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Review

## Redefining Group-man: An application of the “flexible phalanx” theory

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Steinbeck's earlier works, “The Vigilante” and *In Dubious Battle* are described with a tangibly cynical tone towards the nature of man, and the destructive potential of misguided “phalanxes.” However, his later works, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Cannery Row* offer a positive and even hopeful view on the potential of these phalanxes. The reason for this shift lies within Steinbeck's development of “influential actors” and their ability to cultivate democratic communities.

**Key words:** Steinbeck, phalanx, group-man, grapes of wrath, in dubious battle, cannery row, the vigilante, Berardino.

### INTRODUCTION

Steinbeck (1933) wrote “Argument of the Phalanx,” a short essay exploring his ideas on the relationship between the individual and the group. According to him, the group acts with “a drive, an intent, an end, a method, a reaction which in no way resembles the same things possessed by the men who make up the group” (76). Steinbeck's (1933) use of his “phalanx” or “group-man” develops, complicates, and evolves as he explores the possibility of both constructive and destructive group-man within his fiction. His earlier works “The Vigilante” (1938) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936) present a critical view of the dangers and destructive possibilities unharnessed “phalanxes” present, while his later works *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Cannery Row* (1945) offer a more redemptive and productive view on the potential of group-man. The reason for this progression lies in Steinbeck's treatment of what is called “influential actors,” and their ability to foster democratic, participatory communities.

#### Concept/ definition

Steinbeck's phalanx theory is inspired by similar theories in organismal biology that suggest the group “acts as a

causal unit on its own parts” (Astro et al., 1973: 63). Steinbeck borrowed the term “phalanx” for his own theory from Roman legion battle formations in which the soldier units resembled “high domed turtles because of the manner in which they carried their shields above their heads” (Astro et al., 63). Steinbeck's (1933) group-man hypothesis was created in an atmosphere of social unease with the rise of fascism, communism, industrial unionism, and other mass movements. His essay entitled: “Argument of the Phalanx,” can be understood as “a brief social and psychological study of behavior” to make sense of “the social atmosphere of the 30s” (Salazar, 1999: 99). Though perhaps influenced by the strictly scientific attempt to explain group behavior, Steinbeck's theory seems to stray away (perhaps not intentionally) from scientific objectivity and takes root in subjective sociological analysis. Rather, Steinbeck's phalanx theory should not be accepted as pure science, but as an attempted explanation in discussing certain aspects of social and moral behaviors. As they are presented in his literature, the paper will additionally argue that the phalanx theory must be understood as more of a flexible guideline in examining questions of human potential instead of a codified prescription of human action. This

extended “flexible phalanx” argument as its own theory, apart from mere expansion of the original theory itself, includes the influential actor as a *necessary* entity for the creation and preservation of the creative phalanx. That is, the success of the creative phalanx relies on an “other” outside of the phalanx itself.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to assess the difference in Steinbeck’s treatment of destructive and productive phalanxes between his earlier and later works respectively, the paper draws upon biographical works, primary resources including his novels and newspaper articles, along with academic criticism concerned with the Phalanx theory explicitly. The criticism discussed, and indeed much of the criticism in existence in regards to the Phalanx theory, is used as a superficial explanation in determining why groups of men within Steinbeck’s fiction act as a unit. Where the criticism falls short and where the paper attempts to venture is investigating the explicit change Steinbeck makes in his description of his “group-men” during his later novels, and their capacity for positive production. Additionally, the paper contends the agent of this change lies within Steinbeck’s treatment of a single individual—the “influential actor.”

The paper attempts to situate itself within the Phalanx Theory’s critical discourse by citing specific examples within Steinbeck’s fiction where the theory and its depiction of group-man is manifest. The paper draws upon previous criticism to corroborate these instances. The paper then takes Steinbeck’s primary resources in the novels he authored and examines his treatment and portrayal of the “influential actor.” The paper forms its position of the role of the influential actor explicitly from the pages of the fiction itself.

## Application/ analysis

Steinbeck (1933) in a letter to his good friend George Albee discussed the idea of phalanxes for his future novel entitled *In Dubious Battle* (1936). Steinbeck reflects on the destructive capacity for group-man’s “emotions of destruction, of war,... of hatred, of fear” (Steinbeck and Wallsten, 1975:80). The novel, which Steinbeck wrote in 1934, manifests these anxieties in fictional form. The inspiration for *In Dubious Battle* came from his interviews with two communist union organizers hiding in the Monterey area after organizing a strike in the San Joaquin Valley (Benson, 1984: 296). The novel, however, would fictionalize “the geography, facts and characters” blending “the different strikes and the union officials he had witnessed and met in California in the first half of the thirties,” providing the “perfect application of his phalanx theory” (Salazar, 1999: 100) The diegesis of the novel,

consequently, focuses almost explicitly on the conflicts between separate group-men in the Growers’ Association, the Vigilantes, and the apple pickers.

In the novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936) these collectives of men almost always either exploit or endanger one another. They are, due to some sort of moral or structural deficiency, all examples of negative, destructive phalanxes. Their insufficiency, subsequently, degrades into some form of “violence.” The Growers’ Association, the cooperative of landowners in the valley, (whom the pickers seek to strike against) is consistently depicted as predatory when there is an opportunity for profit—capitalizing on the impoverished pickers’ inability to make long trips into town for provisions after grueling days in the fields. The laborers, at the mercy of the Growers’ Association’s store prices, are forced to pay almost all their wages for food above market prices. Jim Nolan, the novel’s ill-fated “hero” (or “half hero”) discovers this as he converses with the old “tree-topper” Dan. As Dan makes his way from the fields, he tells Jim:

Guess I’ll go over to the store and get me a can of beans. These damn fools pay seventeen cents for a pound of canned beans. Why, they could get four pounds of dried beans for that, and cooked up that’d make nearly eight pounds... Well, what time have others got? Women work all day, men work all day; and the owner charges three cents extra for a can of beans because the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries (*In Dubious Battle*, 56).

Though Dan is aware the Growers’ Association is taking advantage of the pickers, he still plans to “go over to the store and get [himself] a can of beans.” Despite the price being unfairly inflated, “the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries.” In order to turn a profit, The Growers’ Association as a destructive phalanx collectively and purposefully keeps the prices high and the fatigued laborers impoverished. Though not physically violent, the Growers’ Association as a phalanx does work jointly as a larger entity to enact a kind of violence against their employee’s well being—providing enough wages to eat but not enough to nourish. With the possibility of greater fiscal gain, the landowners do not hesitate to keep their employees living in tents and shacks; selling them food they know their workers cannot afford.

Acting in concert with the Growers’ Association, the town vigilantes are depicted as another destructive phalanx. While the owners form a group-man to gain profit, the town vigilantes form a group-man because of their inherent prejudiced nature. Steinbeck depicts these men as allowing themselves to be swayed by extreme political ideology as a justification to be violent (perhaps representative of those aligning with Communists and Fascists overseas). The town vigilantes’ ideology is perhaps best embodied by a newspaper clipping the strikers’ action. It

reads:

We [the town] believe the time has come to take action. When transient laborers tie up the Valley's most important industry, when fruit tramps, led and inspired by paid foreign agitators... carry on a campaign of violence and burning, bringing Red Russia into peaceful America, when our highways are no longer safe for American citizens, nor their homes safe from firebrands, we believe the time for action has come (230)!

Through this appeal to extremist ideology, the conflict between the town and the strikers is amplified from a local wage strike into a heavyweight political battle between "Red Russia" and a once "peaceful America...no longer safe for American citizens." As a destructive phalanx, the vigilantes burn a farmhouse, destroy a sympathizer's place of business, and murder Jim in grove outside the striker's camp. Jim's mentor and fellow communist organizer, Mac perhaps best recognizes their capacity for violence in telling Jim:

Why, they're the dirtiest guys in any town. They're the same ones that burned the houses of old German people during the war. They're the same ones that lynch Negroes. They like to be cruel. They like to hurt people, and they always give it a nice name, patriotism or protecting the constitution. But they're just the old nigger tortures working... I guess they're about the worst scum in the world (131).

Here, Steinbeck (1936) seems to expand this criticism of the destructive ideological phalanx by tracing it through history. The town vigilantes in the rural fields of California swayed by charged diction and jingoistic sentiment are, in effect, equated to the people that "burned the houses of old German people during the war" and "lynch Negroes" all in the name of "patriotism" or "protecting the constitution." By drawing in the historical comparison, Steinbeck extends this critique of the town vigilantes to man's disposition towards xenophobic "cruelty." They are not the patriots, or "[protectors] of the constitution" but "the worst scum in the world" (131).

However, Steinbeck's (1936) historical tracking of the violently nationalistic phalanx does present a problem for his theory. By depicting the townspeople as "the same" as the older destructive groups, these particular types of people are presented as *inherently* malicious. The "They" Mac mentions becomes expanded to encompass an entire type of people and their nature. Their sentiments are engrained within this nature as the "They" "always," independent of time, location, or ideology, will be "cruel." The attempt to provide a complex phalaxical explanation as to why these people are violent, if this is the case, seems unnecessary if some types of people are innately "cruel." Their nature, it would follow, could be simply accounted for with a concession that there are just simply

"good" and "bad" people. However, in shifting to an extended view of the phalanx, it is possible to focus on Steinbeck's interest in this group-man's *capabilities*. The individual's nature, whether inherent or scientifically caused, becomes less important than their potential for destruction as a group. It is this flexible understanding of phalanx that preserves the spirit and intent of Steinbeck's disillusionment with mass movements and his critique of the malicious "They."

Even though the strikers are depicted as being taken advantage of and abused throughout the novel, they are also made into a destructive phalanx. Steinbeck purposely, in the communist striker leaders Jim and Mac, creates "a hero in two persons" who have "voluntarily given up their individualities" (Magny as qtd in Astro (1973), "Steinbeck, or the Limits of the Impersonal Novel" 69). Though both Jim and Mac seem to organize the strike with the good intention of securing stable wages for the pickers, both men's growing engrossment in the Party and the Party's goals diminish their sensitivity to the real needs of the strikers, which Steinbeck may suggest, "may well be attributed to his inability to think as an individual about real needs of individuals" (Astro 70). It is both Jim and Mac's stringent obedience to a closed system of Party methods that makes the striker phalanx fail. The men force their ideology upon the workers instead of encouraging democratic, creative participation. Mac, in an attempt to coercively guide the strike, tells a picketer to:

...nominate London, here, for chairman. They'll put him in all right. They'll do almost anything... London, soon you're chairman, you tell 'em to have order. You give 'em a list of guys, about ten, and tell 'em to vote for those guys as a committee to figure things out (*In Dubious Battle*, 80).

Instead of allowing the workers to vote for their own leaders, Mac takes the election into his own hands and uses his position to manipulate the structure of the protest to his will. It is this choice to manipulate instead of include the workers coupled with a rigid obsession for Party's interests instead of the interests of pickers that corrupts the phalanx. The picker's identities, along with the identities of the dual heroes Mac and Jim, are fused together into a kind of perverted "Colossus" (115), with the potential to "run like a mad dog, and bite anything that moves" (53).

The failure as a democratic group-man disintegrates into violence. After settling into their camp, the strikers go out (now under the indirect control of Mac and Jim) to a nearby orchard *en masse* to scare the scabs (replacement workers) that have now taken their jobs. The strikers,

...swarmed on them, cursing in their throats. The [scabs] fought for a moment, and then went down... The fury

departed as quickly as it had come. They stood away from their victims. They panted heavily. Jim looked without emotion at the ten moaning men on the ground, their faces kicked shapeless. Here a lip was torn away, exposing bloody teeth and gums; one man cried like a child because his arm was bent sharply backward, broken at the elbow. Now that the fury was past, the strikers were sick, poisoned by the flow from their own anger glands. They were weak; one man held his hand between his hands as though it ached terribly (141-142).

The strikers, in their "fury," lower themselves to the level of the vicious vigilantes—engaging in the same kind of hateful violence perpetrated against them. The sanctity of their cause and their moral high ground as the abused is lost as they attack innocent pickers not unlike themselves. Steinbeck illustrates the senselessness of this violence and the venality of the "phalanx" in the emptiness Jim experiences as he walks amongst the carnage. Instead of feeling vindication or achievement, Jim looks on "without emotion." The strikers too, after the violence, become "sick, poisoned by... their own anger." This feeling of emptiness and sickness as a symptom of being a part of a negative, destructive phalanx is carried over into another of Steinbeck's stories—"The Vigilante."

Steinbeck published "The Vigilante" in October edition of *Esquire* Magazine in 1936 and later included it in his collection of short stories *The Long Valley* in 1938 (Meyer, 2009 "The Vigilante"). Steinbeck's protagonist Mike, after being part of a lynch mob, experiences hollowness though only:

...Half an hour before, when he had been howling with the mob and fighting for a chance to help pull on the rope, then his chest had been so full that he had found he was crying. But now everything was dead, everything unreal; the dark mob was made of stiff lay-figures. In the flame light, the faces were as expressionless as wood. Mike felt the stiffness, the unreality in himself, too... a cold loneliness fell upon him (*The Vigilante*, 134).

After being a part of this group-man, Mike feels a barrenness similar to what Jim and the strikers experience. The "unreality" does not just affect Mike but the mob in its entirety. In its reckless destruction, the mob "reflects Steinbeck's premise that the group-man can alienate man from himself," (Astro 70). They, perhaps in their last collective action, share together in the hangover of a destructive phalanx. The great catharsis in dispensing justice for the betterment of community, like Jim and the strikers had strived for, ultimately eludes the mob—leaving them only with "unreality" and "cold loneliness."

The desolation both Mike and Jim feel is undoubtedly Steinbeckian symptom of the negative group man. Their detachment and inability to find any sense of accomplishment highlight Steinbeck's own personal critique on the fruitlessness and moral bankruptcy of the mobs. It is

this personal critique, however, that introduces another complication in the application of his phalanx theory. Steinbeck's own moral judgment within his portrayal of negative group-men precludes him from applying any workable objective scientific position. In short, Steinbeck cannot fully include an impartial socio-biological theory to his literature without compromising the biting moral critique that constitutes the nucleus of these stories. However, if taken as an examination of the *potential* of group-man as suggested earlier, Jim and Mac's sickness (along with Steinbeck's chastisement) simply become a consequence of the failed phalanx and its squandered constructive possibilities. Steinbeck's ruling no longer has to remain impartial, while his obvious disapproval of the perversion of the mobs is kept intact.

As Steinbeck continued writing into the late thirties and mid forties, his portrayal of group-man and of group man's potential shifted as he began to explore the value of positive, constructive phalanxes through his literature. In *Dubious Battle*, which first gave the plight of agricultural workers in California some public attention, Steinbeck visited a number of migrant worker camps in Central California. He worked the land shoulder to shoulder with the field laborers and reported his observations of the pickers' living and working conditions in a series of articles for the San Francisco News during the autumn of 1936 called the "The Harvest Gypsies." The workers were almost all displaced Midwesterners trying to escape sandy crop-killing winds of the Dustbowl (Fontenrose, 1963: 67). Later, in 1937, upon returning from New York after working on a stage adaptation of "Of Mice and Men," Steinbeck drove across Oklahoma and joined in with migrants who were heading West in hope of a better life (Fontenrose, 68). After these research-intensive years spent on the road and in the camps, Steinbeck published perhaps his greatest novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

The story of the Joads in their journey across the United States and their struggle in California is a realistic portrayal based on Steinbeck's personal observations. The Joads, like the true migrant families trucking across the long hot highways of depression era America, face financial decline, collapse of morale, and desertion. However, just as the family seems to disintegrate, Steinbeck begins his exploration of the positive, creative phalanx in the birth of the "roadside group-man" between the Joads and Wilsons. Steinbeck illustrates the positive capacity for this roadside group-man in chapter 14:

In the evening, a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. A family, which the night before, had been lost and fearful

might search its goods to find a present for the new baby... And a new unit was formed. The dusk came, but before the dark went down the new family was of the camp (*The Grapes of Wrath*, 193-197).

