediately begins to demonstrate his characteristic kindness by visiting Fleur and Nanapush, who have barely survived the terrible winter (Beidler & Barton, 1999). Nanapush recalls how Damien finds them out, "One day the new priest, just a boy really, opened our door. A dazzling and painful light flooded through and surrounded Fleur and me. Another Pillager was found, the priest said, Fleur's cousin Moses was alive in the woods" (Erdrich, 2001: pp. 6-7).

Besides, later on in the novel, Damien helps the Pillager and Kashpaw families keep their lands. He uses his own money to prevent the loss of their forefathers' land, "Father Damien came by and counted the money too, added the final quarter from his own pocket… There was enough, just exactly as Margaret had predicted, for the holding money on both Pillager and Kashpaw land. No less, no more" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 191).

His generosity has allowed Damien to better integrate the Indian community to the point that instead of calling them the Indians, Damien regards them as "His people" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 5), breaking the barrier between self and other. It is in this perspective that he openly confesses that, "He was proud to say he had been adopted into a certain family, The Nanapush family, whose long dead elder

had been his first friend on the reservation" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 5). In the reservation, Father Damien has become the priest who "puts the welfare of his flock (Indians) above all else" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 191); the priest who has saved Lulu from a black dog, the form of the devil. Again, thanks to His human sympathy and pragmatic approach, it is said in the narrative that, "Lulu became a self-sufficient woman. Father Damien helped her from the beginning, so she didn't falter. She survived…" (Erdrich, 2001: p. 268).

By acting in the sense of counseling many Indian people, helping them support their difficulties, and speaking their language as one of them, Damien was welcome where no other white was allowed. Consequently, Indians appreciated his interest in their weaknesses as well as his sense of compassionate justice. As such, he earns respect and admiration of all the community members.

From all this, we can assert that, "Father Damien is a mature individual devoted to the welfare (not warfare) of fellow human being and that Damien was in the service of the spirit of goodness wherever that might evidence itself" (Howard, 2000: pp. 120-121).

In short, we notice on the basis of Bhabha's vision of the "in-between" that the literary works of Erdrich bespeak how both Indians and non-Indians characters never fit conveniently into any niche; how they experience different hybrid process by seeking to balance contradictions.

As well, despite several centuries of experiences with authoritative discourse, Louise Erdrich's portrayal of people or communities faced with foreign beliefs, customs and culture, has been a significant attempt to dismantle, challenge the racial discourse and categorization. She achieved this challenge thanks to protagonists that are not stereotypical Native Americans by investing them with self-reflective abilities (Beidler & Barton, 1999).

5. Conclusion

> "Erdrich's work opens closed doors, makes multiple experiences visible, includes instead of excluding. It recognizes and prioritizes specificity, instead of discriminatory universal qualities (…) the novels do not subscribe to the "either/or" but to the" both/and" logic" (Lysik, 2017: pp. 130-131).

These utterances of Marta Lysik sum up all the philosophy conveyed by the novels of Louise Erdrich. In fact, the latter differed from the earlier native writers who were much tougher in tone and which demanded for harsh actions against white people and their culture. The tone of her novels is a way of stressing that, "being an American and a Native American are not diametrically opposed identities" (Sanders, 1998: p. 153). Caroline Rosenthal also subscribes to the point of view of Karla Sanders, when she claims that, "Louise Erdrich as a mixed blood herself intends to demonstrate that cultural diversity or a position in-between two cultures is enriching, not depriving." (Rosenthal, 2003: p. 108)

It is obvious that the novels of Louise Erdrich are more tolerant pleading for the mixture of cultures. Namely, they promote the heterogeneity of cultures and

identities which is a living reality of the twenty-first-century in America. They expound the situation of Native Americans in which the binaries of self/other, Christian/ Non-Christian, and male/ female are collapsed, by providing evidence that hybridity being far from being an handicap, is potentially enriching for people in general and particularly for Indians, who should examine themselves and have the ability to adjust to the new social, political, and economic environment of America.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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A Remnant of a Grand Tradition: An Analytical Reading of *Vanessa* (1958)

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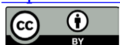

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Abstract

Even though *Vanessa* received a lukewarm reception at its European premier in 1958 and the opus' revival has been irregular, the opera still occupies a special place in the history of opera of the English language. Gian-Carlo Menotti and Samuel Barber's operatic collaboration follows the dramatic convention in the genre of music theater of the nineteenth-century in portraying its heroine. Furthermore, the setting of the opera also reminisces the theatrical themes from the previous century, and focuses on domestic conflicts and mysteries. As most part of the western world was still trying to come out of the horror of the WWII, such theatrical offering might not be able to entice its audience, who was eager to experience new form of artistic expressions. The essay will have a close reading of *Vanessa* and its association with the traditional operatic narrative. The genre of music theater is fascinated with the portrayal of female characters. Thus, through analysing the narrative construction and character depictions of the opera, readers can start to sense the dramatic function of a female character in an operatic narrative. Finally, the essay will also discuss the effect of applied postmodernism on the genre of music theater. Perhaps, it is because of this current intellectual paradigm that signals the decline of this unique art form.

