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Introduction

Janine HAUTHAL, Mathias MEERT, Ann PEETERS and Hannah VAN HOVE

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

This issue of the *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings* showcases five articles selected through an open call, as well as an interview with Brussels-based Eritrean-Ethiopian-British author Sulaiman Addonia. Collected together, these contributions highlight the journal's focus on various aesthetic 'crossings' concerning media, genres and spaces across diverse time periods and subject matters. Engaging with and illustrating some of the core themes of the journal, each of the articles and interview explore literary, critical and intermedial phenomena from different methodological angles, employing and discussing a wide range of approaches including autofiction, queer, intermedial, visual, film and genre studies. While the first two articles (Cominetti and Edmeades) have in common a focus on autofiction in novel and essay form, the latter three articles branch out to non-textual media, including photography (Zelnick and Engelskircher), music (Engelskircher) and film (Friedman). The closing interview with Addonia delves into the crossing of cultural, geographical and genre-related borders and boundaries in a discussion of the author's writing process and his thoughts on the classification of fiction.

In the opening article, "In Between Wor(l)ds: Feminist Autofiction and Post/colonial Identity in Marie Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines* and Marguerite Duras's *L'amant*", **Enrica Aurora Cominetti** (University of Guelph, Canada) investigates how the hybrid genre of autofiction functions as a feminist tool of representation in the two novels. The article suggests that, respectively, *Au pays de mes racines* (1980) and *L'amant* (1984), when it comes to the

presentation of adult recollections of childhood memories of former colonies such as Algeria and Indochina, portray their narrators as female subjects who find themselves in a liminal space, split between two *words* and two *worlds*: the colony and the metropole. This in-betweenness is reflected in both novels' form and content and, Cominetti suggests, underlies the genre of autofiction itself. The article starts out by tracing the history of the term "autofiction", coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 and heavily contested since, and explores the genre's relationship to feminism. Suggesting that autofiction lends itself to experimentation with new modes of expression of women's experiences, the author gestures towards its political potential in being able to put forward alternative approaches to the portrayal of women's subjectivity. A discussion of the autofictional literary strategies employed in *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant* follows. Building on Rosi Braidotti's feminist nomadic project of sexual difference and relating its three levels to the principal attributes of the narrative subjects of the novels, the author argues that their autofictional narrators can be defined as "Braidottianly" feminist and "nomadic" in their specific rendering of women's experience. In order to explore the power dynamics influencing the shaping of the narrators' specific subjectivity, the article subsequently takes recourse to Michel Foucault's theorisation of the practice of "subjectivation." The narrative subjects in Duras's and Cardinal's novels are shown to be presenting themselves as female individuals characterized by an intrinsic difference and, as such, they relate their stories of in-betweenness through the disclosure of the power dynamics moulding and influencing – "subjectivising" – the formation of their identities. Both novels, the article suggests, resist these "subjectivising" dynamics and yet also show how they influence the fragmentation of the multi-layered subjectivities represented. Although the female narrators are shown to be produced as subjects in discourse by the surrounding structures of domination, they nevertheless make clear that they are not simply subjected to such

constrictions, but that they are also able to challenge the colonial norms constraining them and, in doing so, aim to shape their own subjectivities.

In "Supposing (Un)Certainty: Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* and the Queer Essay", **Lynley Edmeades** (University of Otago, New Zealand) takes Maggie Nelson's hybrid essay as the starting point for her critical-personal reflexion on the notion and the practice of the so-called "queer essay". According to Edmeades, the genre of the essay creates an ideal space to explore the multiple possibilities of uncertainty and instability. As the author points out, the essay criticises essentialising answers and fundamentally builds on the practice of supposition, rather than seeking to provide watertight conclusions and/or logical-narrative closure. In her reading of *Bluets* (2009) as an essayistic text that explores this potentiality of supposition, Edmeades links the genre to the queer perspective. The contribution thus proposes to read Nelson's essay as a genre that questions dominant, hegemonic discourses and master narratives "in favor of the queer" (c2). In so doing, the author builds on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Thomas Larson's analysis of *Bluets* 'spiral' shape as well as Teresa de Lauretis's proposition that queer texts withstand narrativity and a closure of meaning. By carefully analysing the fragmented and meandering nature of *Bluets*, Edmeades shows how Nelson's essay performs a 'queering' of its own genre.

In Edmeades' view, Nelson's *Bluets* is defined by its permeability and inability to "be pinned down" (c6): it defies conventions and fixed categories and serves as an act of resistance against homogenisation and commercialisation. Mirroring and exemplifying the uncertainty and supposition typical of the (queer) essay, Edmeades' article is conceived as a personal-critical contribution that self-reflexively discusses the author's thinking and writing process. It shows a dialogue with historical, feminist, queer and philosophical approaches to the topic and critically engages with comments and suggestions by its own reviewers and readers. Viewed against this

background and Nelson's rhetorics, Edmeades self-reflexively delves into how Nelson's queer essay acts as a "pre- and post-genre": it "opens rather than closes," "relates rather than dictates" and "generates, rather than defines" (c15).