The creation of this “one family,” sharing the dream of the “golden time of the West” represents creative group-man ideal Steinbeck seeks to consider throughout the novel. Something as trivial as giving “a present for the new baby” becomes a statement in striving to create a community and a cure for those “the night before had been lost and fearful.” The arduous burden of a sickly “child” is taken up by “twenty families, a hundred people.” It is through this graciousness, care, and unification that the impoverished families are even able to make it to the West. Like the nameless “twenty families” Steinbeck mentions, the Joads and the Wilsons combine into a positive roadside group-man to bear the sickness of one, and ensure the success all.

The Joads meet the stranded Wilsons as they pull onto the side of the road in hopes of finding a place to fill their radiator and allow a “sicker”n hell” Grandpa Joad a break from the road (136). After a brief exchange of pleasantries, Sairy Wilson quickly offers to let Grandpa Joad rest on their mattress. After Grandpa dies in the Wilson’s tent (presumably from a stroke), Sairy helps Ma Joad prepare his body, while the men outside decide what to do with the corpse. Here, the cohesion between the two families is further enmeshed as Pa seeks the Wilson’s advice on how bury the body, asking if they have “Any more stuff to say”—echoing Steinbeck’s description of familial democracy earlier in chapter 10: “And without any signal, the family gathered by the truck, and the congress, the family government, went into session” (139-99).

By asking the advice of the Wilson’s, the burden of the Grandpa’s death becomes transmuted into a problem for the Joads and the Wilsons as a whole. The Wilsons as a part of the new roadside family are given a say as to the death of, now, one of *their* family members. Their relationship, in addition to kindness and sharing, becomes democratic. As the Wilsons and Joads deliberate, they form a “circle.” Here, piggybacking off of the Wilson’s kindheartedness and willingness to share what little they have, Steinbeck reinforces the image of unity and equality through the ring—symbolically marrying both the Joads the Wilsons together.

The democracy, community, and egalitarianism spawned in the roadside phalanx are later institutionalized in the “Weedpatch camp” (285). Run by a “Central Committee” elected directly by the people, the camp is depicted as self-governing and able to function without the police (287). The Central Committee and its sub committees (including the Ladies’ Committee) in the novel take it upon themselves to both integrate the new families into the camp and host dances.

On the first morning, the Joads stay in the camp,

“Ladies Committee of Sanitary Unit Number Four” visits Ma Joad and “try to make [her] feel at home” by showing her around the camp explaining the rules the migrants had voted to enact (312- 13). Even this slight gesture on behalf of the committee goes a long way in salvaging Ma’s dignity and making her family feel included in the camp as a part of the community— “[perking]” her up more than she had been “in years” (319). This sense of community created by direct democracy is magnified later in the camp’s throwing of the “best dances in the county” “every Saturday night.” The combination of music (played but the camp members themselves), and communal dancing amongst is shown as having an almost magic quality in forming a sense of fellowship. Jule, one of the campers, mentions:

Here, dances have done funny things. Our people got nothing, but jes’ because they can ast their frien’s to come here to dance, sets ‘em up and makes ‘em proud. An’ folks respects ‘em ‘count of these here dances (340).

The ability of the migrants to throw their own dances and police them themselves, Steinbeck seems to suggest, plays an integral part in preserving the camper’s dignity and making them “proud.” These government camps are presented in the novel as a kind of model for the future of displaced Midwestern workers in the West. Even as Tom leaves the Joads at the end of the novel he tells Ma:

I been thinkin’ how it was in that gov’ment camp, how our folks took care a theirselves, an’ if they was a fight they fixed it theirselves; an’ they wasn’t no cops wagglin’ their guns, but they was better order than them cops ever give. I been a-wonderin’ why we can’t do that all over... All work together for our own thing (341).

The Weed-patch camp, in affording its campers self-governance, equality and community, becomes a constructive phalanx. Its people work together to survive, preserve dignity, and produce a viable structure for others to follow in the future. Steinbeck (1936) based much of his portrayal of the Weed-patch camp on his own experiences in visiting various government camps in doing research for his collection of articles “Harvest Gypsies” (mentioned previously). In his visits, he found:

The result has been more than could be expected. From the first, the intent of the management has been to restore the dignity and decency that had been kicked out of the migrants by their intolerable mode of life...The result of this responsible self-government has been remarkable... The central committee makes the laws that govern the conduct of the inhabitants (“Harvest Gypsies” Article 4).

Here, Steinbeck’s purpose for including the government camp in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is apparent. His

personal opinion on the success of the real-life government camps bleeds over on to the pages of his literature and are likely responsible for the success of the fictional Weed-patch camp. Though the government camp phalanx appears to fit Steinbeck's theory as an optimum group-man, the problem of the "influential actor's" involvement in its success is introduced.

If the government camp (representative of a positive phalanx) was generally observed to be more successful in keeping its units thriving through maintaining a sense of dignity, democracy, and community—if this is the optimal circumstance for a phalanx—then where lies the problem? The state of the collective is happy, healthy, and peaceful. The problem in the Weed-patch camp as a successful phalanx lies within the role of the Federal Government as an influential actor. It is the government and the government's assets that allow for the existence of the camp. The running water, the paid overseer, and the very housing structures themselves rely on receiving resources (costing according to Steinbeck's calculations "\$18,000") without immediate reciprocation from a generous "other" ("Harvest Gypsies" Article 4). The material for this success, in short, is provided by a higher and more powerful outside entity.

Even the roadside phalanx spawned between the Joads and Wilsons, though undoubtedly positive, eventually divorces and disbands without an influential actor. When the families stop for water near the California border, an alienated Noah Joad decides to leave the family to "a walk on down [the] river" to "catch fish" (208). After this desertion, the Wilsons follow suit choosing to stay behind to allow Sairy to "res' an' get strong" (217). Ma Joad, the leader of the family, is unable to keep them together and eventually acknowledges "It's time to go" (219). Indeed, even Tom Joad's transformation into the "socially responsible individual" empowered by "the gospel of reform" at the end of the novel comes too late for the preservation of Joad-Wilson phalanx (Astro, 1973).

Perhaps best exemplified by "Doc" in "Cannery Row," the influential actor must take it upon himself to guide and foster democratic, participatory communities to ensure the success of a positive phalanx. In a kind of whimsical micro illustration of the dangers of the destructive phalanx, Steinbeck describes the aftermath of a party thrown at "Doc's" house by the rowdy but well intentioned "Mack and the boys" without Doc's presence.

The lights blazed in the laboratory. The front door hung sideways on one hinge. The floor was littered with broken glass. Phonograph records, some broken, some only nicked, were strewn about. The plates with pieces of steak ends and coagulating grease were on the floor, on top of the bookcases, under the bed. Whiskey glasses lay sadly on their sides. Some-one trying to climb the bookcases had pulled out a whole section of books and spilled them in broken-backed confusion on the floor. And

it was empty; it was over (*Cannery Row*, 115).

Though Mack and his group collectively pull their money for weeks to buy party favors, without Doc's hands-on guidance, the party quickly becomes damaging and chaotic. The tipped over items in the Doctor's labs playfully parallel the collapsed bodies after the strikers attack the scabs in "In Dubious Battle." The way Steinbeck surveys the wreckage of the house is amazingly similar to Jim's open-eyed astonishment at the carnage he and the striker phalanx caused. Even the emptiness, earlier described as a "symptom" of the negative group-man, is revisited by Steinbeck in describing the end of the party: "And it was empty, it was over."

Arriving home to a house destroyed by a party thrown without his permission or participation, Doc, out of anger, strikes Mack. Doc, however, immediately settles down and asks Mack to "Go wash [his] face" (119). He pours a beer for Mack and asks calmly "what happened?" deciding not to make Mack pay for the damages (knowing Mack cannot nor will ever be able to afford them) (120).

After some time, Doc even sees the worth in Mac and the boys, calling them "true philosophers" and marvels at their ability to "survive...in the world better than other people" (129). This forgiveness and ability to find the best in people speaks to Doc's generosity, maturity, and love for others. He, through this kind of higher understanding and care, separates himself from his relatively inconsiderate peers. This attests to Steinbeck's belief in the "influential actor" as essential to the positive phalanx, consciously guiding potentially destructive masses towards their more compassionate potentials.

Later on, in an attempt to make up for the bad party, Mack and boys decide to throw Doc another party. After a curious prodding by Mack about his birthday, Doc discovers Mack's intent. Doc's:

...reaction to the idea was not simple. He felt a great warmth that they should want to give him a party and at the same time he quaked inwardly remembering the last one they had given./ ... He glanced about considering what things would have to be locked up. He knew the party was going to cost him plenty (156).

Despite knowing the party will undoubtedly ruin his house again and will "cost him plenty," Doc outweighs his apprehensions with his care for Mack and the entire community (who Doc finds out is also invited). In his desire to do good for his friends and neighbors, he begins to make preparations for the party himself.

His best records he carried into the back room where they could be locked away. He moved every bit of equipment that was breakable back there too. He knew how it would be—his guests would be hungry and they wouldn't bring anything to eat. They would run out of liquor early, they always did...Doc ordered fifteen pounds

of steaks, ten pounds of tomatoes, twelve heads of lettuce, six loaves of bread, a big jar of peanut butter and one of strawberry jam, five gallons of wine and four quarts of a good substantial but not distinguished whiskey. He knew he would have trouble at the bank the first of the month. Three or four such parties...and he would lose the laboratory (156).

Here, Doc takes it upon himself to sacrifice his own money and time to ensure the second party is a success. By preparing and investing selflessly, despite knowing "he would have trouble at the bank the first of the month," Doc is able to guide the course of the festivities. With his attentive guidance, the party "[roars]" from "end to end of Cannery Row" and becomes an event for the all citizens of the sleepy sea village. Doc's role as an influential actor continues even after the party is over. The morning after, Doc cleans the aftermath of previous night's festivities all on his own. His experience, as the influential actor, is not the same as the others. It requires the planning, investment, and foresight his peers lack. The unnoticed sacrifices and "trouble" he must go through are his load to carry alone. What was once only destructive is transformed through Doc's love and expense into a successful, participatory community event. The focus Steinbeck affords Doc in these last few lines of *Cannery Row* again elevates Doc above his friends and out of the phalanx.

The Doctor in *In Dubious Battle* (1936), perhaps comparable to Doc in *Cannery Row* (1945), creates an interesting problem in the "flexible phalanx" theory. Both doctors are depicted as educated, morally upright, non-biased, and caring towards their fellow men. The Doctor, similar to Doc's self sacrifice in caring for his neighbors, volunteers his time to Jim and Mac to care for the hurt strikers—despite not believing in their cause. They are, as characters situated to guide the phalanx, essentially equal in potential.

The difference in their roles, and thus their capacity to foster the success of their respective phalanxes, lies within their willingness to proactively create a positive phalanx. While Doc spends his own resources and provides a controlled environment for the party group man, the Doctor in *In Dubious Battle* takes a more distanced and observational approach. In seeing the phalanx form in the camp, the Doctor tells Mac and Jim,

I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like a single man. A man in a group isn't himself at all: He's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you (113).

Instead of engaging personally in the formation and guidance of the phalanx, the Doctor seeks to simply "watch these group-men." The strikers' potential as a phalanx is reduced to "cells" and "organism[s],"—not the creative community they could be. Additionally, the Doctor in his position of distance makes no effort to correct the

perversion of democracy created by Mac and Jim. His position of privilege and of education is squandered in his will *not* to participate. It is the Doctor's academic distance, rooted in the unbendingly neutral scientific approach that makes the phalanx fail and disintegrate into violence.

## Conclusion

As Steinbeck explored the potential of both constructive and destructive group-man within his works, a strict, inelastic "scientific" phalanx theory cannot account for the "inherent" volatile nature of certain men, the injection of his own the moral judgment, or for the role of the influential actor within his own fiction. With the use of the flexible phalanx however, a more effective portrayal of group-man can be made while maintaining the spirit and intent of Steinbeck's masterful messages.

Though the flexible phalanx helps in explaining the evolution of Steinbeck's thought in examining positive and negative phalanxes, it remains unclear whether the influential actor was meant to have any real world application. The closest Steinbeck gives his reader is the government-run Weed-patch camp—a hopeful experiment subject to collapse with the strong winds of an unkind congress. Even at that, it lacks the organic community involvement Doc of *Cannery Row* seems to possess. The endlessly kind and forgiving Doc, after all, is a creation of his fiction. He is a perfect character to facilitate a perfect end. Perhaps he is presented simply as a kind of goal for powerful men to strive towards—a bright idea always ahead and just out of reach to illuminate the path as mankind moves along, step by step, searching for that perfect combination of influence and love to guarantee a creative, democratic community for all.

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## Review

## Irigarayan divinity and Tantric Yogic breath

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**This contribution offers a reading of Luce Irigaray's recent works of Western thought in relation to Eastern yogic tradition of "breath". Irigaray as a French feminist in her theories of 'feminine divinity' and 'sexual difference' relies on Eastern notion of 'breath'. This paper aims to reveal the concept of 'breath' in the West and East. Unlike Tantric yogic breath which serves as the basis of sexual union, Irigaray in her theories of 'feminine divine' and 'sexual difference' imagines an embodied and sexed subjectivity for women through breath. She tries to create a divine space for women through their breath and their sexual body. She uses yogic breath as a space between body and spirit, nature and culture, and masculinity/femininity. However, Irigarayan breath derived from yogic tradition is bodily breath. Irigaray considers breathing as a requirement and a necessity especially for bodily divinity. For her, the cultivation of breath in a specific spiritual practice of yoga represents just a way of overcoming repression of women's body in Western society.**

**Key words:** Breath, women becoming, autonomy, love, feminine divinity, feminine jouissance, intimacy, sexual difference, sexual union, dichotomy, yogic tradition, Hinduism, feminist theory, Luce Irigaray.

### INTRODUCTION

Luce Irigaray as a French feminist acts as a kind of bridge between Western and Eastern traditions. She uses the notions of 'breath' and 'silence' derived from yogic tradition in her 'sexual difference' and 'feminine divine' to allow for women's becoming as well as intimacy between sexes. Her recent works focus on the difference between Western and Eastern cultures with respect to Tantric yogic breathing (*prana*) as the essence of a living body. Breathing as the most important vital power in yogic practice is equated with life itself and with person's Self (*Atman*). Irigaray's thematic focus on the figure of 'breath' is observable in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993), *I Love to You* (1996), *The Forgetting of Air In Martin Heidegger* (1999), *To Be Two* (2002), *The Way of Love* (2002), *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community* (2002), and *Sharing The World* (2008). Irigaray affirms yogic practice to create the horizontal relations between the sexes and to restore certain relations between feminine culture and patriarchal Christian culture, aiming not toward a reversal of power

but a possible coexistence of perspectives, of subjectivities, of worlds, and of cultures.

The encounter with yogic traditions gives the figure of breath a further range of meanings for Irigaray, incorporating its role as a medium for exchanges between body and spirit, nature and culture. She focuses particularly on the role of breath as a means through which humans passively and actively reunites natural and the spiritual within themselves. Irigaray states that "the gesture of both natural and spiritual life is to breathe by oneself (Irigaray, 2002). For Irigaray, to become spiritual it is necessary to transform the vital breath "into a more subtle breath" (Irigaray, 2008) which corresponds to the transformation of natural life into a spiritual life.

Irigaray rejects traditional forms of Western Christian religion in which transcendental and corporal are separate and cannot associate with each other. Unlike Christian tradition that teaches human to despise the body for the sake of the soul, Irigaray finds in the Eastern tradition of yoga an imperative to cultivate breathing as

an activity of the self which combines body and spirit together. Irigaray in "The Age of Breath" brings women back to the very beginning of the Christian story and reminds women that "the breath of God is within each of us. According to Genesis story, God creates humanity by sending his breath into matter, into earth" (168). She calls the age of breath: "our epoch has to return to awareness and to cultivation of the breath before and beyond any representation and discourse" (166). This epoch is the age of breath, an age where the body, silence and listening are paramount in establishing a possibility of an ethical gesture between two sexes.