Keywords

Music Theater, English Libretto, Post-War History, Feminism, Intersectionality

1. Introduction

Menotti and Barber's *Vanessa* begins with the premise of the heroine's submissive mentality within a patriarchal society (Heiland, 2004). The work highlights the delicate balance of the power dynamic in a relationship and emphasizes the characters' emotional bond. Vanessa has the beauty and wealth but emotionally

she still longs for a masculine figure in her life and is willing to suspend her life for twenty years for that to happen. By featuring a heroine with extreme wealth and beauty, the librettist intends to set the opera in a fantasy world of unconstrained glamour without the awkwardness of real decision and action.

Furthermore, the theme of the interiorisation of women's social and emotional needs can also be considered the main subject of Samuel Barber and Gian-Carlo Menotti's only collaboration, *Vanessa*. The work was arguably one of the most highly anticipated American works prior to its successful premier at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York on 23 January 1958. Distantly inspired by Isak Dinesen's (Karen Blixen) "The Old Chevalier" from her *Seven Gothic Tales*, this American opera is written by an American composer and an Italian librettist; the opus is conceived by following the conventional European "grand opera" style. As Barbara B. Heyman suggests, "*Vanessa* does epitomize the conventional lyrical style of late nineteen- and early twentieth-century Romantic operas; but while its models derive from Verdi, Puccini, and Strauss, the musical ideas are always on Barber's own terms" (Heyman, 1992). Not only the musical style but also the literary manner in *Vanessa* can be seen to have been influenced by its European antecedents.

In practice, however, the opera is vague in establishing its genre. Clearly the Gothic and melodramatic elements are supposed to remove this from grubby realism into the land of romantic myth. But there is no sign to indicate the type of myth the opera belongs to and it is notable that most myths do not involve quite so much swooning music. The characterization of the heroine does not give her any symbolic value nor succeed in portraying her even as the stereotype of the female self-sacrificing figure as most of her nineteenth or early twentieth-century counterpart. Her initial renunciation of her happiness and youth looks more like extended pique than unfulfilled passion, and Vanessa eventually gains her "salvation" with Anatol junior who gives every indication of being profoundly untrustworthy. As the hero finally departs with his adroitly [re]claimed mistress, the music seems to endorse this improbable union of opportunism and self-delusion and *Vanessa* has managed to espouse the weakly conventional view of the female operatic character as passive receiver in a male dominated society.

Vanessa is set in an unspecified Northern European country during the winter season. The librettist deliberately uses the gothic elements to evoke not only a sense of romance but also an impression of unattainability throughout the narrative. The never ceasing snow and the coldness in the story also symbolize the heroine's emotion, which has been frozen in a time capsule since her lover's untimely departure. The dinner scene, which opens the opera, represents a daily routine of the household and captures not only the opulence of the family but also a sense of stillness indicating that very little has changed for quite some time. The first scene establishes the relationship between the three female characters: Vanessa is agitatedly waiting for her lover; Erika is collectedly carrying on

her daily routine and looking after her aunt while the Baroness' indifference and silence to the heroine are her strong protest against Vanessa's irrational behaviours. The arrival of a stranger suddenly awakens the heroine's emotions as she believes that he is her lover, Anatol. In fact, the stranger's name is Anatol—not the heroine's bygone lover but his son.

Anatol's startling presence appears to bring the heroine's household "alive" again. However, in the second scene the librettist also indicates the young hero's facile character and this creates a variation on a nineteenth-century romantic story. Anatol not only has successfully seduced Erika on the day of his arrival but has also managed to manipulate Vanessa into believing that she is in love again with him. The hero's fluid character arouses the Baroness' strong suspicion as to his motives but she nevertheless strongly urges Erika to be more assertive in her own interest. But after hearing Anatol's easy-going attitude to love, Erika realizes that he is not as committed to her as she is to him and decides to give him up on behalf of her aunt, even though she is already pregnant by him.

The second act further expands on the relation between Vanessa and Anatol with the announcement of their engagement. The seemingly ritualistic declaration of love in the act is strangely muddled with an unlikely love duet. "ANATOL: Love has a bitter core, Vanessa. /Do not taste too deep. /Do not search into the past. /He who hungers for the past will be fed on lies. /VANESSA: Love has a bitter core, Anatol, /but let me taste this bitterness with you. /I shall never take too much/if you will offer all." (*Vanessa*, Act II) The passage reveals the characters' different outlooks on their love affair. Anatol is quite bluntly telling Vanessa that his love is most likely to be insincere. However, the heroine still enthusiastically and blindly welcomes his love for her and expresses her willingness to suffer the consequences. The librettist is using Anatol and Vanessa's romantic proclamation to express a cynical view on the true motives within a conventional relationship. Furthermore, the ceremonial atmosphere for the scene is marred by the absence of Erika. The heroine's niece is heartbroken by Anatol's betrayal and she dashes out into the snowy evening, murmuring that Anatol's child "must not be born".