The next article, entitled "Aleksandar Hemon's Photography-embedded Migrant Literature," turns to the intermedial form of Hemon's memoir *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You* (2019) and his novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008). In her contribution, **Sharon Zelnick** (University of California Los Angeles) suggests that by closely and critically exploring what she calls the "subgenre" of photography-embedded literature, we can better understand why this form lends itself particularly well to migrant stories (d3). At the same time, analysing this literature, Zelnick proposes, allows us to develop novel insights into the relationship between literature and photography, in non-antagonistic or non-hierarchical terms. The article starts out by defining photography-embedded literature, paying particular attention to migrant narratives which take recourse to the incorporation of photographs within the literary text in this mixed form. It suggests that the ways photographs in this literature call on readers to engage with the paratextual and epitextual parts of books fundamentally alters conventional reading practices. Photography thus becomes central to the unfolding of stories, memories and migrations between these realms cross-temporally. The article then delves into an exploration of Hemon's works, considering them as points of departure for exploring this reconfiguration of photography and literature in the context of contemporary migrant literature. It illustrates how, instead of diving into a story by reading and imagining, the reader is expected to decode images, remember various histories, and actively connect the visual and verbal in multiple ways. To "read" this work, Zelnick suggests, we must participate in the embedded histories and life narratives which often overlap. Analysing the transmedial nature of Hemon's practice, Zelnick suggests photographs function as

embedded links to memories, stories, and histories that can be approached as individual parts, but also as parts of greater narrative journeys and arches that the reader co-creates. Hemon's works then, and by extension photography-embedded literature in general, evoke the past and the present, and signal to the future through text-image intersections and the employment of transhistorical narratives. As such, this cross-temporal dimension complicates theorisations about photography and migrant literature that situate the medium and author as being geographically and temporally in either the past or the present. Instead, as Zelnick's analysis demonstrates, the complexities of movement during and after political violence are communicated aesthetically as well as thematically.

Approaching the work of the world's most famous pop band from an intermedial angle, the German-language article "*Mad Days Out* – Ein beatlesker Erkundungsgang zwischen Nationalität und Transkulturalität [A Beatlesque Exploration between Nationality and Transculturality]" by **Kathrin Engelskircher** (independent researcher) channels existing Beatles research through the lens of an iconic photograph, taken of the band by Tom Murray during the so-called *Mad Days Out* session in July 1968. The author demonstrates how the picture both evokes and questions, comments, and ultimately transcends "Englishness" in ways that reflect the increasing diversification of English national culture at the time. Belonging to the later creative period of The Beatles from the mid-1960s onwards, Murray's photo shows the band dressed in colourful suits, standing in a garden amidst, and partly hidden by, high-growing hollyhocks of different colours, with a fence and house visible in the background. As Engelskircher explains, the photograph alludes to, and plays with, such national stereotypes as the English Garden, the Victorian mansion and English humour (as expressed in the play with in/visibility of individual band members) and confronts such traditional notions of Englishness with transcultural influences equally present in

the picture that have led – both in the microcosm of The Beatles' work and in the macrocosm of the British Empire – to a re-negotiation and broadening of "Englishness", orientating it towards the more diverse, transnational and transcultural notion of "Britishness". The author attributes the visualization of transcultural influences in the photograph to the overgrown wildness of the flowers and The Beatles' colourful Hippie clothes. According to Engelskircher, Beatles adepts will be quick to conceive the former as a visual allusion to the international 'Flower Power' movement, while they are likely to refer the latter to The Beatles' stays in India, which resulted in the integration of South Asian sounds and instruments into their music.

In so doing, the author takes issue with the received image of The Beatles as an epitome of Englishness that tends to supress the transnational and transcultural dimensions of the British lifeworld, resulting from the country's imperial history and long history of immigration, that are particularly present in The Beatles' hometown, the port city of Liverpool. The author also asserts how, by portraying The Beatles as agents of cultural mediation, the photograph conceives of identity as a process rather than a static and unchanging given in ways that resonate with the groups' musical creations, which are just as indicative of their interest in, and experiments with, the emerging discourse on alternative lifestyles as the photograph in question is. According to Engelskircher, therefore, the photograph does not just reflect on social shifts at the time but also hints at alternative future life worlds. While the article thus highlights music's specific ability for transcultural mediation, its most interesting take-away, in view of this journal's focus on "crossings", may be that, in the creative work of The Beatles and potentially that of other artists or groups, transcultural mediation often operates transmedially, shaping not just an artist's music but also their use of photography, clothing, film, visual design etc.