Irigaray derives breath from yogic tradition. For her, breathing is a requirement and a necessity especially for bodily divinity. Regarding the divine body, Irigaray writes: "I am thinking of certain traditions of yoga that I know something of, cultures where the body is cultivated as body .... In these traditions, the body is cultivated to become both more spiritual and more carnal at the same time" (Irigaray, 1996). She discovers that the 'corporeality' begins with the bodily phenomenon of 'breath' as the first autonomous sign of life. "Without a cultivation of breathing women and men cannot reach a human relation. Maternity is the invisible sharing of breath and soul" (Irigaray, 2008). Irigaray considers breath as a "second birth assumed and willed by oneself" (Irigaray, 2002). Humans are given the gift of breath and at the same time they are called to cultivate their breath.

### **Irigarayan Feminine Divine**

Irigaray turns to yogic tradition to explore women's body as divine, and the natural as spiritual. She talks of breath as a way of infinity and freedom of women from patriarchy. She employs 'feminine divine' as a means for reverence of women and the material reality. Irigaray's exploration of divinity is not mystical; rather it is an erotic exchange. She creates feminine divinity and bodily desire as a different space for women to breathe freely. She helps women to "construct a space for [ourselves] in the air for the rest of [our] time on earth- air in which we can breathe and sing freely, in which we can perform and move at will" (Irigaray, 1993). Irigaray believes that neutralization of women leads to their destruction.

Irigarayan 'feminine divine' derived from Tantric tradition of 'Sakti' proposes a way of women's liberation from the phallogocentric structure of the Western society where cosmic universal power is referred to the masculine God. For Irigaray, the cultivation of breath in a specific spiritual practice of yoga represents just a way of overcoming repression of women's body in Western society. Irigaray introduces women's body as the pathways of their spiritual enlightenment. In her theories of 'feminine divine' and 'carnal ethics,' she divinizes the female body and women's sexual desire since it is devalored and reduced in Western culture to its role in reproduction or to the status of an animal instinct – both

of which impoverish women's sexual desire and ignore their autonomous self and their subjectivity. Irigaray lets women gain an access to their autonomy, and opens a way for their sexual body by cultivating breathing. Her claim is that women can only 'spiritualize' themselves in the West through their body and can achieve real autonomy by learning to value silence and the breathing of themselves and others.

Irigarayan 'breath' is defined based on women's autonomy and their female body. For Irigaray, breath is the source of life in women's body. She tries to create a divine space for women through their breath and their sexual body. She argues that "we need to relearn how to breathe. It means that we in effect need to learn how to be reborn. Through neglecting our breath we prevent our becoming, particularly our spiritual becoming" (Irigaray, 2002). Irigaray recounts to women how they can breathe through yoga. When she sees that "the West is stifled by its inability to breathe" (6), she enables women through breathing to return to themselves, to their corporeal rootedness, to become more aware of their autonomy. "We, as humans, were made alive through the breath of the divine. The divine, through air and breath, is within us. Within our bodies, we incarnate the living breath of the divine" (7).

Irigaray extracts the 'incarnation' from Hinduism for new thinking about women's bodies as vessels of the divine rather than other's bodily needs: "When we recognize our bodies as spiritual vessels, we acknowledge that our connections with others cannot be reduced to bodily need" (Irigaray, 2002). According to Irigaray, women recover their own unique conception of the divine as a part of the process of discovering their own uniqueness as women. "We are given the gift of the incarnation in the very beginning and it is our task to cultivate that incarnation. Women should become divine: Women are to gain their own gendered subjectivity by becoming a divine in the feminine" (*Luce Irigaray: Teaching* 68). Irigaray explains the important role of the mother/woman in the process of breathing:

*The divine appropriate to women, the feminine divine, is first of all related to the breath. To cultivate the divine in herself, the woman has to attend to her own breathing, her own breath, more even than to love ... Becoming divine is accomplished through a continuous passage from nature to grace, a passage that everyone must realize by oneself.... The feminine breath seems at once more linked with the life of the universe and more interior. It seems to unite the subtlest real of the cosmos with the deepest spiritual real of the soul... which inspires a woman appears to remain joined with the universe's breath, related to the wind, to the cosmic breathing ... In this way, the woman can welcome the other in her soul (Irigaray, 2004).*

Woman shares her breath preeminently by keeping it 'inside'. By a 'feminine economy of the breath' she is

keeping and cultivating breath inside the body and sheltering in herself the first seed of nature. For Irigaray, this is the spiritualization of the body, or nature. "The first breath of the world we share is both in nature (macrocosm) and in woman (microcosm)" Irigaray, 1993). Irigaray insists that women have "forgotten air" and they must be rescued from being 'forgotten' or 'repressed' within the Western culture and tradition. She asserts that:

*Though we all know how to breathe, we neglect to breathe consciously. The air we breathe, in which we live, speak, appear; the air in which everything enters into presence can come into being. This air that we never think of has been borrowed from a birth, a growth (Irigaray, 1993).*

Irigaray brings air and breathing to the fore to suggest that "we must each, on our own, come into relation with the divine. Air and breath allow us to relate and, at the same time, individuate ourselves" (Irigaray, 2002). Lovers experience their autonomous self through their own space of freedom and then their souls combine and rebirth to a new one. For Irigaray, women and men share same air, yet they are autonomous and different: "The breath not only creates an autonomous world for individuals but also unites the lovers in breathing the same air" (11). In other words, their union is through their alliance and freedom. According to Irigaray, each woman and man discovers her or his own breath, and the divine within met the possibility of respect and love. Irigaray suggests that "the integral nature of breath awareness in yoga practice can contribute to the respect of the natural and spiritual life of self and of other because the breath is something shared by everyone" (Irigaray, 2002).

### **Sexual difference**

Irigarayan theory of 'divinity' centers on 'sexual difference' in which she proposes a difference of consciousness and divinity between men and women and therefore "it is necessary for women to experience their own transcendence and their own practice of yoga" (Irigaray, 2002). For Irigaray, 'god' has no independent reality outside of the human psyche. Irigaray asserts two distinct projections of the divine: masculine and feminine. Irigaray defines different divinities for women and men according to masculine and feminine forms and she searches transcendence in individuals' gender. Irigaray argues this centers around the body; specifically the breath of the body. Through air and breath, she introduces women and men's bodies as spiritual vessels for achieving divine love. She positions love as a mediator for approaching the other of sexual difference and places 'breath' as a "mediator between the corporeal and the spiritual, masculinity and femininity, and inside and outside" (Irigaray, 2002). Lovers discover their divinity through and

within their sexual incarnation.

Irigaray interprets breath as "a figure of the non-hierarchical and reciprocal exchange and relationship between subjects and as a model for a reconceived subjectivity and intersubjectivity with new possibilities for understanding individual autonomy" (Irigaray, 1993). Through yogic tradition, Irigaray creates a deep intimacy that is grounded in breath within the individual to achieve unity and reciprocity. "Yoga explores all of our real desires, dark and light, in a compassionate setting. By yoga, we learn how to create a spiritual portal through the sexual act; uncover our deepest purpose and learn to offer ourselves fully" (14). She draws on the notion of 'breath' to represent the possibility of a form of subjectivity and spirituality that is embodied. Irigaray creates reciprocal love through the breath between self and other:

*Love, the mediator, is a shared outpouring, a loss of boundaries, a shared space, a shared breath, bridging the space between two sexes; it does not use the body of the other for its jouissance; each is irreducible to the other. The loss of boundaries does not lead to fusion in which one or the other disappears, but to a mutual crossing of boundaries which is creative, and yet where identity is not swallowed up (Whitford, 1991).*

In fact, Irigarayan love and breath as a mediator can be indications of lovers' sexual difference and women's sexual desire. Irigaray introduces air as a distinguished space between lovers as well as the condition for the production and reproduction of life. For Irigaray, women's sexual 'jouissance' in their love relationship is for their liberation; where they cultivate love for themselves and intimacy with another, grounded in their own and lovers' silence. Irigarayan 'female jouissance' produces an ecstatic energy or pleasure in women and encourage women to explore their own sexuality, their own pleasure and their own body. The recognition of Irigarayan 'feminine divine' and 'sexual difference' and the interiorization of breath can be instructive for struggles for sexual and cultural equality in the West. In 'sexual difference,' she finds "a spiritual path, which can lead us to love, to thought, to the divine" (Irigaray, 1996). Irigaray defines love as a space between two sexes. She says;

Carnal love becomes thus a spiritual path for energy, the flesh becomes spirit and soul thanks to the body itself, loved and respected in its difference, including at the level of breathing. Sexual difference is, in fact, the difference that can open a transcendental horizon between humans, in particular between man and woman. The transcendence is in the respect of each person's natural and spiritual life..... Between man and woman, thanks to love, an awakening to transcendence can take place that corresponds to the reign of spirit as spiritual breath, as soul (Irigaray, 2002).

For Irigaray, carnal love is therefore cultivated and made divine. "The act of love becomes the transubstantiation of the self and his or her lover into a spiritual body. Love is witnessing to that which is *between* us, the invisible bond created through *the labor of the negative* (space) and differences of sexes" (Irigaray, 2002). For Irigaray, the difference between sexes attracts them to each other: "Love relationships through lovers' limitation will be beyond domination and recognition. What I do not see of you draws me toward you" (69). In Irigarayan 'sexual difference,' the other is the irreducible difference of one sex to another. "Air let someone be in the present, enter into presence in the present, which emptiness does not allow to humans... Respecting the air between us and drawing from it in the present allows each to be and become" (Irigaray, 2002). For Irigaray, the breath as a space between lovers creates respect and honor. "Breathing makes women aware of the moment they are touched by the other. Breath therefore generates the space in-between the subjects" (10). When Irigaray answers, "I am listening to you" and "I give you a silence" (Irigaray, 1996), integral to this listening and gift of silence is the space between lover and beloved: "It is a silence made possible by the fact that neither I nor you are everything, that each of us is limited," (58) marked by non-hierarchical difference. A silence is the primary gesture of *I love to you*.

Irigaray uses silence, love and the breathing to represent non-hierarchical dualistic modes of exchange and relationship between subjects. In silence, "relations between two different subjectivities cannot be set up starting from a shared common meaning, but rather from a silence which each one agrees to respect in order to let the other be" (Irigaray, 2008). Hence, for Irigaray, breath and silence get endowed with a very positive meaning: "a return of woman to herself, in herself for a meeting again with her own breath, her own soul.... The first task is to consider and cultivate a relation with the other as other" (19). The silence is what men and women share. It is a place where the other can exist and be.

Irigarayan 'sexual difference' with a shared space between self and other creates autonomous self for women. "We need to cultivate a sensory perception, and in my perception of the other I need to be careful not to appropriate the other. I can never perceive the other completely. I approach the other as an embodied subject. Perception must maintain duality. We have to remain two in bodies if our aim is for a shared world" (Irigaray, 1996). For Irigaray, bodily proximity to another is only possible if women first form a relationship with their own breath and self. She calls this self-affection and it begins with the premise that men and women are with two different bodies. Irigaray describes self-affection as:

*The real dwelling to which we must always return with a view to faithfulness to ourselves and our inability to welcome the other as different. Dwelling within one's own*

*self-affection, opening oneself requires us to return our original 'home' to a natural human identity (Irigaray, 2004).*

Women grow and meet with the other through self-affection without losing themselves and annihilating the other. Irigaray believes that a woman can have relationship with the other, especially the lover, and can share spiritual integrity after appreciating her internal breath. "The woman would not have to quit her body, to leave herself, her breath. Her task would be, rather, to make divine this world - as body, as cosmos, as relations with others (Irigaray, 2008).

Irigarayan divinity and breath are considered by some feminists. Marie-Andree Roy begins by reviewing Irigaray's argument that women need to reconceive divinity in the feminine in order to find a specifically feminine subjectivity and to provide a basis for the reverence of female embodiment. Roy expands upon Irigaray's theory of 'sexual difference' as paradigmatic of difference in itself, and as privileged site of corporeal spirituality enhanced, in Irigaray's view, by the cultivation of the breath. Ellen T. Armour takes Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental', to overcome the traditional Western division between transcendence (spirit) and sensibility (body). According to Armour, Irigaray's 'sensible transcendental' emerges as an important resource for imagining both divine otherness and sexual difference beyond rigid separations between self and other, immanence and transcendence, human and God. Joy et al. (2003) returns to Irigaray's 'Divine Women', that women need a feminine divine to serve as the foundation for especially feminine subjectivity. Irigaray creates different divinity for women where women's body plays an important role in their divinity.

### Yogic Breath in Hinduism

Unlike Irigarayan 'feminine divine' and 'sexual difference' which seek divinity merely in material and sexed body, Hindu yogic tradition goes beyond the limits of gendered and sexed body. "Soul goes beyond body in different forms of physical, subtle and causal. The unity of these three bodies in Hinduism leads to spiritual wholeness and makes Self or *Atman*" (Adiswarananda, 2005). Although the path of spiritual wholeness in Hinduism is through the body, the body acts as a means of self-realization rather than Irigarayan embodied self in gross and subtle body. For spiritual wholeness in Tantric yoga, "individual goes beyond the limitations of gross and subtle body where feminine and masculine energies are integrated" (Tigunait, 1999). In fact, Hinduism sees "the human body as a vehicle of the divine and an instrument of liberation" (Subramuniaswami, 1993). It can be said that body in Hinduism is a manifestation of the non-dual Self. "The bodies have an end, but the Self (the infinite

consciousness) is eternal. The Self or infinite consciousness is one and non-dual" (Venkatesananda, 1993).

While Irigarayan breath insists on the sexed body, the corporeality of spirit, and the space between lovers for creating gender limitation and sexual difference, Tantric yogic breath lies in subtle body and is "a way of transcendental and spiritual life and it elevates body toward spiritual consciousness" (Feuerstein, 1989). Breath in Hinduism is neither mere matter like a corpse, nor wholly immaterial or incorporeal, it augurs a conception of subjectivity in which materiality and spirituality, nature and culture, flesh and words are thought as inseparably intertwined. "Breath is the opposite of substances that remain contained and immobile, fixed in one place; breath is constitutively that which crosses boundaries between inside and outside, between multiple spaces and subjects" (Rama et al., 1976). In yogic tradition, breath is neither personal nor a property of someone else; rather it represents the priority of intersubjective relationships over the individuality of subjects.

Unlike Irigarayan 'sexual difference,' Tantric yoga addresses sexual union as "a central means of Tantric spirituality" (Shaw, 2003). In Tantric sexual union, the partners circulate energy through their chakras (energy spots) to help each other to achieve balance and enlightenment. In sexual union, men and women need each other; while each sex has both masculine and feminine attributes, each sex is out of balance in energy without the other. In fact, man and woman cannot achieve enlightenment without each other's help.

The partners become saturated with one another's energy at the deepest levels of being. They consciously absorb one another's energy and then deliberately direct that energy through their yogic anatomy, into the subtle nerve-centers (Chakras). This energy carries the quality of the partner's emotions, and consciousness. Therefore, at this level the partners permeate one another being (Shaw, 2003).

The goal of Tantra is to reunite male and female principles. Through breathing and yogic tradition, the kundalini (the feminine aspect), lying dormant like a coiled serpent in the muladhara is awakened. The yogi realizes the supreme non-duality of the Self by awakening the female force 'Sakti' and making it move upward along the spinal cord. Through yoga, the female Kundalini ascends and unites with 'Siva, the male force, at the brahmarandhra as she enters the final energy center (Chakra) of the subtle body. Through yogic breath, feminine energy ascends the chakras, it moves through the feminine elements, and descends through the masculine. "In ascent, one understands by fully experiencing, incorporating and transcending each chakra's energies as one moves toward spirit; in descent, one intentionally illuminate the chakras with spirit" (Frost and Frost, 1989). Just as the feminine energy incarnates ascension and learning, masculine energy incarnates descent and application of knowledge. The presence of the masculine and feminine energy in each of the partners amplifies their energies in sexual

union:

The goal is the carnal and spiritual refinement of both partners through the incorporation and discipline of all aspects of human being. Each chakra also has its own meditation, its own sound, god/goddess, taste, smell and element (air, earth, fire, water). There is no part of self that is rejected in Tantra, but all parts are disciplined. Each sex has both the masculine and feminine of each chakra in them (146).