The first scene in act three is set in Erika's bedroom, a couple of hours after the engagement party. Even though the girl has been rescued by Anatol by being pulled out of a snowdrift and has suffered a miscarriage, Vanessa is tormented by the possibility that Erika is actually in love with Anatol. Vanessa demands an explanation from Anatol as to why her niece went out but Anatol's evasive response allows the heroine to believe he really loves her. As the scene comes to an end, Erika finally tells her grandmother that she miscarried on the night of Vanessa's engagement. Astounded by Erika's conduct, the baroness turns her back on Erika and abandons her just as she did to Vanessa. The final scene contrasts Vanessa and Anatol's preparation for their departure for their life in Paris with Erika's solemn lament for the loss of her love and youth. The opera concludes with Erika's words, "Now it is my time to wait!"

The structure of *Vanessa* relies upon a cyclic narrative form in which the fate of the heroine will eventually pass on to her successor, Erika. Although the relationship between Vanessa and Erika is bound by blood, their parallel fates have almost added a supernatural element throughout the whole piece. Although fate casts a formidable shadow for the heroine and her niece, the librettist also provides a dramatic twist to amplify the elements of this seemingly gothic romance. Like the character of Rodolphe Boulanger in *Madame Bovary*, Anatol is not only unconventional but also unsatisfactory as the hero of a romance. Even though he is naturally eager to meet the woman who "haunted" his family throughout his childhood, his actual intention and manner of the visit is something of a mystery. The baroness unreservedly speaks out her impression about the young Anatol, "but this Anatol, oh this cautious knight/who entered our house like a thief, /what kind of a man is he?" (*Vanessa*, Act I scene ii). The word "thief" combined with Anatol's sudden and peculiar appearance and behaviour suggests the character is better to be described as an opportunist than a romantic hero. Without his family (it is unclear what has happened to them, except that Anatol the elder has died) and being alone in the world, Vanessa's vast wealth immediately represents the obvious and the most plausible attraction for Anatol's visit.

Although Anatol's visit finally terminates Vanessa's solitary longing for her previous lover, the young man also awakens Erika's womanhood and inspires her to break away from being in her aunt's shadow. This takes the form of her getting drunk and allowing herself to be seduced by Anatol on the first night of his arrival as the young hero alluringly utters, "Outside this house the world has changed. /Time flies faster than before; /there is no time for idle gestures. /I cannot offer you eternal love/for we have learned today such word are lies. /But the brief pleasure of passion, yes, /and sweet, long friendship." (*Vanessa*, Act I scene ii) With her entire life entrenched in Vanessa's isolated mansion, Erika has obviously very little experience in interacting with others. The appearance of Anatol the son not only resuscitates Vanessa's unending aspiration for reunion with her past lover but also awakens Erika's femininity and her craving for love. For her, Anatol represents the freedom of the outside world. Erika finds Anatol irresistible and yields to temptation. Allured by Anatol's romantic talk, as illustrated above, Erika unwittingly inherits Vanessa's fate and stays even more firmly under the shadow of her aunt.

The dramatic function of Anatol's character exposes an unexpected source of confusion in understanding the opera. Menotti's libretto clearly underlines the character's unreliability, as immediately announced by the Baroness. Although the Baroness does not have many lines to sing, her grim presence throughout the piece has made her an authoritative (if somewhat eccentric) witness to the Vanessa/Anatol/Erika love triangle. Her strong suspicion of Anatol's intentions behind the visit is the librettist's initial indication which suggests a dramatic twist on this seemingly romantic plot of lost-love recovered. Menotti's intention of undermining the conventionalities of plot in gothic romance find further evi-

dence in Vanessa and Anatol's love duet in the second act. "ANATOL: I did not ask for whom you were waiting/that night when first we met. /VANESSA: For you, Anatol, for you. /ANATOL: Not, not for me, for I was born that night." (*Vanessa*, Act II) Anatol clearly understands that it was not him that Vanessa is expecting, that it was in fact his father; in turn, Vanessa glosses over this detail in order to accept this specious declaration. The hero is merely an illusion of his father whom Vanessa in true Romantic fiction style dearly loved and can never forget. Nevertheless, with remarkably little effort, he beguiles the heroine into loving him and implores her to forget her painful past. Vanessa simply falls for this young re-embodiment of her former lover without questioning much about him. The heroine has been living in a delusional mental state since all she does in her desolated mansion is await the re-appearance of her Anatol. It is difficult to describe the exact tone of this libretto. At one level, through this unrealistic positioning of the main characters, the librettist intends that it should resemble something of a mythic narrative about a woman's steadfast virtue. On the other hand, there is a profoundly cynical strain running through the whole piece.