In her contribution entitled "Parodic Transitions to Corporeal Reality", **Bianca Friedman** (Edge Hill University) focuses on *Young Frankenstein*, the 1974 parodic film adaptation by American director Mel Brooks. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and her paradox of parody, Friedman's analysis argues that spectators' construction of meaning takes place between degrees of knowledge. The author's close reading of the film focuses on slapstick and comic encounters between characters which allow for different spectatorial experiences, depending on their knowledge of the source texts – which include not just Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* but also previous filmic adaptations of the novel – on the one hand, and of conventions of the gothic/horror genre on the other. Drawing on Irina Rajewsky's distinction between intermedial references to specific (individual) texts and to genres, artforms, and media *qua* system, Friedman contends that the significance of the filmic text cannot be identified within *one* specific degree of knowledge but needs to be placed *between* degrees of knowledge that inform spectators' creative acts of meaning-making. Hence, even though parody in *Young Frankenstein* potentially unfolds through a range of possible processes of understanding the film, the spectatorial experience of it is nevertheless consistently driven by genre-specific dynamics rather than, e.g., humour in general because of parody's reliance on stereotypes, relating to either individual films or the filmic system of the gothic horror genre in general.

Applying Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism to studies on film parody, concepts such as dynamic interaction, negation and implied reader allow Friedman to demonstrate that Brooks' rendering of Shelley's 19th-century gothic classic largely conforms with conventions of the gothic horror genre, but – at the same time – operates a shift from the abstract mechanisms of genre to more corporeal dimensions of experience by disrupting spectators' expectations. Negation as a concept comes into play when reader expectations are thwarted and spectators are prompted

to reformulate their relationship with the conventions of the gothic horror genre. As Friedman reveals, in *Young Frankenstein*, the foregrounding of unexpected bodily transformations draws spectators' attention to the importance of corporeality in the adaptation itself and its source text. Ultimately, Brooks' insistence on corporeality in his adaptation also orientates spectators towards a meta-cinematographic reassessment of the gothic genre: they are invited to see the gothic in its corporeal dimension rather than as an abstract concept that regulates their horizon of expectations.

Finally, this issue closes with an interview with **Sulaiman Addonia** by **Elisabeth Bekers and VUB students (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)**. Addonia is an Eritrean-Ethiopian-British writer who lives in Brussels. His first novel, *The Consequences of Love* (2008), was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and has been published in more than 20 languages. *Silence Is My Mother Tongue* (2018) was longlisted for the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction and shortlisted for the 2021 Lambda Awards. The interview originally took place during a webinar in the context of the Master course "Postcolonial Literature in English", taught by Elisabeth Bekers at Vrije Universiteit Brussel in the Autumn of 2020. In addition to the course instructor and colleagues and students from VUB and beyond who attended the seminar session as guests, students in the Master "Taal- en Letterkunde" and the "Multilingual Master in Linguistics and Literary Studies" prepared and asked the questions. Subsequently, VUB alumnus and doctoral researcher Parham Aledavood (Université de Montréal) transcribed the interview. We are delighted to be able to share the interview here, which focuses mainly on Addonia's *Silence Is My Mother Tongue*, a compelling, vivid novel about the everyday challenges, feelings, intimacy, hopes and fears of refugees in an East-African camp. Additional topics of discussion include the changing classification of Addonia's writing and the "Creative Writing Academy for Refugees & Asylum Seekers" that Addonia founded in Brussels in 2019.

In Between Wor(l)ds: Feminist Autofiction and Post/Colonial Identity in Marie Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines* and Marguerite Duras's *L'amant*

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Introduction

By making use of autobiographical elements, autofictional works can be regarded as aligning with Second Wave feminism's principle that the "Personal is Political," in that they emphasize the fact that women's "personal" issues have great political relevance (Thompson 346). Autofictional works such as Marie Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines* (1980) and Marguerite Duras's *L'amant* (1984) expose and voice women's post/colonial [1] and complex experiences in Algeria and Indochina under and/or after French colonial rule, thus functioning as an empowering tool of representation. These two novels, although focusing on different cultural contexts, are similar in portraying how the mark of in-betweenness and the related power dynamics make their protagonists "nomadic," fragmented, fundamentally different and torn between opposite cultures. Their characters appear as post/colonial products and agents located in between two *words* and *worlds*: the colony and the metropole.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how the literary genre of autofiction can function as a feminist tool of representation germane to exposing concerns regarding the concept of in-

[1] The term "post/colonial," a neologism Chris Bongie first employed in Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature (1998), indicates a relationality "in which two words and worlds appear uneasily as one, joined together and yet also divided in a relation of (dis)continuity" (Bongie 12-13). This term synthetizes the fragmented identity of the narrators of the novels considered here, who embody a cultural tension between the different poles of attraction around which they orbit (namely, the colony and the metropole).

betweenness and the relative processes of cultural hybridization in post/colonial contexts. The analysis, based on Rosi Braidotti's nomadic political project of sexual difference as well as on Michel Foucault's practice of "subjectivation," focuses on questions of the formation and representation of women's subjectivity in Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines* and Duras's *L'amant*, particularly with reference to the dichotomous status of their post/colonial and transcultural subjects. The aim is to show that these autofictional accounts, compared across different cultural contexts, can be considered as tapping into contemporary cultural and feminist theories prompting a redefinition of the notion of the subject as multilayered, culture-specific and mediated by sociohistorical factors.