The male and female union in Tantric yoga shows the transcendence of two forces of the femininity and masculinity resulting in identification with the non-dual divine Self in ecstasy and bliss. Within the Tantric tradition, the uniting of two aspects of energy takes place within the individual. Thus, the union of 'Siva, masculine aspect, and 'Sakti, the divine female energy of the universe, is beyond Irigarayan duality of the masculine/feminine and her gender categories.

## Conclusion

Irigaray's attitude on women's physical body as divine and breath as a space between different sexes in her 'feminine divine' and 'sexual difference' does not seem to be in accord with the ideal of self-fulfillment that Hindu Tantric yoga seeks. Yogic tradition transcends Irigarayan air and breath which are defined as an in-between space within lovers and outside of them, and as a model of intimate exchange between lovers; between the two gendered identities. Unlike spiritual wholeness in Hinduism which occurs when sexes go beyond their physical body with integrating their breath, Irigarayan divinity arises in sexual body and the breath acts as a space between the lovers. For Irigaray, one way of understanding the integral connection between spirituality and sexuality is to view sexual energy as that which has the capacity to represent women's autonomous identity. Irigaray is interested in sex for its own sake in the expression of love that reaches its culmination in an intimate relationship of a man and a woman which remains merely at the physically erotic level. Irigaray considers breathing as a requirement for bodily divinity and for empowering women's sexual body. Thus, the sexual relation cannot transmute into a spiritual relationship where sexual desire has generally been as a work of the flesh alone and not of the spirit.

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## Review

# An evaluation of post-colonial African leadership: A study of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*

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This paper centers on how post-colonial African leaders in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Achebe's *A Man of the People* have shifted from democratic leadership to an autocratic type of governance. The paper denotes a form of corruption that departs from cherished values and ideals of post-colonial Africa. The key method of this paper is textual analysis. The paper seeks to show the socio-economic disillusionment of an independent African society. The leaders abuse their posts to enrich themselves at the nation's expense. The paper seeks to show how the black people's quest for shared power and freedom has been thwarted by the post-colonial African governments. The paper also dwells on how the misuse of power causes the offices of African leaders to be sources of evil and wealth creation for a few selected individuals.

**Key words:** Post-colonial African leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah (Fraser 1980), generally subscribe to the notion that independence is a source of disillusionment to most black Africans because it has failed to deliver on the key objectives that spurred the quest for independence. The two authors introduce a paradigm shift from the culture of blame shifting which characterized most polemics (defending by attacking) against colonialism towards a culture of internal focus. The sad aspect of current African politics is blaming colonial encounter as responsible for misgoverning, yet mostly the blame lies on endogenous factors behind that such as corruption, nepotism, manipulation of media, mass apathy, politics of lies, demonization of democratic values, politics of deception and self-aggrandizement, ethnicisation of politics and naturalization of election violence. In a sense, it is not a fulfillment of expectations but a nightmare, an illusion that generated a false sense of arrival.

Fage and Roland (1970) assert that the post-colonial elite of independent Africa championed the first movement

of African nationalism, which coerced its political demands in terms drawn from European nationalists' thought. In light of this assertion, people in post-colonial Africa are still yearning for independence. The coming of independence to Africa was marked by euphoria and great expectations. Independence was envisaged as a new era to bring and deliver a human rights culture and a democratic dispensation. However the celebratory mood of independence in Africa evaporated because of the problems of cynical leadership, mass apathy and despair.

The colonial encounter left the legacy of capitalism and its related system of exploitation. After independence, some Africans thought that they were welcoming victory in its fullness but their fellow blacks use their power improperly, replicating the colonial forms of repression. Africa has slipped off the noose of colonialism but then their governments are not different from colonial governments because at independence, it was realized that black oppressors replaced colonialists and there was mere substitution. According to Mbeki, it has also been

argued that Africa was re-colonized at independence by black oppressors. According to Ngugi (1982) in Duerden and Pieterse (1972), African leaders run their economies according to the American standard and the governments have been taught the system of self interest and told to forget the ancient songs that glorify the notion of collective good. African leaders in positions of authority are cushioned in extravagance, yet the majority is suffering. In post-colonial Africa' cultural dislocation is coupled with political betrayal by the indigenous crop of African leaders. Leaders betray people in that independence in many African countries remained in the hands of the founding fathers and there was negation of power sharing thereby undermining democratic principles. Nationalist leaders at independence engaged in politics of violence, exclusion and inclusion, hence independence brought nothing but suffering. The high hope attendant to the dawn of independence is frustrated by the corruption of the political leaders. Bingu wa Mutharika (1995) also postulate that it is socially unacceptable or morally degrading for a leader to reap huge profits from swindling his people or hijacking the economic development machinery for his personal benefits. Needs of the people become secondary because resources are spent on military hardware for oppressing the very masses for which government came into power and negation of human rights became absolute.

Gakwandi (1977) suggests, 'we are presented with a world in which the sewage pipes of history have been exploded and everything is polluted.' This is evident in the two primary texts which the author is using that African leaders are essentially not or more humanist than the imperialists they have replaced. The poverty-stricken Africans decide to get rich whilst the peasants and the unemployed are not convinced that anything has really changed in their lives. The corruption of post-independent leaders triumphed over morality of humans; the majority are thus relegated to the periphery.

### **A MAN OF THE PEOPLE-CHINUA ACHEBE**

Achebe's *A Man of the People* is an indictment on post-colonial Africa, where people worship materialism and have thrown away spirituality. The country, Nigeria is corrupt, thus independence is meaningless. Achebe comments on the degree to which unrestrained corruption has come to dominate Nigerian life and his text reflect the horrors of the status quo in African independent countries. The repressive machinery was not only retained in Africa but was adopted and perfected. Achebe argues that the political machine had been so abused that whichever way one pressed it, it produced the same results and therefore another force had to come in. He is suggesting that the legacy of colonialism is apparent in post-colonial African leadership. *A Man of the People* ironically presents 'a man of the people' who detaches

himself from the society and seeks to meet individual interests. The leaders had wielded power and had been misusing it by pursuing personal interests.

The leaders had voted for the expulsion of competent ministers who were intellectuals. *A Man of the People* is a reflection of the African leaders who have perfected the biting draconian pieces of legislation to politically castrate and silence their critics. Repressive machinery in many African countries were perfected and made razor sharp to slice all fingers of all those who dared to criticize them. African dictators at independence personalized powers and displayed a passion and intention to die in power. Many dictators in post-colonial Africa declared themselves life presidents for example Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. African dictators as Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi etc created one party state and advocated for a one country, one leader and one party doctrine.

Achebe argues that the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added on to them. His argument has been strengthened by his text *A Man of the People* that depicts an African society betrayed by its own people. The assumption that the colonial government is responsible for the sufferings of the society has been weakened. Chief Nanga, who has come to power through rigged elections and oppressing his opponent Odili, is a reflection of independent African societies which is characterized by rigged elections. A good example is of the rigged elections in Dafur in April 2010, where the National Congress Party manipulated census results and voters' registration, drafted election laws in its favour in order to win elections. In light of these malpractices independent African politics is characterized by rigged elections which normally lead to election violence.

The government ministers use bribery, force and thugery as well as finance to enable Nanga and his kind to return to power unopposed. For example Chief Nanga comes to bribe Odili to step down for him by offering him a scholarship to study overseas, garnished with a personal cash gift for two hundred and fifty pounds sterling. Chief Koko bribes Max to withdraw and end up killing him on Election Day. The rigged elections thus reflect how political leaders use their positions to gain what they want.

Achebe portrays a post-colonial African society that has come to accept institutionalized corruption and nepotism. The society realizes the hypocrisy of its leadership but it is silent about it. Nepotism and corruption become familiar problems of the African society. Achebe is suggesting this in his text '*A Man of the People*', for nepotism is cheered at public meetings; people use positions to enrich themselves. Nanga offers Odili a privilege:

By the way Odili, I think you are wasting your talent here, want you to come to the capital and

take up a strategic post in civil service. We should not leave everything to the highlands tribes-our people must press for their own share of the national cake (Achebe, 1966)

This reflects that leaders use nepotism in their politics. Odili is given a strategic position because he is of Nanga's tribe.

The idea that Chief Nanga views the nation as no more than a cake is an indication that politicians think that each group should scramble for power and position so as to get as large a share as possible. Thus, senior members of government misuse public funds for self-aggrandizement. They live a luxurious life through defrauding the people by the system of bribery, corruption and nepotism.

Chief Nanga lives a luxurious life at the expense of the country. His life contrasts the general poverty in the country where the majority of peasants and workers can only live in shacks and afford pails as lavatory; Nanga lives in a princely seven-bath roomed and bedroom mansion. Killiam (1969) in the same vein argues that corruption of perhaps the most responsible and influential minister next to the Prime Minister is affecting the masses.

Achebe's *A Man of the People* reflects that the post-independence corruption has been naturalized and beneficial to office bearers, thus those in power regard those who do not practice corruption as unnatural. Achebe also portrays leaders as being self-centred and they work with foreign companies to rape the nation's economy. Nanga is pressing for the tarmacking of the road before the elections because he wants to gain political mileage and not to serve the citizens. This is a portrayal of the hypocrisy of African leaders who only assist the society if that help would benefit them in the long run. Nanga would invest in foreign banks the profits he would make. This is a reflection of Kahari's (1990) comments. Nanga is unsympathetic towards the concept of progress in the country; he purports to serve, and he is just engrossed in personal gain and self-importance. Africa is considered among the world's most corrupt places. An African Union (2002) study estimated that corruption cost the continent roughly \$150 billion a year (Hason, 2009).

Achebe's text also shows that almost everyone in independent African society is engrossed in corrupt practices through trying at all costs to be perfect. Odili, who appears to be an anti-thesis of Nanga, is hypocritical and corrupt. He uses C.P.C money to cover his father's case of the Tax Assessment Office and pays the bride price for his promised wife. Max, the colleague to Odili who is also in a dilemma, is trying to rid the country of corruption but finds that he has to accept money from a communist party and from Chief Koko and he rationalizes the act by telling Odili, 'now you tell me how you propose to fight such a dirty war without soiling your hands a little' (Achebe, 1966). This is a reflection of how everyone in

post-independence Africa abuses his office and it shows the impossibility of eradicating bribery and corruption in independent Africa. Corruption is accepted as inevitable because the authorities carry on their corrupt practices easily since corruption has been legalized as a means towards riches.

## THE BEAUTIFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* conveys a sense of resentment with the way in which corruption and bribery are universally accepted in Ghana as the only way to prosperity. The central character, he is not moving with the world. The anonymous here, a clerk in the administration, is suborned by his ambitious wife and powerful friends, such as the Minister Koomson, to pursue the search for 'shiny things' which wealth can bring and to use his position to aid their crooked get-rich schemes.

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* discusses the harsh and uncompromising picture of corruption and self-interest in Ghana and mirrors the people in independent Ghana who believe that power is the only salvation and for one to be successful one has to be a liar and a thief. The book is characterized by the selfishness of leaders who took over from the colonial government. According to Gakwandi (1977) in the world of the novel, wealth and power have become the principal pursuits and the inevitable result of the situation is a complete disregard of any moral or social considerations in the drive to satisfy individual desires.

The abuse of leadership is mainly seen in Koomson and his government and even from the people of low positions in life like the conductor, boatman, watchman, clerks and drivers. Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as Cameron Duodu's, *The Gab Boys*, 1967 tends to attack not only politicians but also all those who hold influential positions in society. Armah makes use of the messy environment, phlegm, filth, putrefaction and excreta to depict the intensity of the various levels of corruption. The bus conductor is used to corrupt practices but the Passion Week seems to be the stumbling block to his ways. But against all this, he gives the wrong change to the man who has given him a cedi. The conductor cheats the clients in order to satisfy his own desires and fatten his pocket. The man who had given him a cedi was fast asleep in the bus with eyes wide open, showing his withdrawal from the social world, but the conductor assumed that he had been seen. In fear of exposure and in a desperate bid to save himself, the conductor attempts to bribe the man with a cigarette, 'You see we can share' (Armah, 1969). According to Palmer (1979), the bus is like a country or a nation, which is in a state of decay. The passengers represent the ordinary citizens while the driver and conductor are authorities conniving to defraud the citizens and, if caught, bribe them into silence.

Armah also articulates the theme of political betrayal and cultural dislocation where the people such as Koomson and his kind are well known for taking their positions as means of getting girls. This is as good as Pfende in Musengezi's *The Honourable M.P.* (1984), who sexually abused Sabina, his office cleaner. Musengezi also shows corruption of leaders when MP Pfende after being voted into power, there was a persistently threatening drought and he began to desert his people in pursuit of the wealth that power has placed. The South African analyst in 'YonakeYona' (February-March, 2005) argues that Armah deflates 'weakness of the flesh'. Maanan is typical of all Ghananian women who have been betrayed by their husbands and politicians. Maanan has been in love with the new Member of Parliament and was exploited and disappointed. Those in power who wish to satisfy their desires sexually abuse girls. The woman who is selling bread expects to see Koomson with a girlfriend because it is the order of the day, 'Have you ever seen a big man without girls. Even the old ones?' (Armah, 1969).

Armah stresses his view by the use of symbols of sexual drawings on the toilet, which signifies that corrupt men are associated with sexual activities. Young women were sexually abused by party men for only blouses and perfumes from diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair 'scraped from decayed white women's corpse' (Achebe, 1966). A very pathetic example of sexual abuse by politicians is when the government is paying for hired places for prostitution.

Alfred Ndi in Emernyonu and Uko (2004) argues that ministers snatch girlfriends of poor intellectuals and there is endless seduction of women, married and single alike. This depicts that post-colonial leaders use their material possessions to win favours from women. In Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, girls are employed in the Modern Love Bar and modern problems are resolved with the 'aid of thighs'. This abuse of office is also evident in *A Man of the People*, where Nanga sleeps with Elsie, Odili's mistress only because of his position as a minister. Nanga pays for Edna to go to college and despite his old age, wants to marry her as a reward. In this regard, Pieterse and Munro (1969) reflect Chief Honourable Nanga M.P as the corrupt uncultured Minister of Culture in a corrupt regime of a newly independent African State.

Armah, in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, like other West African writers, reflects the sense of dismay with which writers confront the corruption and divisions in the new post independent regimes. In Ghana, there is rotteness; everyone is swimming towards what one wants. People are using their positions to aid their crooked 'get-rich' schemes and to pursue wealth. Independence in itself does not prove a solution to the social problems of the people. To be uncorrupt was as good as a crime, as the Teacher in the text says, 'You have not done what everybody is doing and in this world that is one of the crimes' Armah (1969).

The intelligentsia are the ones who are prospering. Fanon (1976)'s comment on the African leadership is, 'the national bourgeoisie strung to defend its immediate interests and see no further than the end of its nose, incapable of bringing national unity'. Koomson, for instance, has risen from being a humble office cleaner to a pampered government minister; thus he is seduced by the fruits of office. The man, Koomson is successful as a result of public theft; power is his salvation. Koomson is used to stealing the money that belongs to state coffers, hence he abuses the trust that the public places in his responsibility. To be successful in Ghana, one needs to be a liar and a thief. Koomson's salary cannot cater for all the material things he has. Koomson's mind is preoccupied with money making schemes. He flourishes at the expense of other fellow men. For instance, he uses the fishing boat scheme to win Oyo and her mother since he promises them that he would make them rich by giving them the fishing boat yet the boat is in the name of his daughter, Princess. The women are just used and only occasionally do they get few fish.

For Armah, the most terrible thing is to watch a black man trying by all means to be a dark ghost of a European. Africans themselves help to facilitate the abuse of their fellow black men, 'How long will Africa be cursed with its own leaders?' (Armah, 1969). Koomson has succeeded by taking the path of corruption. He destroys his people's destiny for the sake of a luxurious life. Koomson is driving stolen posh cars and owns luxurious properties.