By employing gothic elements in the libretto, the librettist can transfer the plot from realism into the realm of fantasy, but quasi-realist considerations become insistent. Vanessa's hysterical response towards the appearance of young Anatol underlines Menotti's aim not only to establish the piece as a mythic fantasy but also to reflect the heroine's delusion state of mind. One might compare much of this to Proust, where love is so tied up with illusion and self-projection that the old romantic myth can no longer survive. However, Barber's music does not fully correspond with Menotti's intention of creating a distinctly odd dramatic entanglement between Vanessa, Anatol and Erika.

Furthermore, the composer does nothing to explore the caddishness in Anatol but simply depicts the character in the mode of a nineteenth-century romantic hero. It is typical of the score that the rich melodic lines in Vanessa and Anatol's love duet seem entirely without irony. Where the libretto has established dubiety or self-delusion, Barber's music persists in romanticising the plot as if it can be taken at face value. As a result, instead of composing the music for a gothic intrigue, the composer approaches the story as a piece of late romantic music theatre, such as Puccini's *Turandot* (1924). The composer's aim in connecting the twentieth-century American opera with European traditions has led the piece to be criticised as being not "American" enough. But this rather misses the point. One should rather question whether the main situation is at all coherent. Perhaps the comment reflects the shortcomings of the piece in which the composer and the librettist were too eager to recall the operatic tradition of the previous century but neglected a chance to explore either the implications of its own materials or embark on a new direction for the genre of music theatre in the twentieth-century.

In the opera, the young Erika is presented as Vanessa's mirror image as she reflects, "sometimes I am her niece/but mostly her shadow." (*Vanessa*, Act I scene i)

The young Anatol's appearance, therefore, initiates Erika's self-recognition. In the course of the piece the young lady has gradually evolved from a mere reflection of her aunt into a mature independent woman. However, in a re-enactment of the family fate, Erika, just like her aunt Vanessa before her, also chooses to sacrifice herself (and her child), in this case to deny a man whose integrity she no longer believes in—though the baroness thinks she should just get what she can. Rather she makes herself available for the future appearance of some possible ideal love. Like the heroine, Erika has surrendered to her destiny, which is to await the arrival of her future lover, as she delivers the ultimate phrase of the opera, "now it is my turn to wait!" (*Vanessa*, Act III, scene ii)

Although *Vanessa* did not succeed in captivating the Austrian critics at its European premiere at the Salzburg Festival in 1958, Barber and Menotti's collaboration nevertheless won over its first European audience. To quote Henrik Kralik's review in *Die Presse* after *Vanessa*'s Salzburg performance, the critic declares the opera is "an opera for the public and not for the intellectuals". As with gothic fiction itself, one of its narrative appeals is to evoke a sense of nostalgia through capturing a fantasized version of the aristocratic past; *Vanessa*'s targeted audience would be the social bourgeois. By drawing on an exotic and lavish European setting, the opera seems designed to capture middle class America's nostalgic fantasy concerning the old world. Along with Barber's music, Menottis's libretto achieved critical acclaim in the United States, as a journalist notes, "Mr. Menotti's libretto is effective theatre, and by the time the composer has reached the fourth act he has conquered the problems of opera. He has educated himself *en route*, as it were, and the most significant lesson he has learned is that the surest way to reach the heart of the audience is to be true to his own deepest musical instincts" (Taubman, 1958).

The combination of Vanessa's blind and self-deluding love for Anatol, Erika's naivety and the insincere, deceiving character of the hero, demonstrates Menotti's intention to create an ironic reading of a conventional romance. Menotti was explicit in his writing of stage directions in the libretto, and this clearly represents an attempt to ensure that future productions would not distort his intentions and, in this way, reduce any misunderstanding by directors. Unfortunately, he seems not to have told his composer. One can only conclude that the clash of words and music in *Vanessa* is due to Barber and Menotti's miscommunication or even an unintentional rivalry. (On various occasions Gian Carlo Menotti has mentioned that he did this to try to ensure that his works would be presented in line with his intentions. He explained that like other composers, he wrote the music to reflect the text and set the scene for the piece. Menotti viewed certain "updated" operatic productions, which in accordance with the German school of "regie theatre", to be an abomination. They destroy the composers' original intentions when the director ignored the written text.)

The ending of the opera arouses a degree of puzzlement as to intentions. In

the field of theatrical writing, the end usually goes some distance to defining the genre and confirming the audience's understanding of how they are expected to respond to the story. In this case, *Vanessa* concludes with the happy departure of the hero and the heroine, though whether we are meant to assume that Anatol and Vanessa will actually live happily ever after is something of a mystery. On the face of it, it seems improbable, calling into question any view of the opera as a conventional romance. Furthermore, although the opera is set during a three-month winter period, the plot and scenery arrangements provide a static tone for its dramatic actions. Everything appears to happen within a short period of time—Anatol suddenly arrives, then he and Vanessa fall in love and not long after that they leave the house to live together. The compressed timeline in the opera is presumably intended to quell the audience's doubts on the psychological motivation for the characters. The gothic element in the opera further removes the plot from any realistic attachment and gives the opera a sense simultaneously banal and mythic qualities. However, the final presentation of the piece is seriously marred by an apparent miscommunication between the librettist and the composer. It is clear from the music that, Barber intended to compose a romantic melodrama but he was a given a much darker anti-romantic story as the base of the libretto.