## CONCLUSION

The two authors do agree that decolonization and independence have not brought real autonomy to African nations. The aspirations of the poor remain unsatisfied. The colonial encounter leaves the legacy of capitalism and its related system of exploitation, thus the black man abuses power, replicating the colonial forms of repression. The African society's expectations of shared power have been betrayed. The independent African leaders portray a handful of people who profit from the suffering of the majority, the sorrow of many being the joy of a few. The new men in power are not governing the country well. The general feeling in post-colonial country is that the mainspring of political action is personal gain. The leaders had abused their political position to enrich themselves by using the nation's resources. The greed of the few leaves the majority in want. The African world is giving itself the wrong impression that the people are effectively sharing in the national issues yet the real power is in the hands of the few people. African leaders have tended to seek fame and riches at the expense of the collective social concerns.

According to Achebe and Armah, independence was only a boon to the elite who under the banner of

Africanisation grabbed all leisurely goods. Achebe and Armah register the black people's quest for a government and community based on collectivity not on the voice of the individual. The two works of art denounce the highest echelons of the society. The 'intelligentsia', who are in power, have allocated all social and material comforts to themselves and closed doors to further entry into their class. Cultural nationalism sounds noble but it is an inadequate platform to address the socio-economic challenges of the post-colonial paradigm. Power is being abused at political, economic, social and religious levels. The highest echelons of the society misinterpret the concept of power and they take it as having direct influence and control on people and resources.

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Review

## The theme of “alienation” and “assimilation” in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri: A socio – literary perspective

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Words like “Expatriate” and “Diaspora” need no introduction in postcolonial literary scenario. Indian - iaspora, today, has emerged with the “multiplicity of histories, variety of culture, tradition, and a deep instinct for survival.” Indian Diaspora, though counting more than 20 million members world-wide, survives in between “home of origin” and “world of adoption.” The process of survival of the diasporic individual/ community in between the “home of origin” and “world of adoption” is the voyage undertaken in the whole process from “alienation” to final “assimilation.” Bharati Mukherjee as well as Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian born Canadian/American novelist, has made a deep impression on the literary canvass. Their novels honestly depict the issues of their own cultural location in West Bengal in India. They were displaced (alienation) from their land of origin to USA where they were “simultaneously invisible” as writers and “overexposed” as a racial minority and their final re-location (assimilation) to USA as naturalized citizens. They are the writers of *The Tiger’s Daughter*, *Wife and The Namesake*. The dilemma of belongingness in these three novels is a matter of flux and agony, Which explores the problem of nationality location, identity and historical memory in USA. The “cultural diaspora-isation” which Stuart Mall calls it marks the beginning of the desire for the survival in the community of adoption. The paper aims to explore their sense of alienation in USA where life as an immigrant was unbearable, forcing them to make an effort towards the process of economic, social and cultural adjustment. Further, the paper will explore their desire for cultural fusion in the new dwelling, which in fact is Mukherjee’s own inward voyage in *The Middleman* and other stories. Finally, they visualized “assimilation” as on “end –product” which implies in totality “conforming to a national culture” of “nationalist way of life.”

**Key words:** Diaspora, alienation, assimilation, isolation, culture.

### INTRODUCTION

The word ‘Diaspora’, derived from the Greek word Diaspeiro, literally means scattering or dispersion of people from their homeland. Diasporic writing has been receiving increasing academic and disciplinary recognition. It has emerged as a distinct literacy genre. A large number of people have migrated from India to various alien lands under “forced exiles” or ‘self-imposed exiles’. Some of them have made a mark in the field of writing. These immigrant writers reflect, on one hand, their attachment to their motherland and on the other hand,

their feeling of alienation and rootlessness. Diasporic writings also known as ‘expatriate writings’ give voice to the traumatic experiences of the writers when they are on the rack owing to the clash of two cultures or the racial discrimination they undergo. Immigration proves a pleasant experience only to a few immigrants who succeed in assimilating themselves with new geographical, cultural, social and psychological environment. To most of the diasporic writers, immigration is not a delectable experience. They often find themselves

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sandwiched between two cultures. The feelings of nostalgia, a sense of loss and anxiety to reinvent home obsess them, consciously or unconsciously. They all voice the anguish of the people, living far away from their native land and being discriminated on the grounds of race, colour or creed.

Every immigrant experiences injustice, inequality, discrimination, biases, prejudices and a threat to cultural identity in the unfamiliar country. Adjusting with the social, economic, political, psychological and environmental changes is also a challenge. The abrupt change in the lifestyle, culture, status, society causes emotional and psychological problems. Adjusting with the changing scenario of their lives is a challenge. The Indian Diaspora focuses on the varied aspects of life abroad. The Indian women Diaspora writers have created a niche for themselves in the literary world. Writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and many others have taken great pains to focus on the world of immigrants.

The present paper is an attempt to explore the traumatic experiences and cultural perplexity of the first and second generation immigrants. It also focuses on universal dehumanization in the modern globalized world. Jhumpa Lahiri, one of the second generation immigrants in the USA, acknowledged as one of the women writers in Indian English Literature for her Indian themes is a recent new wave literary artist. She is the author of two acclaimed books: *The Interpreter of Maladies*, her debut collection of short stories and a novel, *The Namesake*. She has received many awards and among them the most prestigious Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Born in 1967 in London, she was raised in Rhode Island. Her latest collection of short stories is *Unaccustomed Earth*, in which she handled personal problems, social conflicts and cultural dilemmas with great depth. At the beginning of *The Namesake*, the issue of identity is presented. Culture of naming the baby is a practice in every society. Lahiri narrates this practice with bicultural implications with a style that leaves nothing untold. She captures best the essence of the lives of Bengali Indian in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America. However, Lahiri's (2008) *The Namesake* is such a wonderfully apt description of a Bengali Indian family that it does not give her American nationality away and she is now acclaimed away. She is now acclaimed as the chronicles of the Bengali immigrant experience. She describes how *ash-oke* abhors waste, even the extra water in a teapot- a common Indian middle class mindset. The Gangulis are shown taking precaution for everything that can go wrong, a constant fear of disaster as another typical Indian preoccupation. At the same time, she takes care to describe the second generation Indian immigrants- the children who do not care for see-off and coming home for every festival. Gogol and Moushumi do not wish to keep up the appearance of their marriage and Sonia decides to marry Ben- a non Bengali, non Indian man who Ashima ultimately trusts will give more happiness to her daughter than Moushumi ever did to her son. This is because rooting, uprooting and re-rooting the lives of

Individuals leave them devastated. Barrenness results due to lack of fertilizers like love, emotions, feelings of care, bonding close relationship and intimacy among individuals. The differences in social station widen the gap between husband and wife. Lives decay instead of flourishing in the new, adopted soil. From generations together the roots lay deep in the worn-out soil, spoiling, rotting the young buds in the name of modernity and globalization. Longing for and belonging to a different homeland creates a void which cannot be filled with any other nation. It is like leaving the inherited for adopting temporary, notorious, glamorous future. The homeland is a pious place of worship in the Diaspora imagination. Nostalgia for homeland, feeling of rootlessness, instability, insecurity and isolation cause intense pain and grief, as reclaiming the past is impossible. Bicultural life entraps the immigrants in a dilemma. The couples are unable to acclimatize completely into the foreign culture and society. The intermingling of the eastern and western ethics irks lives. Stability is the essentiality of the cultural transmission and cultural crisis, a part and parcel of their routine. Adopting the tradition of the native land and trying to learn new culture is a challenge.

Similarly, like Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee also discusses the complications of the place and time in which she has seen the immigrants. She has to respond and react to the dual culture positively taking the best from both sides and even negotiating between their identity and a hyphenated space. She vehemently asserts "I am an American citizen" from the core of her heart in her short story, *Two ways to Belong in American*, published in New York times in Bharati (1996). The preamble of the term 'alienation'<sup>1</sup> by Karl Marx in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been invigorated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the progression of migration to America which has reached to the new height in terms of émigré populace. In the Social Sciences, 'Assimilation' is an approach toward incorporation and amalgamation, through which, not only immigrants but also other marginalized groups- African-American in America, women in society, scheduled castes in India-are "wrapped up" into an integrated conventional society.

Bharati Mukherjee is an investigating pioneer of innovative terrains, practices, and literatures that co-exist with her wide-ranging mission to discover new worlds. Bharati Mukherjee's foremost concern, as a postmodern writer, has been the life of South-Asian expatriates and the dilemma of 'acculturation' and 'assimilation'. Acculturation is the depressing upshot of post-modern scenario, which Mukherjee had comprehended much early. Mukherjee's characters are autobiographical portraits of her interpretation and reaction of her experience as an expatriate in Canada which was "a cultural and psychological 'mongrelization'" and her mounting identification of

<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'Alienation', developed by Marx is the subject of much interest in sociological discussions relating to the human condition and our relationship to society and the workplace.

the self as 'an immigrant nobody' in America. The two different sets of experiences- of an expatriate as well as an immigrant- are reflected through five novels, two collections of short stories and two non-fictional works co-authored with her husband, written in two different countries. Her two early novels *The Tiger's Daughters* (Bharati, 1972) and *Wife* (Bharati, 1975) were written during the period of alienation in Canada. Her characters are not controlled by one faith, one ethnic, racial or cultural proclivity. The Canadian occurrence, however, has left its own scratch marks and blemishes on Mukherjee's inherent sense of worth and stimulated and provoked her individuality. "I was always well- employed but never allowed to feel part of the local Quebec or larger Canadian society", she states.

The women portraits are the spokesperson of her own experiences; through them she extricates trials and tribulations. Instead of limiting to the constricted paradigm of deliberation, alienation also refers to the concept of transnationalism, multiculturalism and the theory of Diaspora. The idea and usage of transnationalism came into vogue with the term "transnational nation" by Randolph Bourne in 1916. The spotlight is on both transnational communities represented by Bharati Mukherjee as well as transnational interpretations represented by the characters in her novels and short stories and their experiences. Transnationalism in Bharati Mukherjee is a broader expression. The intrinsic triangular relationship exists between her as a migrant, and the "place of belonging" that is, India and destination countries- first Canada, and finally America, which in due course became the "place of belief". While it is difficult for an Asian person to assimilate into American culture, it is similarly difficult for an Asian- American to assimilate back to his native country. In a paradoxical situation, Tara Banerjee in *The Tiger's Daughter* is alienated in her American set of connections and then alienated from her roots of pedigree. She suffers the spasm of estrangement which is awfully unfortunate. Her pain of alienation is evident not only in Canada and America but even in her indigenous terrain of Bengal and wonders "how does the foreignness of spirit begin?", when she returns to India after seven years. It is at that moment she excruciatingly realizes that she is neither an Indian nor an American. With the advent of globalization, Diaspora, in particular, has attained new connotations, significance associated with design such as global deterritorialisation, transnational migration and cultural hybridity.

#### **DIASPORIC COMMUNITY IN THE NOVELS OF BHARTI MUKHERJEE**

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* is a materialization of the diasporic community and hence alienated. Tara Banerjee, the main protagonist, is the 'other' disjointed community who struggles to hook-on to the nationalized community by entering into the wedlock

with an American, David Cartwright. According to Milton Gordon, the eminent sociologist, inter-marriage leads to marital assimilation which is an "intermixture of the two 'gene pools' which the two populations represent, regardless of how similar or divergent these two gene pools may be". David Cartwright is wholly Western. The more Tara becomes cognizant of this point of divergence between the Indian wife and the American husband, the more she is apprehensive of the verity that she is a detachable entity from the nationalized community. Her first manifestation of alienation in a territory of immigration is through *The Tiger's Daughter*. Tara Banerjee, the key protagonist, is a Brahmin girl who travels to America for advanced studies. In order to assimilate herself to her new surroundings, she marries an American like Mukherjee did. A sociological theory, proposed by Glazer and Moynihan (1970) arose in the sixties. They proposed a 'melting pot paradigm', which takes a closer look at the process of migrants' integration in the case of New York City. The authors argue that migrants like Tara Banerjee are more prone to assimilate to a common (American) model but at the same time they increasingly retain their ethnicity more than ever. Tara Banerjee evaluates her life and ethics with that of her husband's. Contrary to the cultural belief; her ethnicity comes to direct blows when her conjugal life which was supposed to be based on the standard code of 'union' identified by her right from her childhood, was actually based on the principle of 'contract' as identified by her husband. The wistful, passionate sensitivity of an immigrant for her mother country is dashed to pieces when it comes into direct blows with reality. The "Americanization" of her finer sensibilities; her unruffled and frosty response to her nickname 'Tultul'; her response to her relatives' house which seemed elegant and chic to her previously looked shabbier afterwards startle her. The character of Tara is aghast and horror-struck at this swing in response. Tara is an immigrant 'sandwiched between personality' woman and suffers the 'duality and conflict' very divergent to her American life. The moral fiber of Tara's character, like the novelist, suffers from the cultural dichotomy "surrendering those thousands of years of 'pure culture". The 'epidemics, collision, fatal accidents, and starvation" of Calcutta, the omnipresence of her husband David in the midst of rioting rabble and her own westernization over the period of seven years add to her anguish and misery.

Not only "alienation" but also the "transcendence of alienation" is an inherently holistic concept. Bharati Mukherjee learnt to overcome the traumatic experiences of the 'other' from her mentor Malamud but at the same time she realized "the different sense of self, of existence and of mortality" that differentiated her from Malamud.

Estrangement is a generalist standpoint and it, too, has been condemned to some disgruntlement. In *Wife* (Bharati, 1975), Mukherjee writes about a woman named Dimple who has been suppressed by men. She is desirous to be the idyllic Bengali wife, but out of foreboding

fear and delicate volatility, she assassinates her husband and ultimately commits suicide. Bharati Mukherjee's characterization of Dimple lends a divergent and an intricate perspective to the theme of immigration and subsequent alienation. Dimple is a middle class married woman who wishes to migrate and finally migrates from Calcutta to New York with a hope that "Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, and fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love".

For her, migration and marriage are synonymous with each other. She presumes that her migration to New York with her husband after marriage would gratify, enchant and liberate her from the expected unhappiness and afflictions. The author impresses upon her readers that immigration for some is an exodus from reality. Her failure to grasp the pleasures of existence in New York with its bigness which "she had never seen before" is symbolic of failure of her marriage to Amit. The novel, *Wife*, is a perfect version of peripheral confusions regarding American culture and habitat and internal commotion to choose between personal deliverance, on one hand and matrimonial bondage, on the other hand, that Dimple suffers from. Dimple shows signs of dilemma of cultures which is a domino effect of her phobic condition in the end. Two incidents from the novel, one, her enforced self-abortion and the other, her atrocious assassination of her husband are emblematic expression of her turmoil flanked by the other and the self.

Taking into consideration the Chicago School, in particular the work of Park (1930), and his socio-political analysis into consideration, Bharati Mukherjee's assimilation is a progressive and an irreversible phenomenon, justified by her struggle for subsistence in an alien milieu. Warner and Srole (1945) were the first to launch the notion of "straight line assimilation". This has been a seminal decisive model in the sociological literature, the crucial squabble being that migrants' behavior will become in due course increasingly similar to that of natives. Bharati Mukherjee metamorphoses, through her novels, from an expatriate in Canada to an immigrant in the United States of America. Canada offers a mosaic of multiculturalism that persuades people to preserve their unique cultural characteristics whereas United States proffers an assimilating melting pot to persuade all and sundry to become part of a homogeneous mass.

## CONCLUSION

A most recent development in the analysis is the "segmented assimilation" paradigm developed by Portes and Zou (1993). In this view, migrants assimilate in different strata of the host society. Bharati Mukherjee's stay in Canada reflects "the sense of betrayal had its effect and drove me and thousands like me from the country" on the paradigm of "segmented assimilation". Bharati Mukherjee industriously demarcates the process of migrants'

integration into the host country from a social point of view assessing the degree of social integration and assimilation, from being an expatriate deracinated from her roots in the early 70s, her autobiographical projection of characters in the early 80s exploring the dilemma of transition. Secondly, through her characters, she explores the migrants' own perceptions about their integration rather than natives' attitude toward migrants.