Of course, the above must be modified in that there is obviously an attempt to fit this up in mythic terms as a cyclic narrative, and by the invocation of Gothic form—which is intended to remove it from the framework of realist narrative (within which it would become merely ludicrous and unconvincing). One aspect of the "gothic" element is that any sense of the real outside world has virtually ceased to exist and that we are therefore to be more concerned with rather strange inner states than with anything that could be regarded as everyday reality. The heroine's refusal to accept the elder Anatol's departure has caused her to preserve herself within a time capsule for the last twenty years, living in a house with all the mirrors covered and not speaking to her mother during the whole period. Erika, we are told, is Vanessa's niece—though what happened to Vanessa's sibling is not explained. That both Vanessa and Erika seem to have an inner need to sit around moping for years on end is odd enough—but odder (as it turns out) is that the plot does not seem to be based on any observationally convincing aspect of their psychologies. That is, they are responding to an impulse which is inner but not psychological in the sense of "Why did you do that?" —which is a question about identifiable (or even unconscious) motives. As the opera begins, it is a dark and stormy night. Not knowing that Anatol the son has used his father's signal, Vanessa's anticipation of her lover's return finally culminates in her extreme reaction on hearing of Anatol's arrival, "Do not utter a word, Anatol, /do not move; /you may not wish to stay. /For over twenty years/ in stillness, in silence, /I have waited for you." (*Vanessa*, Act I scene i) And it is this strange inner need that connects the narrative both to the gothic and the mythic.

2. Female Characters in Early Twentieth-Century Music Theater/Opera

Like Guiseppe Giacosa, Luigi Illica and Giacomo Puccini's "tragedia japponese", *Madama Butterfly* (1904), the theme of a heroine desperately expecting the return of her lover has formed the basic dramatic structure for *Vanessa*. "Tutto questo avverrà, te lo prometto. /Tienti la tua paura—io son sicura/Fede l'aspetto." (*Madama Butterfly*, Act II) In *Madama Butterfly*, the audience is presented with a theatrical portrayal of an innocent young oriental woman who is dishonestly betrayed. Because Cio-Cio-San firmly believes that her American husband Pinkerton will ultimately return to be reunited with her, she steadfastly refuses to believe any indication that her American husband could have intended that he was entering a sham marriage. After Butterfly pours scorn over Prince Yamadori's genuine proposal of marriage, the tragic conclusion of the opera is therefore unavoidable. She finally realizes Pinkerton's new marital status and as the heroine's world completely shatters, Cio-Cio-San decides to end her suffering by committing the ultimate Japanese sacrificial ritual, "seppuku" and dies with honour. Thus, Butterfly inherited not only the sacrificial weapon, but also her fate.

In *Madama Butterfly*, the librettists not only make use of an oriental setting but also feature a Japanese woman who fits the clichéd occidental image of a loyal, innocent and graceful character, in order to locate the action in a familiar space for its first European audience. Lehmann reflects, "exoticism inevitably conjures up images of sensuality […] the *veni-vidi-vici* theme of Western boy meets Japanese girl was taken up by many writers of the day—and, over the decades, it became the most popular one" (Lehmann, 1984). Pinkerton is presented as the prototype of the Western explorer who imposes his cultural expectations on his Japanese "wife" who is supposed to be an emotionally fragile and physically delicate creature. Furthermore, by highlighting Cio-Cio-San's steadfast loyalty to her husband, the opera also reinforces the role of women in society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By setting the opera in the Far East, the composer and the librettist therefore have given themselves the license to incorporate the European audience's expectations into their narrative.

Both *Madama Butterfly* and *Vanessa* emphasise the nineteenth-century idea of the passivity of female characters and of their social function; then incorporate them into the literary expectations of twentieth-century western society. In both operas, the only occupation for the heroines is simply awaiting the reappearance of their long-lost lovers. They have been removed from any significant social obligations. The music in both works also reflect this nineteenth century view with an abundance of high romanticism in the music structure. By creating a myth surrounding the subject of the emotional dependency of women, Barber and Menotti are leaning heavily on the nineteenth-century's view of women and this will raise some interesting questions about expressive functions and audience's expectation in the middle of the twentieth-century, especially after the

second world war.

In conventional romantic literary portrayals, the main role in life for young upper-middle class women in the nineteenth-century was to marry well, or at least to form a useful or prosperous marital alliance for her family. Once they had achieved this goal and had found a suitable husband, their initial mission in life was accomplished and their individual personalities could henceforth be subsumed under that of their husbands. Significantly, their lives would lack of plots and they would be portrayed as leading a rather monotonous domestic life. This social phenomenon is well reflected in Jane Austin's works in which all the narratives are structured by the search for an ideal husband and conclude with happy marriages – there are no plots about married life, apart from the splendid Mrs Croft in *Persuasion* (1816).

It appears to be that a woman's live ceases to be appealing as the centre of narrative after they are married. Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* presents a terrifying account of the banality and emptiness for nineteenth-century women after entering wedlock. In order to escape from domestic boredom, Emma Bovary reads romances, albeit uncritically, and deludes herself into thinking that she might live like a romantic heroine. However, as her illusionary world collapses, Emma decides to end her life as a "noble" heroine and commit suicide. The female characters in *Vanessa* re-capture this nineteenth-century social phenomenon in that they all apparently just sit around the remote mansion years after year without seeming to do much. Whereas Emma Bovary at least seeks her illusionary life style, Vanessa and Erika submissively wait for the right person to come along. Even in a conservative twentieth-century society this presents problems concerning narrative motivation and whether these can be side-stepped by the invocation of a non-realistic genre remains to be seen.

After the late eighteenth-century, male characters in music theater have gradually lost the battle of popularity to their female counterparts who still fascinate librettists, composers and the audience to this day. (Clément, 1989) Since then composers and librettists have been more drawn to the pathos and conditions of tragedy in a drama than to representing historical or heroic deeds as did their Renaissance and Baroque predecessors. For this reason, the vulnerability of female characters in music drama has presented itself as a topic suitable to the artists' imaginations. However, unlike the masculine roles which predominately emphasize the militant facet of their characters; vulnerability and frequently even passivity in the face of human suffering are predominantly portrayed by the female characters (Pope & Leonardi, 1998).

Some aspects of this narrative function continue into the portrayal of women in twentieth-century works though there are subtle shifts in their evocation of pathos. Instead of drawing on the spectators' sympathy as in their nineteenth-century predecessors, writers in the twentieth-century focus more on the irony and horror which the heroines endure throughout the narrative. The comparison of the heroines' suffering between *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and Alban

Berg's *Lulu* (1939/1979) highlights the shift of the employment of pathos in music theatre. In *Lucia*, the audience will sympathize with the suffering heroine who has no choice but to surrender her mental stability in order to escape the demands from her family. The use of *bel canto* soprano emphasizes the composer's intention to conjure up the dramatic pathos throughout the entire work. On the other hand, the death of Lulu at the hands of Jack the Ripper comes at the end of a long downward spiral and is almost a relief for the spectators. Although they might be shocked by the final scene, Lulu's death appears to be the consequence of a series of horrible circumstances which she has been powerless to control even while exercising her function as seemingly autonomous agent. William Beers points out, "The ritual reenacts the terror of merger and separation […] this reenactment gives men power […] which was originally located in the experience of the maternal self-object. The cultural function and result of this transfer of power is that women are excluded from exercising cultural power […] the need to sacrifice occurs when the male narcissistically invested social structures have their boundaries tested or threatened, that is, whenever self-objects intrude" (Beers, 1992). By creating women as the sacrificial victims, the subconscious self-anxiety and vanity within the male self in the modern patriarchal society has finally revealed its true nature. Therefore, through the sacrifice of female characters the librettists and composers are guiding their audiences to undergo a new aspect of dramatic catharsis through their musical and theatrical experience (Nuttall, 1996).

By contrast, in Menotti and Barber's *Vanessa*, the opera captures the heroine's submissive mentality towards gender roles established in a patriarchal society. (Heiland, 2004) The work highlights the delicate balance between power and sexual dominance in a couple's affectionate bond. Vanessa has the beauty and wealth but she displays her emotional dependence by her fixated desire for the one man in her life. By renouncing her happiness and youth, Vanessa seeks to gain her ultimate salvation by the presence of Anatol junior. As the hero is ultimately able to adroitly [re]claim his father's mistress, *Vanessa* has espoused the conventional romantic view on the female operatic character as a passive receiver in the male dominated society.

3. *Vanessa* and the Late Twentieth-Century Applied Postmodernism

Vanessa was one of the most anticipated shows before its European premiere at the Salzburg summer festival in 1958. The collaboration of Samuel Barber and Gian-Carlo Menotti marks a significant moment of both composers' artistic endeavours. Barber and Menotti have known each other since their time at the Curtis institute and have formed a strong connection. They thoroughly understand of each other's artistic style and aesthetic intuition. *Vanessa* marks the beginning of their operatic collaboration; in 1966 they both worked on Barber's second full-length opera, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, an adaptation after Shakes-

peare's famous play to commemorate the grand opening of the Metropolitan opera at the Lincoln center, NYC.

Menotti was already a celebrated composer in his own right with the works such as *The Medium* (1946), *The Consul* (1950) and *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951). The Italian American composer would only write his own libretto for his work. Therefore, not writing the music for his own words would be a major departure from his own creative procedure. Even though, Menotti had mentioned that he had his own version of the music for *Vanessa*, of course it was never committed on paper, the composer has complete trust in Barber's version of the final presentation.