Dimple realizes the ethnic characteristics of the "little India" where Indian-Americans live. It is very difficult to evaluate whether these Indian migrants' that live in ethnically homogeneous communities have a predilection to socialize more. She instantaneously indoctrinates the Americanization of the personality in her character but the persistent Indianness seems to stick to the subsurface of her adaptations.

Migrants like Tara, Dimple, have a propensity to converge, and so does Bharati Mukherjee albeit quite gradually, to the standard of natives. Bharati Mukherjee in her candid confession bemoans the state of "overseas citizenship while expecting the permanent protection and economic benefits that come with living and working in America". The constant reminder of language, physical differences and loss of the native land no longer problematizes the exceptionally intricate endeavor of assimilation, rather, Jasmine's peculiarity of her personality adds to the mystic charm.

"Amalgamation" is distinguished by Park and Burgess as "a biological process, the fusion of races by interbreeding and intermarriage. Assimilation, on the other hand, is limited to the fusion of cultures". Bharati Mukherjee unambiguously has cast off the hyphenated sticky tag 'Indian-American,' regardless of the fact that she is an expatriate from India.

To conclude, we can say that words like disintegration, exile, alienation, disorder, and a quest for identity are the terms often applied for defining the experience of emergent.

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Full Length Research Paper

## “Tremulations on the ether”: The sublime and beauty in Graham Swift's humanist art

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This paper aims at investigating the interplay of the sublime and beauty in Graham Swift's attempts at communicating humanly and vividly with readers about human experience. In the author's works, both the sublime and beauty convey a sense of order and destabilisation. Both can be construed as enlightening transitions. Sublime patterns of human transgression trigger a quasi-divine sublime revenge and result in the unveiling of a new agnostic order. However, this new sublime-induced order is in turn irremediably damaged by the mutual erosion of art and reality created by sublime terrorism. As far as beauty is concerned, if characters do discover their *integritas*, the total fulfilment of their possibilities linking them to the universe and hence to the natural order at large, if *erôs* and *philia* have them progress towards greater truth, the novelist's aesthetic conceptions prove to be far from stable. Indeed, Graham Swift's sense of beauty incorporates contemporary anti-aesthetics, the elaboration of a beautiful realism as well as a critical distancing on beauty.

**Key words:** Graham Swift, contemporary British literature, beauty, sublime, aesthetics.

The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. (Lawrence, 1936: 535).

### INTRODUCTION

This work has the particularity of dealing with the crucial intertwining of the sublime and the beautiful in Graham Swift's fiction. Actually, in this author's works, the sublime implies the presence of beauty and *vice versa* though, in the Burkean tradition (Burke, 1909-1914), the two concepts should be opposed, one appearing unconnected with human temporality, the other reverberating the image of an ordered world or the plenitude of a motionless paradise (Girons, 1993: 509); one being characterised by unalterable newness whereas the other is ephemeral (Girons, 1993: 509). This original association of the two aesthetic dimensions enables Swiftian works to convey human experience as vividly as Lawrencian tremulations on the ether.

As Girons underlines, the sublime usually leads the reader to an unstable and dangerous world where identity always has to be re-conquered. Now, most Swiftian

narratives are at least partly situated in war contexts leaving “a world in which holes might open, surfaces prove unsolid” (Swift, 1980: 96) behind them. Identity, never self-evident, is rather a matter of chance as it reveals the narrator's all too unexpected loss of landmarks at the end of “The Son” (Swift, 1982: 61), the orphaned Gabor's relationships with his adoptive family in “Gabor” (Swift, 1982) or the disturbing and confusing proliferation of Bill's fathers in *Ever After* (Swift, 1992).

The sublime transition or translation - if we consider the references to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in “Waves” (Swift, 2009: 230) or in *Tomorrow* (Swift, 2007: 142) - far from involving tastes, has to do with what constitutes the core of the Swiftian narratives: the elevation and edification caused by momentary destabilisation, unease and distress. Appealing to the deepest emotions in human nature, the sublime enables

characters to evolve from deeply rooted convictions or illusions about reality. Graham Swift follows Jean Bessière's interpretation of the sublime (Bessière, 2007). By going beyond the awe normally characterising the sublime, by presenting Jean-François Lyotard's unrepresentable (Lyotard, 1991: 119) - what has never yet been constituted as presence, such as Sophie's reflection on the white blinding light of the explosion in *Out of this World* (Swift, 1988: 109) or the complex feelings surrounding the apparition in *Wish You Were Here* (Swift, 2011: 338-346)-, the author seems to negate the existence of limits to make humans include these very limits within the scope of their faculties. If we agree with Bessière (Bessière, 2007) that when an author uses the sublime, he puts his ability to represent to the test, Graham Swift seems to question the very power of art and of the artist.

The Swiftian sublime, mainly consisting in an art of passages, transitions, transgressions, vertigos, oblique intrusions of the unconscious, could be compared to the alchemy alluded to in "Chemistry" (Swift, 1982: 127) as it invariably purifies characters' and readers' relationships to the world. Similarly, adding his own contribution to the contemporary rewriting of the famous romantic theme, the author reinforces his refusal of artistic norms and thus purifies his aesthetics.

A good reason to focus on beauty, aside from the fact that it is a sort of stabilised equivalent of the sublime, is that one of the Koine Greek adjectives from which the English word "beautiful" was derived was "horaios" (coming from "hora" (hour) and literally meaning "of one's hour"), a word not unreminiscent of the etymological sense of the word "novel" designating a new genre and a new aesthetics. If Graham Swift declared for *The Guardian* (2011) that he does not believe a novel could rigorously be contemporary, for him, beauty can come from the genre's adequacy to adopt a certain perspective on long-term evolutions in society and in private life as well as to treat more or less topical issues (IRA or Islamist attacks in *Out of this World* or *Wish You Were Here*):

*[novels]’re there to take the long view to show change and evolution, human behaviour worked on by time. But none of this means that novels, which can never be strictly of now, cannot have their own kind of newness. [...] They can have immediacy.*

Owing to the straightforwardness, simplicity and historical dimension of streams of consciousness, more often than not linking the individual to a larger community, the beauty involved in Graham Swift's style, like Saul Ostrow's concept, becomes a node in a complex network "connecting our concepts of aesthetic judgement to truth, purity, art, the political" (Ostrow, 2013: 15).

The beauty to be found in Graham Swift's fiction also has to do with the author's use of heterogeneous

transartistic materials enhancing it. The work is pervaded with references to popular or operatic songs such as *Blue Bayou* in *Last Orders* (Swift, 1996: 12), Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* in *Wish You Were Here* (Swift, 2011: title), or Mozart's aria "Dove sono I bei momenti" in *Ever After* (Swift, 1992: 18-19) where female ballet dancers have a role (Swift, 1992: 19). In *The Light of Day*, one may be impressed by the combined use of Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* technique and of the film *Dressed to Kill* (Swift, 2006).

By resorting to such a transartistic inspiration, Graham Swift's idiosyncratic art - like Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophy - seems to distance itself from abstract literary appreciations and transcendent justification to taste (Gadamer, 1992: 12). Moreover, as he features a certain number of artist figures (Mrs. Singleton from "Learning to Swim" in the eponymous collection of short stories, the would-be painter in "The Tunnel", photographers in *Out of this World* and *The Light of Day*, lyrical artists in *Ever After*, the art specialist in *Tomorrow*), the author leads the reader to consider the aesthetic activity as belonging intrinsically to the normal flow of human activity in general.

As for his own art, forever on the brink, it always evades aesthetic certainties as it relies on romantic but pragmatic wanderings between magical realism (*Waterland*) and fantastic inspiration (see the mysterious textual apparition of Jack in *Last Orders*), between literature and theatre (*Out of this World*, *Last Orders*), prose and poetry (see the poems in *Making an Elephant*), true art and entertaining pseudo-art (Collingwood, 1938: 80), history and parenthetical humour, autobiography and autobiographical creation, and, last but not least, between beauty and the sublime which is our subject here.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

So far, critics engaged with the aesthetic appreciation of contemporary literature have determined a whole set of ever-recurring issues among which the emotional response to fiction (Winnberg, 2003), the Flaubertian strategy of the manipulative author's withdrawal from the narrative, the dismissal of the notion that art exists solely to create pleasure.

Of course Graham Swift, once labelled "terminal poet" (Pesso-Micquel, 1999), is famous for his treatment of mourning and trauma and for the underlying psychoanalytic dimension of his narratives sometimes relying on perlaboration (Porée, 1989). The related vocal aspect of Swiftian narrations or emphasis on the creation of voices has already been discussed in Tollance's works (Tollance, 2011).

As for contemporary aesthetics, it is still concerned with finding a definition of art covering all art forms. Consequently, one still has to situate any artistic inquiry

concerning the novel within the framework of theoretical questions about the nature of art, about the difference between works of art and artefacts, about the values embodied by art and the special qualities relating to individual art forms <sup>(see "Eighteenth-century foundations")</sup>. However, one cannot but be influenced, on the one hand, by Leo Tolstoy's definition of art as a transmission of feelings involving artist and audience/readership (Tolstoy, 1996: 51) and, on the other hand, by Morris Weitz's conception of art as an open concept (Weitz, 1956: 31).

Therefore, if this reflection on beauty and the sublime in Graham Swift's works does not directly deal with aesthetic psychology and, more to the point, with reader-response psychology, it does not preclude the research in this field and even takes it as a starting-point. The emotional link of the reader to the text is assumed to condition their relationships to beauty and sublime in the literary work. One should bear in mind that the reader's experience of the sublime involves profound thought, intensity of emotion and necessitates that the work must provide the reader with material for reflection (Oatley and Gholamein, 1997: 170).

As far as reader-response psychology is concerned, Wittgenstein's refusal of the quantification of aesthetic pleasure (Wittgenstein, 1971: 75) comes to mind as none of the Swiftian novels are interchangeable. Adorno's position also seems relevant as he rejects the idea that aesthetic appreciation necessarily implies pleasure (Adorno, 1974). As far as sociologist Demeulenaere's work is concerned, it is particularly thought-provoking as it conceives the representation of most painful events as pleasurable because action becomes a positive aesthetic means of going beyond negativity (Demeulenaere, 2002), of taking distance from it.

The readers' ability of being moved by the beauty and sublime of a literary work largely depends on what Fizer calls the "[...] psychological transcendencies of the perceiving individual [...]" (Fizer, 1981: 187) and on "[...] the exclusive role of the eye/I of the intellect in creating, perceiving, contemplating and knowing aesthetic realities [...]" (Fizer, 1981: 189). It also builds on how the author deals with their emotions. For Oatley and Gholamein (1997), fiction must first be a good imitation of life so that readers may be able to identify with the main character, and be able to "wish they were here". Unobserved observers, readers must then be able to posit as sympathetic spectators (Nussbaum, 1995) in order to fully benefit from the necessary latitude of emotions. Empathy then relies on "[...] accumulated perceptions, mnemonic residua, impressions, judgements and divergent ideas [...]" (Fizer, 1981: 189). Moreover, the intensity, frequency and originality characterizing emotions a reader may feel when reading a novel are caused by the writer's careful selection and direction of episodes (Oatley and Gholamein, 1997: 170). The story must somehow function as "[...] a clue to explicit or implicit recall of fragments of our own autobiographical memory

[...]" (Oatley and Gholamein, 1997: 170).

Demeulenaere's *Théorie des sentiments esthétiques* insists on the reader's quickly metamorphosing emotions during the reading experience (Demeulenaere, 2002: 164). According to him, the confusion and complexity of these emotions make them difficult to identify and classify. However, drawing on Kant's previous distinction between what is pleasant and what is beautiful (Demeulenaere, 2002: 176), the sociologist insists on what is interesting, meaningful for readers and what is not (Demeulenaere, 2002: 176).

The debate opposing Derek Matravers and Kendall Walton may also be interesting. Indeed, Derek Matravers contends that when reading a novel, readers who make believe they are facing a report of actual events experience real emotions and not quasi-emotions as Kendall Walton had put forward. However, David Novitz claims that literature provokes an anaesthetics of emotions as art has the power of persuading us to renounce ideas we previously held dear without arousing fierce emotions.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is conceived as a kind of prologue to a reflection on the interartistic dimension of British contemporary literature. This reflection would mainly aim at the progress of the history of ideas and representations and at demonstrating how beauty in the novel is best achieved when aesthetic emotion circulates from one art to another.

Here, to give a background to these transartistic studies, the paper chooses to study what is at the core of the novelistic aesthetic and transartistic experience in Graham Swift: the organisation of the relationships between the sublime and beauty. Both philosophical approaches (Plato, 2008; Friedrich Nietzsche, 1995; Lyotard, 1991) and works by specialists of the sublime and beauty (Alberro, 2004; Girons, 1993; Berléant, 2009; Cheng, 2006) will be used to cast light on the Swiftian fiction. This paper shall progress from notions of order to ideas/ideals of precariousness, from the positive assertion of the need for beauty to the hesitation on the type of beauty needed.

## RESULTS

The issue of beauty and sublime in Graham Swift's works has never been truly raised so far. Applying Girons' analysis (1993) to the Swiftian corpus permits to consider how the sublime elevation undergone by the characters makes them envisage (self-) knowledge differently. Indeed, they come to participate better in infinity once they have felt the distinct, incomparable transfixion of the sublime. As they commit sublime transgressions, the characters also come to grasp with the hierarchical sense of order implicitly pervading the Swiftian thought.

*Out of this World or Wish You Were Here* force readers to acknowledge with Berléant (2009) that any aesthetic experience should encompass the negative dimension of human existence even if it implies dealing with the

problematically media-covered acts of terrorism. In *Wish You Were Here*, by placing terror at the heart of individual and of global histories, Graham Swift seems to agree with Arnold Berléant's idea that though terrorism can never be justified, it can and even must be understood. Sublime terrorism is thus linked to terror, in a logic inherited from Arnold Berléant. *Wish You Were Here* also seems to embed in its structure a reflection on Karlheinz Stockhausen's terrorism conceived as a work of art making normality, reality and art collapse.

Graham Swift's works also exhibits a beauty reminiscent of François Cheng's religious sense of existence (Cheng, 2006) even if classical beauty is deliberately denigrated for being both necessary and fraudulent in a Nietzschean perspective. Indeed, conveniently making Bill lose sight of a too ominous, painful reality, the classical beauty of Sylvia's voice is synonymous with the futility of adulterous relationships

The wisdom of the author's art triumphs over the sufferings imposed by life. Ordinary beauty, traditionally rejected for being useless and vulgar, is what really matters in Graham Swift's novels. The novelist seems to think that ordinary beauty is the only one that counts at a contemporary era marked with the unease with bourgeois 18<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics.

## DISCUSSION

### Subliming the destabilising sublime or approaching a fragile agnostic sense of order

#### Secular though sacred: the organising sublime of the ordinary

As Girons (1993) underlines, the word "sublime" first designated Ganymed's abduction by Jupiter's bird (17). In Graham Swift's works, it is possible to say that the mourning male characters (for instance Willy Chapman in *The Sweet Shop Owner* or Bill Unwin in *Ever After*), forever on the brink of death and madness, being suddenly carried away as they are by love and unfulfilled desire, suffer a comparable sublime situation which enables them to reach a higher viewpoint on the meaning of life. In fact, if they suggest the inanity of all cravings, including the wish to understand the world, this and other Swiftian proliferating sublime predicaments act on the characters' desire for knowledge as well as on preservation and representation instincts. Indeed, unsettling as Swiftian sublime experiences are at first sight, they eventually seem to lead to their own subversion as they encourage narrators and readers to distance themselves from their usual perspective to participate more consistently in infinity, eternity, the absolute of men's aspirations and spiritual quests and, in the end, in creative forces themselves. Thus, these experiences seem designed so as to convincingly convey the Swiftian conception of a

sacred though agnostic order under which the characters live, emanating from the memory-wise author identifying with the divine elephant Ganeish as the title *Making an Elephant* suggests. This paper will try to explore the structuring dynamic of the sublime as it appears through the whole Swiftian corpus.

In his very first novel, even before tackling what Tom Crick from *Waterland* designates as the "here and now" attacking Marie-Antoinette (Swift, 1983: 52) and reminding the reader of Burke's immanent sublime (Burke, 1909-1914), Graham Swift lays bare Girons's *sui generis* emotion of the sublime (Girons, 1993: 514-5), relating to the common Burkean notions of awe, terror and delight as negative pain (Burke, 1909-1914) but defined as becoming transfixed or as fearing transfixion. This overpowering emotion controls humans who cannot control it or even intentionally communicate it. Because of a breakdown, due to his incapacity to remedy his isolation, the surviving Mr. Chapman, a little like Bill Unwin, both longs for and dreads death. Like another King Lear suffering *angina pectoris*, he waits for the transfixion of his chest which he and only he supposes will turn him conveniently into "a cold statue" to welcome his unforgiving daughter (Swift, 1980: 10). Even in the first pages (Swift, 1980: 9-11), his theatrical passivity in front of indomitable terror, conveyed by the linguistic inscription of the character's wavering between life and death, motion and immobility, compels him and us to adopt a humble, low point of view.

The author's creative superimpositions of temporal strata - birth coincides with death (Swift, 1980: 10) making all life events merge into a single one - manage to give the impression of a fossilized ordinary time and underline the importance of describing things not as they really are but as they are really felt.

In Swiftian works, sublime passages abound, particularly those revolving around the structuring motif of the fall. Inspired by classical Greek and Christian cultures, driven by their *hubris*, Swiftian characters have fallen from grace, transgressed - sometimes because they have wanted their love affairs or other emotional engagements to last "ever after" (*The Sweet Shop Owner*, *Ever After*, *Wish You Were Here*), sometimes because they wanted to see time, death or all sense of responsibility abolished ("The Watch", "Chemistry", "Hotel"), sometimes because they have lost contact with nature when entering the world of knowledge (*Shuttlecock*) - seemingly waiting for redemption.

Sublime transgression often implies semi-oneiric narrations playing with the fulfilment of the characters' worst nightmares (*Learning to Swim and Other Stories*). Then, transgression may be of a Promethean kind ("Hoffmeier's Antelope", "The Watch", "The Hypochondriac"), or related to the fear/desire of disappointing familial, socio-ethical expectations binding society together ("Seraglio", "Hotel", "The Son", "Gabor", "Tunnel", "Learning to Swim", "Cliffedge", "Chemistry"). In "Hotel", the

narrator - himself a victim of his mother's sexual perversion - gives free rein to his unconscious fear/desire of facilitating incestuous relationships. In "Cliffedge", the narrator enacts his fratricide fantasy in the same way as the narrator of "Chemistry" enacts his fantasy of murdering his dearest relative (his grandfather). Likewise, narrating "The Hypochondriac" seems to help the doctor-narrator purify his mind as it allows him to give a complete expression to his darkest fears: killing an otherwise healthy young man by negligently negating all possibility of illness and encountering a ghost.

To the figurative falls are linked literal falls permeating the texts such as Irene's uncles' fall "in action" (Swift, 1980: 49), Willy Chapman's echoing fall from his ladder (Swift, 1980: 43) and his metaphorical plunge from the diving-board into death (Swift, 1980: 222); the doctor's collapse in "The Hypochondriac" (Swift, 1982: 76); Martin Luther's, the tree's and the grandfather's fall in "The Watch" (Swift: 1982: 104, 105); the crashing planes of "Chemistry", *Out of this World* and *Ever After*, Uncle George and Uncle Rupert's tumbles in *Ever After* (Swift, 1992: 28). Sarah Atkinson's fall and Dick's own plunge in *Waterland* ascribable to the characters' assumed wickedness (Swift, 1983: 66, 310) strangely reiterate the motion of God's punitive aborted dropping of the stars (Swift, 1983: 1). Indeed, due to a network of correspondences binding the individual to the universal, in their agnostic sacredness, Swiftian falls seem both to reverse and sanction the unethical progress of a harmful civilisation able to produce ever ascending bombers. The logic underlying this dynamics is enhanced in *Out of this World* where the joyful landing onto the moon is counterbalanced by the Vietnam War on earth (Swift, 1988: 12-13), and where war orphan Anna's hubristic adulterous sex symbolised by Mount Olympus is punished by the gods' revenge when they have her plane crashed (Swift, 1988: 181).

Hence, if there is no real God in Graham Swift's fiction, morality and order win the day, particularly when the author adapts the Greek *de casibus* tragedy to his literary purposes and teaches his characters to fall as well as to swim. To try and adopt a divine position hubristically invariably fails as exemplifies the one hundred and sixty-two year old grandfather from "The Watch" punished for his family's obscure dealings with time when falling - however deliberately - under a quasi heavenly scimitar of lightning (Swift, 1982: 105). In a sublime moment at the end of the short story, the forever elusive sense of eternity rendered absurdly graspable within earthly time by the perfidious clock-makers simply vanishes (Swift, 1982: 113).

From Swiftian falls to the reinvention of a Fall to be associated with the novelist's more or less assumed attempts to reconnect with a transcendence there could be but one step, potentially made at the end of "Seraglio". The final passage from the two-dimensional skyline to the "scintillating façades" (Swift, 1982: 9) seemed to evoke

the crucial transition from the primaevial unity formed by sky, earth and water (water/land) to the ensuing separation and nostalgia for unity. Therefore, transcendent order is reverberated in the spatial organisation of the Swiftian fiction.

Following the delineation of the sublime emotion in *The Sweet Shop Owner* and the elaboration of transgression/fall patterns, the invention of sublime infinite verticalities manifested by *Last Orders'* Canterbury Cathedral (Swift, 1996: 194) comes to echo the enigmatic experience of the link between sky, earth and water at the end of "Seraglio", a link re-wrought in each of the water-related Swiftian works ("Cliffedge", "Hotel", "Learning to Swim", *Waterland*,...). The psychic elevation inherent in the sublime experience could already be read through the cliché metaphor of Quinn's cherry-trees in *Shuttlecock* (Swift, 1981: 17) heralding *Wish You Were Here's* old oak, metaphorically linking the transgenerational theme with the sexual and suicidal one (Swift, 2011: 274-275). The tree cannot help reminding the reader of the figure of Ganeish whom Graham Swift identifies with. On top of the Tree of Life uniting Earth and Sky, the elephant/author, like another god in his realm, seems to cast his light illuminating the world to the deepest valleys, thus permitting poetic action.

More generally, in Graham Swift's fiction, sublime landscapes provoking awe symbolise human realities in a tradition inherited from romanticism. One may think about the skyscrapers in *Out of this World* (Swift, 1988: 16), the dangerous cliffs of "Cliffedge" in the eponymous short story (Swift, 1982: 116, 119), the violent middle-East in "Seraglio" or "The Son" (Swift, 1982: 3, 52), the still unfinished suspension bridge over the estuary in "Learning to Swim" (Swift, 1982: 134).. Facing the hallucinatory power of the skyscrapers in the land of cancelled memories without a past (Swift, 1988: 16), both a land of amnesty and of guns (Swift, 1988: 16), Sophie remarks: "[...] all these clean, hard, soaring, futuristic lines were mixed up with something crumbling, blighted, decomposed. As if the skyscrapers had to sprout out of some fertile rot. But sweetness and innocence were never really the ticket, were they? If you want them, go walk in some English meadow" (Swift, 1988: 16).

A prominent feature in Graham Swift's treatment of the sublime and of the ordered world it implies is the organisation of narrations according to a *chiaroscuro* technique suggesting the typical ambiguity of the characters and also facilitating awe and horror in them. Thus, in "Chemistry", the narrator's grandfather's uncertain death and the apparition of the dead father occur at night (Swift, 1982: 128-129), the most sombre passages of *Shuttlecock* happen in the darkness of le Goret's room (Swift, 1981: 138-139). In this second novel, power has to do with the ability to access light since only Quinn has a window in his office (Swift, 1981: 17). *The Light of Day* which, from the very title, refers to Caravaggio's style, relies on the clear opposition between the gloomy world

of the prison, of Sarah's deed and the clear light of day corresponding to the narrator's freedom and to his ability to conceive a future.

### **In the wake of Arnold Berléant's negative sublime: the Swiftian sublime of terrorism corroding emotions, art and human reality**

After an early fiction concerned with the sublime impact of world wars on reality, *Out of this World* revolved around the familial and universal consequences of a terrorist attack ironically aimed at a bomb maker's home. Now, *Wish You Were Here*, revealing the vicious circle of terrorism, associates it to the sublime and hence to the world of deepest intimate reminiscences and feelings especially marked by strategies of mourning and of facing more or less sordid death: "A war on terror, that was the general story. Jack knew that terror was a thing you felt inside, so what could a war on terror be, in the end, but a war against yourself? Tom would have known terror, perhaps, quite a few times" (Swift, 2011: 60).

In fact, both Berléant (Berléant, 2013) and, implicitly, Graham Swift relate sublime terrorism to terror defined as the most powerful passion a human is capable of feeling, characterised by astonishment mixed with horror, causing the suspension of all other thoughts. The very terrorism Tom wants to fight against is presented as the global version of the anger- and awe-inspiring domestic and national circumstances (Swift, 2011: 60, 206).

The sublime linked to terrorism in *Wish You Were Here* is evocative of Stockhausen's 2001 definition of terrorism as "the greatest work of art ever [...] for the whole cosmos", "a jump out of security, the everyday" in which human values and the value of humans are at stake (Hänggi, 2011). Indeed, Tom's fate, linked to the re-direction of his own anger and terror, makes normality collapse under the extreme and mystical extraordinariness of ill-timed death in utmost physical pain (death by burning: Swift, 2011: 207-209). Terror and terrorism corrode the notions of reality and art as well as the frontiers between the two, leading Damien Hirst to assert the artistic value of a Ground Zero film footage (Allison, 2002). Likewise, Jack wonders about the potential hole made in the fabric of normality: "Was it conceivable that terrorists - Islamic extremists - might want to operate out of a holiday facility on the Isle of Wight? Or, on the other hand, want to crash a plane into it? Target a caravan site [called the Lookout]? He didn't think so." (Swift, 2011: 61).

Sublime suffering caused by the sublime need for the dead to reappear, opening deep chasms in the narrator's psyche after the family disaster, leads to the symptomatic apparition of the parental object's (the dead father's potentially metaphorising the nation's) repressed psychic matter or unconscious: Tom's phantom lying behind

Jack's image reflected in the mirror (Swift, 2011: 350-1). In *Wish You Were Here* rendering the animal world of beauty, almost crazy emotions triggered by familial losses and thus blurring the mental frontiers between his adult reader and his main character, one could say that Graham Swift, aesthetically mature, now uses terrorism to offer his reader a full and direct grasp of the powerful inner world of human feelings writing national and international history.

Though the rain beats a tattoo at the end of *Wish You Were Here* (Swift, 2011: 353), the world represented by Graham Swift has become even more uncertain than the post-world war universe he used to describe in his early novels.

### **Beauty and Graham Swift's problematic stabilisation efforts**

#### **Consolidating order after the sublime transition: Beauty as *Integritas* Linked to *Erôs* and *Philia*.**

In Graham Swift's works, after the operation of the sublime transition, beauty, striking the right balance between the pleasant and the sublime, having to do with notions of justice, morality and ethics (Scarry, 2001), is still there to reassure us about the presence of the agnostic order already described above.

It is possible to interpret beauty in Graham Swift's works in the wake of François Cheng's approach (Cheng, 2006). Indeed, the latter seems fitting to analyse our corpus since it is by exploring their individuality that the characters manage to transform themselves into essences linking them to the transcendental universality of human being and, finally, to beauty, an extra source of happiness (Cheng, 2006: 26-27). Investigating reasons for the failure of his private life (Swift, 1981: 76), Prentis from *Shuttlecock* comes to situate himself in private and collective history and eventually manages to develop healthier connections with beautiful nature helping him to resolve his family trouble (Swift, 1981: 215-220).

Thus, beauty seems to spring from the uniqueness of the created characters to which the elaboration of individual voices clearly contributes. In fact, though the main narrator of *The Sweet Shop Owner* was called Chapman, the author has always denied creating types or archetypes. It is by their more or less unconscious desire to move towards their *integritas*, the beauty associated with the total fulfilment of their possibilities, that the characters come closer to universal being and to the original desire and order from which the universe proceeds even in a non religious perspective (Cheng, 2006: 27). Certain characters prove more conscious of their desire to reach their *integritas* than others. Such is the case of Willy avidly plunging into introspection, seemingly craving a unified, pacified and reified final self in view of his planned pseudo-suicide and of his daughter's arrival

(Swift, 1980: 10). It is also the case of the other old suicidal narrator, Bill Unwin in *Ever After* who also tries to grasp the implications of his aesthetic, literary, historical/ Historical identity between his aborted suicide and his oncoming true death. In contrast, George, the narrator in *The Light of Day*, far from conceiving his identity as sealed, reveals open to sudden sentimental reshuffle: "Something happens. We cross a line, we open a door we never knew was there. It might never have happened, we might never have known." (Swift, 2006: 3).

Anyway, no single character can ever discover beauty understood as his or her *integritas* reflecting the transcendental desire presiding over the universe unless his consciousness be related to the various parts of his own self and to others (Cheng, 2006: 27-28). So much so that when Graham Swift resorts to polyphonic narrations, in their quest, the characters systematically manage to summon a sign of transcendence: the cryptic ghost (*Out of this World, Last Orders*). Even when a single character takes charge of the narration, like in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, "Chemistry" or *Wish You Were Here*, and when his stream of consciousness conjures up his various temporal selves, does the familial ghost appear. In *Out of this World* or *Last Orders*, it is by interpreting life together - Vic's sections, Lenny's or Ray's all cast a different light on existence - and by pooling their recollections together that the characters are able to unveil the hidden harmony or disharmony of the world.

In a Platonic vein (Plato, 2008), Graham Swift's works show how beauty is also dependent on love - both understood as *erôs* and *philia* - and plays a major role in mental development. In *The Sweet Shop Owner*, beauty emanates from Irene (and contaminates Dorothy) because we see her mainly from Willy's point of view. As in the Platonic scheme of things, Willy's original physical love (*erôs*) has quickly evolved towards an admiration for Irene's cleverness (her inner truth) and a spiritual unveiling of the truths underlying his social life since he can now speculate about the rape, his relatives' and acquaintances' secrets and the functioning of the world at large. In *Last Orders*, it is *philia* characterising the bonds between life-long friends which enables the characters to approach the intimate truth behind their friendship and behind Heideggerian spirituality. In *Tomorrow*, Paula's fascination with the rich beauty of her husband's intellectual originality seems to enhance her own artistic/aesthetic sensitivity and to deepen her reflection on beauty. Her husband's scholarly tastes for atypical subjects and "the sheer particularity of things" (Swift, 2007: 57), their beautiful originality, seduces her (Swift, 2007: 56) and seems somehow to trigger a parallel quest for beauty in Seurat's "clouds of atoms" (Swift, 2007: 57) or in unknown artists such as Vareschi, a very minor old master who painted Paula's *Gennaio e Maggio* (Swift, 2007: 171). Mike's fascination for biology which links him to the universe finds an echo in Paula's adoration of Jacopo Bassano's animal scenes (Swift, 2007: 125).

### **Graham Swift's art at a crossroads between contemporary anti-aesthetics, beauty, beautiful realism and a discontent with beauty**

As was often remarked, twentieth-century so-called anti-aesthetics rested on a paradox since it was deeply influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche for who: "The voice of beauty speaks softly; it creeps only into the most fully awakened souls" (Nietzsche, 1995: 93). If he contributed to the initial dismissal of beauty's importance probably because it was strongly linked with eighteenth-century culture and bourgeois unpopular values, Graham Swift also re-introduced it in literature.