In spite of the fact that *Vanessa* received a warm and welcome reception at its world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera, the opera's European outing was far from desirable, as the work encountered serious of disapproval and was deemed "unamerican". (Ashley, 2003) It could be argued that by the late 1950's and early 60's, European countries have gradually come out the shadow of the WWII and societies were enthusiastically embracing new aesthetic paradigm and expecting seismic change in artistic expression. With the emergence of the baby boomer's generation, the social and economic influence of the boomers have begun to make its mark around the late 1950's, hence the birth of "counter-culture" among the European and North-American countries. Theodore Roszak notes, "The counter culture is the embryonic cultural base of New Left politics, the effort to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual norms, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home and the Protestant work ethic." (Roszak, 1968) With this new aesthetic framework based on the Left, Marxist leaning ideology and the rejection of the bourgeois society which was established during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, a narrative purely derives from a domestic setting destined to be faced with lukewarm reception from the critics and the audience alike. *Vanessa* would prove to be one the examples in which the work was not able to caught up with the general sentiment of the zeitgeist of the era.

It could also be argued that the lack of enthusiasm for Barber and Menotti's collaboration after its European premiere is not only the consequence of the narrative problem in the work but also the general perception of opera as an art form in the post-war era. It is true that western music theater did enjoy a period of boost in its popularity and demand as European nations, especially the German speaking region, used the art form as the binding force to unite the nation. Vienna State opera hastily reopened in 1955 with a gala performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Bavaria State Opera reopened in 1963 are the two examples in which each individual nation used music theater as a form of secular ritual to commemorate the past and indicate the arrival of a new era.

However, with the increasing dominance of the youth "sub-culture" and the emphasis on the employment of technology in art-work production, the tradi-

tional or even conservative style of performing art, western music theater in particular has gradually been demoted to be enjoyed only by a handful of niche audience. As Arthur Marwick notes, "the rise to positions of unprecedented influence of young people, with youth subculture having a steadily increasing impact on the rest of society, dictating taste in fashion, music, and popular culture generally…such was the prestige of youth and the appeal of the youthful lifestyle that it became possible to be "youthful" at much more advanced ages than would have been thought proper previously. Youth, particularly at the teenage end, created a vast market of its own in the artefacts of popular culture." (Marwick, 2006) The ascendency of the youth subculture throughout the second half of the twentieth-century has signaled the dwindling prestige which the western music theater once had among the social elite throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The cold reception of *Vanessa*'s European premiere perhaps reflects this unavoidable social change.

Another major issue which inadvertently hinder Barber and Menotti's first collaboration to be admitted to the twenty-first century operatic canon could be the opera's subject matter and its detachment from the contemporary discourse, the emphasis on post-structuralist conditions and the woke mentality. Not only the increasing influence of the youth subculture has gradually eroded western music theater's cultural and social prestige away from the consciousness of the general public, but also the emergence of the use television as people's primary source of entertainment has significantly obstructed the masses' attention from performing arts. Marwick further notes, "the advent, as a consequence in particular of the almost universal presence of television, of 'spectacle' as an integral part of the interface between life and literature. The most rebellious action, the most obscure theories, the wildest cultural extremism, the very 'underground' itself: all operated as publicly as possible, and all, thanks to the complex interaction with commercial interests and media, attracted the maximum publicity. Thus, one extreme gesture accelerated into the next. Each spectacle had to be more extreme than the previous one" (Marwick, 2006). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, as entertainment industry continuously depends on technology and slowly gravitates to sensationalism in order to appeal the masses, few newly commissioned works of art could be easily recognized and be appreciated as a result. *Vanessa* unfortunately falls victim of that social trend and only be remembered by a few ardent connoisseurs.

The disconnection from the twenty-first-century "society justice" movement, which derives from the post-modernist movement, in regard to its portrayal of female characters in the opus also restricts *Vanessa*'s reproducibility among major opera houses. The narrative of the opera follows the nineteenth-century operatic convention by focusing the story on domestic issues in a "northern country", presumably in Scandinavia. Vanessa's household is evidently wealthy with a footman, a butler and even an in-house doctor which reveals not only the characters' social status but also their confidence in expressing their emotional tur-

moil and needs. However, these dramatic elements are not able to answer post-modernists' call for a more "equal" and "democratic", both in social, economic and racial term, society. James Lindsay and Helen Pluckrose states, "postmodern thinkers reacted to modernism by denying the foundations of some aspects of Modern thought... they rejected the underlying modernist desire for authenticity, unifying narratives, universalism and progress, achieved primary through scientific knowledge and technology. At the same time, they took the modernists' relatively measured, if pessimistic, skepticism of tradition, religion, and Enlightenment-era certainty—along with their reliance on self-consciousness, nihilism, and ironic forms of critique—to extreme" (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). With an opera mainly focuses on its upper-middle characters' emotional yarning and inner struggles, *Vanessa* does seem to be rather old-fashioned in its dramatic theme and narrative.

Another issue which the modern audience might have when reading *Vanessa* would be the opus' insufficiency in addressing the current feminist concerns. A socially privileged heroine in a self-imposed exiled and doing nothing but patiently waiting her lover's return does not seem to reflect twenty-first century's fascination on "intersectionality", which focuses on gender, ethnic diversity and social pluralism. This new aspect of the more intricate dimension of feminism would place the protagonist's "standpoint" center stage and employs such model as the benchmark to evaluate the character's social value. Lindsay and Pluckrose further note, "in this new feminist paradigm, knowledge is "situated," which means that it comes from one's "standpoint" in society, by which they mean one's membership in intersecting identity groups. This, in turn, renders objective truth unobtainable and ties knowledge to power and both knowledge and power to the discourses that are believed to create, maintain, and legitimize dominance and oppression within society" (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). As a result, *Vanessa* can hardly satisfy contemporary audience's demand for "social justice" by following the grand operatic tradition of the nineteenth-century and is only been referenced as one of the American operas of the twentieth-century.

4. Conclusion

In Samuel Barber and Gian-Carlo Menotti's *Vanessa*, the narrative is focused on the concept of fate, destiny and the mirror image of the two female characters. By setting the story in a domestic confinement in a remote northern country, the audience is presented with a psychological music drama. The main characters in the opera ultimately fulfill their destiny, hence each of them could start again with a new life after the curtain fall. However, such narrative theme could hardly satisfy the contemporary audience's need for a more socially attuned and ethnically nuanced theatrical motif and the work has gradually been neglected by the modern audience.

The poor reception of *Vanessa* in the new millennium is not a single case among operatic opus. Opera composers and librettists can hardly emulate the

great success of their predecessors such as, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart/Lorenzo da Ponte, Giuseppe Verdi/Francesco Maria Piave, Richard Strauss/Hugo von Hofmannsthal and W. H. Auden/Igor Stravinsky. With the dominance of television as the primary entertaining outlet for the masses, music theater unfortunately is no longer the only ultimate representation of western civilization but merely an aspect of the colonialist white-elitist perception of the western cultural production. The rise of the youth subculture since the 1960s also contributes to the steady decline in western music theater/opera's social influence and cultural prestige. The general public would no longer be satisfied solely by the subtle melody and the intricate harmony which western classic music can provide and they are more likely to be drawn to music which can instantly gratify their senses and listening experience.

Apart from the unavoidable social changes in the late twentieth-century which sowed the seeds for western music theater's unfortunate demise; the music establishments itself could also be the blame for its own gradual collapse. The evolution of an opera singer requires time and constant awareness of singer's physical and mental development. However, under the current opera market, the younger generation of opera singers do not have the luxury to fully develop their instrument and, in many occasions, are even been encouraged to sing roles which are beyond their ability. If they fail to live up to the expectations, there will always be the next person who is willing to step in for a chance to shine.

Furthermore, there are some opera directors who are more than eager to redefine and reimagine the existing operatic canon for the audience. They would present the viewing public with a fanciful production of a classic music theater in hope of attracting a new and younger audience. However, in so doing those overly enthusiastic opera directors would normally impose their own world view and philosophy on the already established dramatical settings in an opera. "Regie Theater" as it is been called in German artistic scene, is a rather popular and wide spread practice in music theater. In most cases, such interpretations would not only alienate the audience but also spoil the original work. During the process of writing an opera, composers and librettists would already have a concrete image and idea of the artistic effects they are searching for, then commit them into words and music. The subsequent productions and interpretations should really honor the artistic integrity of its creators and serve the score to their best ability. Finally, it is the audience who will eventually judge the piece on its merits. A well-received work will undoubtedly be included in the western operatic canon; on the other hand, an ill-conceived piece will soon be forgotten by the general public.

The muted reception of Barber and Menotti's opera, *Vanessa* in the new millennium might reflect the ordinary people's indifference towards western music theater as an accessible form of performing art. It is true that the development of western music theater is the by-product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment movement and is normally associated with the social elite. However, there

is hardly any other form of western art which can successfully fuse various artistic disciplines into an exuberant and intricate theatrical presentation. Although western music theater can be considered as an outdated art form in the twenty-first century, the traditions it manages to pass on and the aesthetic values it generates are still worth being preserved in this mercurial world. With the genuine intention and careful preservation in presenting such art form, the art loving audience may again enjoy going to an opera performance like those who attended the premier of *Vanessa* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York City on the 15th January 1958.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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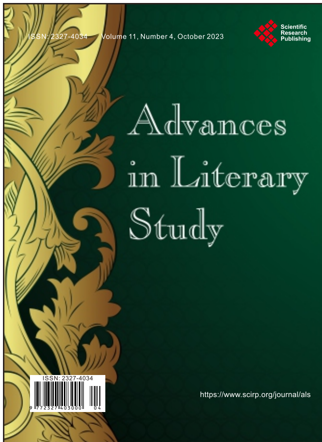

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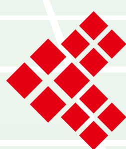

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