Graham Swift's *Shuttlecock* itself reveals the contemporary barbaric demise of bourgeois aesthetics and Western values. It can be associated with today's avant-garde almost exclusively focused on the polarisation between *Erôs* and *Thanatos*, presenting mechanical unsatisfactory sex. It somehow chimes with Gunther Von Hagen's obsession with death formulated by grotesque plasticised corpses. As such it confirms Alexander Alberro's idea that there is no intrinsic beauty in ideas such as postmodern disillusion or disintegration of the truth (Alberro: 2004).

At the same time, Swiftian texts often point nostalgically towards beauty understood as the absolute refinement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see for instance the implicit reference to Mozart's "Seraglio" in *Learning to Swim*). As for the reader's aesthetic pleasure, partly derived from the author's beautiful realism, it owes something to the re-creation of Plato's splendor of truth provoking shock, wonder, as well as seduction and suspending despair (Plato, 2008).

Thus, beauty is to be found in the way Graham Swift undermined all possible pretentiousness in order to address frankly the mystery of community life and to make the silence of daily existence speak. This silence could be linked to Boucher et al.'s "beau ordinaire" with which man is compelled to commune (Boucher et al., 2010). Graham Swift's way of making human reality manifest can also be related to Ivan Gobry's anthropophanic beauty (Gobry, 2003: 17).

Looking nostalgically for beauty and truth, the author's almost wordless writing (whatbooktoread.com) unveils what Peter Ackroyd would call an English Music (Ackroyd, 1992), *that is* the line of secret and unsuspected harmonies, correspondences and melodies at work in a godless universe where narration always has to be regenerated to be requited (see the use of female and male narrators coming from diverse social backgrounds).

Far from trying to drive us away from gloomy thoughts on our perishability, as Hogarth or Purcell's aesthetics in Peter Ackroyd's novel, Graham Swift's beautiful/truthful language forever points to mortal delinquency to incite us to hope for a community-induced salvation. Thus, Graham Swift's Purcellian music "reflects the harmony of the soul and soars above the corruption of the flesh."

constituting “a discourse in a strain above mortality” which “has not conquered time [...] but has become a true part of it.” (Ackroyd, 1992:169). From this perspective, as Dostoevski’s Hyppolite declares (Dostoevski, 1887: 102), in Graham Swift’s world, only the beauty inherent in the poetic expression of mortal life, in “the perfectly judged and timed revelation on the page of an unanswerable truth we already inwardly acknowledge” (Swift, 2009: 13) could save the world. Happily enough, always beyond the writer, the force of Swiftian writing which is a “primitive irreducible mystery that answers some deep need in human nature” is always impossible to outguess (Swift, 2009: 12).

To a certain extent, Graham Swift’s conception of literary beauty might have been influenced by Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin’s art which the novelist admires (Metcalf, 2011). For the humble Graham Swift, Chardin’s heavy though carefully thought-out brushstrokes, his “grande harmonie des consonances qui ne coule que de la main des maîtres” (Rosenberg, 1991: 80) may reveal maturity. If Chardin’s works were first disparaged as being those of a mere copyist, the painter’s way of revealing the poetic nature of everyday objects soon grew influential. Like Chardin’s brushstrokes, Graham Swift’s simple, touching words must register the impact of events - like deaths - potentially lying beyond them or just at their edge. Thus, in the rural novel *Wish You Were Here*, one may notice the aura bestowed on simple but important things such as the big parental bedroom or the family oak which function as landmarks. In the Swiftian musical conception of literary art, reminiscent of Chardin’s “pâte travaillée, malaxée, retournée et qui sait saisir le reflet de l’objet voisin.” (Rosenberg, 1991: 80), spaces between and around words have their unspoken resonances in the same way as in music, both sounds and silences matter.

The novel had also to be true to the underlying music of life’s confusion to be actually redeeming. According to the author in an interview with Lidia Vianu (2000):

*An American writer once said we all lead lives of quiet desperation. Perhaps, but I think we all lead lives of quiet confusion. The novel is a form in which you can be true to the confusion of life. I’m not different from my readers and I certainly don’t want to have power over them. I’m confused too, I’m in the same boat.*

The variety of contrasting subjects invading the table of contents of *Waterland* mirrored the chaotic division founding the subject’s beautiful intimacy as well as the necessarily confused postmodern post-Greenwich temporality. Aesthetic fragmentation contaminated a description of the fens not unreminiscent of a cubist painting: “[...] [the land] stretched away to the horizon, its uniform colour, peat-black, varied only by the crops that grew upon it - grey-green potato leaves, blue-green beet leaves, yellow-green wheat; [...]” (Swift, 1983: 2).

In *Ever After*, (artistic) beauty as governed by the principle of life, is everywhere present - the luminous city of Paris (Swift, 1992: 13), the world of ballerinas (Swift, 1992: 19) and of beautiful voices (Swift, 1992: 31) - though nowhere really necessary.

First, beauty is opposed to evil (the evil of the adulterous relationship Sylvia/Sam, of the war leading to young Ed’s death, of nuclear power) and helps loser Bill Unwin find meaning, comfort and a sense of direction since, fortunately, as he himself declares when discussing his infatuation with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, “The fads of adolescence die hard” (Swift, 1992: 4).

Bill being a professor specialised in English literature also acting as a literary consultant for his wife may be perceived as another - maybe superior - reader giving us the key to Graham Swift’s beauty. Indeed, he is the only one character to directly and unashamedly equate literature with beauty (Swift, 1992: 70).

For Bill, part of the aesthetic enjoyment of reading or watching *Hamlet* may accrue from the fact that though his personal story makes him identify with the eponymous character, enslaved in the postmodern world of parodies, he never undergoes the final stages of the tragedy. Therefore, the fun he seems to find in the play would have to do with seeing his deepest emotions of terror, pain, love, joy and hatred reflected and put at a reassuring distance, purified in an Aristotelian manner. What happens to Bill reading Hamlet’s tragedy may bear a resemblance to what happens to contemporary readers potentially suffering from intricate familial plights and reading Bill’s often comic story including Hamlet’s tragic one. This aesthetic structure of the book stimulates aesthetic pleasure as it implies that beautiful experiences always leave emotional traces that can be revived under propitious circumstances

However, one could assert that Graham Swift inserts negative elements undermining the power of beauty. Trying to convince himself about the legitimacy of his intellectual pleasures in order to enjoy them to the full (see Chagnat, 1860: 4), Bill likes to stage himself in the stereotyped role of the starving student neglected by his materialist stepfather and mother and fighting, suffering for true beauty (Swift, 1992: 71-72, 150). Moreover, because Bill’s connection with artistic beauty sprung from his relationships with his singing and versatile mother, the reader may notice that beauty both re-enchants the world and appeals to a grotesquely excessive sensuality. Beauty’s image is forever tarnished by Sylvia’s voluptuous greed: “Juice ran - a drop, a splash or two of pearly pear juice in that baffling opening of her blouse. Her tongue made slurpy noises, her eyes wallowed. ‘Mmmm, darling -divine’”(Swift, 1992: 230).

Bill’s present quest for beauty, associated with his painful grieving for his charismatic and potentially adulterous wife (Swift, 1992: 111), a famous gifted actress, transforms the Shakespearean plot of *Hamlet* into that of *Antony and Cleopatra* and finally into that of a tragedy

hinging on aesthetic pleasure. Then, it seems to suggest that beauty always excites desire without satisfying it, both emancipating the subject from reality and isolating it.

## Conclusion

In fact, the importance bestowed on both beauty and the sublime as well as the impossibility of separating personal style from content in Graham Swift's fiction denotes the prevalence of artistic expression over representation. Indeed, if the author knows how to faithfully depict Londonian communities in *The Sweet Shop Owner* or *Last Orders*, expression remains his true artistic vehicle. This accounts for the transartistic nature of Swiftian writings which are both pictorial and dramatically, architecturally musical. This accounts for the Lawrencian-like, sensuous rendering of life emanating from the figurative use of language. Indeed, tropes such as living metaphors abound, be it the uncle running away with an antelope ("Hoffmeier's Antelope") representing the contemporary mad attempts at halting nature-endangering progress or the sublime metaphor of cliffedges representing the suicidal impulses of young people suffering from mental breakdowns and emotional shocks ("Cliffedge"). Graham Swift's humanist texts are also packed with symbols encompassing the whole subjective experience: maternal waters ("Waves", *Waterland* and *Learning to Swim*); tunnels expressing the transition to adulthood ("The Tunnel"); the east associated with both violence and refinement ("Seraglio", "The Son" and *Out of this World*); the west linked to comfortable forgetfulness (*Out of this World*); rats, holes and shuttlecocks (*Shuttlecock*). By resorting to figurative language, the author clearly means to connect the work of art with human action, life and emotion.

According to Gadamer, symbols also hold the promise "to complete and make whole our fragmentary life" (Gadamer, 1992: 32), wholeness being required in order to achieve aesthetic success. He declared: "[...] the experience of beauty, and particularly beauty in art, is the invocation of a potentially whole and holy order of things [...]" (Gadamer, 1992: 32). If the expression of emotions, such as the one displayed in Swiftian art, acquaints us intuitively with the human values and condition, it can also bridge the gap between common readers or even academics and the war photographer, the soldier about to die in Iraq, the young man mourning his dead brother and the private detective. From one original work to another, the reader is confronted "with the [still] un-conceptualised uniqueness of [the work's] subject-matter." (Scruton, 2011: 98) and evolves towards the perception of human experience as a whole

The sublime and the beautiful imply the changing emotional reactions of readers enjoying Graham Swift's works as an aesthetic experience. Readers may be amazed to be faced with a sublime triggered by the loss of the main

character's beloved, mad patterns of transgression destabilising the limits of the characters and of the texts. They also may be surprised to find reassuring landmarks signalling the presence of an order.

Graham Swift's fiction has the particularity of directly addressing its readers as both its beauty and sublime belong to the realm of the ordinary, permitting to make positive what first appeared as negative in life - contemporary crises such as the mad cow disease and terrorism but also mortality.

Anyway, nothing is self-evident in Graham Swift's art, if beauty understood as *integritas* is present, the author hesitates between anti-aesthetics, the invention of beautiful realism and a disparaging view of beauty. However badly the author may treat beauty and the sublime, what matters for the novelist is to express himself, to reinvent a sincere communication with the reader based on mutual vulnerability.

## SYNOPSIS OF SOME MAJOR SWIFTIAN WORKS MENTIONED IN THIS PAPER

### *The Sweet Shop Owner* (1980)

Willy Unwin, a widowed sweet shop owner from Bermondsey suffering from *angina pectoris*, lives what he decides will be his very last day. He obviously wishes his own death to take place on this June day, the day of his daughter's Dorothy's birthday maybe in order to make her feel guilty to have left him and to have taken her mother's money. Alone on earth, stuck in the routine of his shops, he remembers his unrequited love for his wife Irene, a woman raped when she was young with her parents' more or less implicit assent. He especially remembers the trap his doomed marriage and family life soon tacitly became, as Irene never sought psychiatric care for her troubles and could never become a happy wife or a good mother. Dorothy, a clever girl escaping from her family's plight in the study of literature, is never a good daughter. In this novel, collective history also interferes with personal history and permits a certain poetic justice to take place since one of the unpleasant and aggressive Harrison brothers dies on a sunken ship while Willy survives the conflict.

### *Shuttlecock* (1981)

Prentis investigates dead crimes in the London police archive administered by Quinn. Hoping to obtain a promotion, he dutifully gathers information from various files his boss hands him and emits hypotheses. Only to discover that Quinn is deliberately but enigmatically withholding vital clues. Frustrated by Quinn's unlimited power and his own insignificance, he fails to establish good relationships with his wife and his two sons at home. To compensate, he soon concentrates on

discovering the truth about the dumbness his father - a former wartime spy and hero who wrote his memoirs after escaping his German tormentors suffers from. Discovering why his father is permanently silent becomes a time-consuming passion as Prentis must re-read his father's memoirs to find potential clues.

Finally, it is Quinn who holds the keys to the old spy's plight. It is also from Quinn that Prentis will acquire the right professional attitude: indeed, innocent people have to be protected, even if it implies burning some documents. Progressively led by Quinn to acknowledge the relativity of all human feats, Prentis will eventually manage to return to more natural relationships with his wife and sons.

### Waterland (1983)

*Waterland* is told by a soon to be retired history teacher called Tom Crick whose wife has just gone mad and kidnapped a baby in a supermarket. The school headmaster, Lewis, does not want Tom in his school any more. One can divide *Waterland's* action into various historical parts and temporal stratas: what happened in the fens when the teacher-narrator is still a teenager (a murder, parental deaths, a suicide, sexual experiments triggering certain uneasy courses of events), the historical strata corresponding to the narrator's ancestors, a more recent historical strata concomitant with the narrator's parents' history, the narrator's parent's history could be situated, the historical strata dealt with in the history lesson Tom Crick is still teaching (18<sup>th</sup> century and the French revolution), a most ancient and essential historical strata corresponding to the biological, geological, geographical history of the earth.

### Out of this World (1988)

In 1972, bomb maker and First World War survivor Robert Beech died to a terrorist attack though ironically he provided the IRA with arms. This put an end to his son Harry Beech's and his granddaughter Sophie's careers. This also put an end to their father and daughter relationship, which had already been damaged by Harry the war photographer's frequent absence and by the accidental death of Anna, Sophie's mother Harry was actually unable to rescue. Now Sophie lives in New York and Harry in Britain. Having witnessed the terrorist attack aimed at her grandfather, Sophie still goes to see Doctor K, a psychoanalyst, while she resents her father Harry for having taken a photograph when her grandfather died. Father and daughter have almost decided to meet again for Harry's second marriage with a young woman.

### Ever After (1992)

Told by an opera singer's son, Bill Unwin, *Ever After* deals with adoption and the contemporary disappearance

of meaningful father (and parental) figures. The old narrator, a university professor, has been taught only recently who his real father was. After having lived under the deception that his real father was a spy who killed himself with a gun in his office, Bill has now some difficulty to face the truth. Now his mother is dead and so are his second stepfather and his beloved wife who left him childless. *Ever After* has the particularity of spanning several centuries as it refers to Bill Unwin's personal ancestor, Matthew Pearce, an intellectual inspired by Charles Darwin, who opposed his father-in-law's religious convictions.

### Last Orders (1996)

Jack Dodds the butcher dies from stomach cancer leaving his wife, adoptive son and band of old friends behind him. As they wish to respect his last wishes - he wants to be incinerated and have his ashes thrown at Margate Pier by the seaside - the friends all embark together on a journey leading from Bermondsey to Margate and take a number of detours. Geographical, romantic detours lead the companions up to Canterbury Cathedral, while mental detours enable the companions to remember their shared past.

### The Light of Day (2001)

Former policeman George Webb has become a private detective investigating conjugal affairs. He falls in love with Sarah, a university language teacher who kills her husband. The latter had extra-marital relationships with a young woman, a Serbo-Croat refugee, she had decided to shelter at home. Now Sarah is in prison, George is decided to wait for her and thus to forget about his previous relationships with a headmistress, though he never forgets about his daughter Claire. He learns the latter is homosexual.

"The Light of Day" seems to be partly a reference to Claire's love of Caravaggio. Indeed, as a former art student who frequently resented her father for being a policeman, she used to identify with the master who is reputed for being often drunk and fighting with the police. Caravaggio died when running away from his city. The title also refers to the film noir, an allusion one can combine with other cinematographic allusions (*Dressed to Kill*).

### Wish You Were Here (2011)

Jack loses his young brother Tom in the war against terrorism. The latter is burnt to death in Basra and his corpse must now be repatriated to Britain. This is the opportunity for Jack to remember about his troubled family past. Tom had fled the family home in Devonshire after his mother's death and after the mad cow disease imposed the burning of the farm's animals. Tom fled just

at the right time, never wishing to see his father Michael sinking into ruin. After Tom's departure, Michael commits suicide, leaving Jack alone to freely leads his life with Ellie, his girlfriend. Driven by the weight of his sad family life, Jack wishes to kill himself and Ellie

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