In Between Genres: Autofiction

The term "autofiction" first appeared on the back cover of Serge Doubrovsky's *Fils* in 1977 and has been heavily contested ever since as it challenges dominant configurations of knowledge adopted in more traditional forms of autobiography (Rérolle). This literary category indicates a genre in which, notwithstanding nominal identity or a correspondence of personal and sociocultural references between author, narrator and protagonist, the latter two differ from the former in their being fictionalized (Doubrovsky 256; Gasparini 24-25). For this reason, autofiction has been considered to encompass different genres of writing, raising questions about its significance and legitimacy. Indeed, over the last forty years, the genre of autofiction has been the center of heated discussions especially among French literary critics. On the one hand, the specialist in autobiography Philippe Lejeune posits in *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975) that referentiality and literariness are mutually exclusive, and that the former, ensured by the nominal identity between author, narrator and protagonist, can only be used in relation to autobiography

and not to autofiction (23). On the other hand, Serge Doubrovsky shows in his novel *Fils* that the referential traits present in autofictional works do not invalidate their literariness, as they combine the real events underlying them with fictional language (Cusset 1).

Other critics and theorists have opened up the Doubrovskian definition of autofiction. Vincent Colonna posits in *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraries* (2004) that autofictional novels can dispense with nominal identity and are rather focused on a writer's fictionalization of his/her own persona (196). Going a step further, in his monograph *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (2004), the essayist Philippe Gasparini stresses the fact that the referential nature of an autofictional book is constructed through personal and sociocultural references, and not merely through nominal identity between author, narrator and protagonist (24-25). Moreover, in her article "L'Autofiction, un genre pas sérieux," Marie Darrieussecq argues that autofiction belongs to the literary canon since, in requiring a double pact between author and reader – a factual and a fictional one – it defies Gérard Genette's theory according to which the literary status can be attributed to fiction by virtue of its nature, and to factual accounts only as far as their aesthetic is concerned (Jeannelle et al. 22-23).

The autofictional narrative form articulates its subject as different from the autobiographical omniscient narrator, as characterized by a certain degree of nonlinearity, a fragmented identity and a preoccupation with memory (Contat 119; Cusset 2-3; Jones 176-177). Indeed, the autofictional subject has often been referred to as a "post-Freudian" one since its "unstable, prospective rather than retrospective" narrative aligns with the unsettledness of the post-Freudian "I" as well as with its focus on stories revolving around events rather than authenticity (Jordan 76). Because of this and of its relatively marginal status within the literary field, such a hybrid narrative form in between fact and fiction has often been dismissed as being typically

feminine, inferior to other allegedly more masculine and linear ways of writing (Jordan 77; Rérolle). However, in taking issue with autobiographical norms, autofiction lends itself to experimentation with new modes of expression of women's experiences. Therefore, the autofictional pluralized "I" can be believed not only to challenge overarching representational techniques, but also to be seen as a tool which enables the author to articulate the multiplicity of the fragmented identity of the female subject, thus tapping into feminist theories challenging patriarchal categorizations and putting forward alternative approaches to the portrayal of women's subjectivity. Indeed, the hybrid nature of autofiction, a literary genre in between fact and fiction, makes it particularly suitable to voice concerns about the transcultural status of female colonizers in post/colonial countries – women who are torn between being faithful to the metropole, and their love for the colony in which they grew up. Such an as yet unexplored correlation between form and content is evident in the novels *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant.*

Liminal Narratives: *Au pays de mes racine*s and *L'amant*

Although both Cardinal and Duras never specifically categorized *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant* as autofictional, these works can be considered as such based on their stylistic choices. Indeed, *L'amant* has already been analysed by critics as autofiction, as it recounts autobiographical anecdotes in a way that appears "festonné et brodé,"[2] and where the autobiographical "je"[3] is portrayed as multiple and characterized by "diverses variations déclamatoires"[4] (Burgelin 9; Diouf 218). The value of Duras's adoption of the hybrid autofictional genre has been defined by Najet Limam-Tnani as a tool functional to the articulation of the two cultures the author/narrator

[2] "Festooned and embroidered." All translations are my own.
[3] "I."
[4] "Different declamatory variations."

negotiate (47). The analysis carried out in this paper adds to this theorization by presenting the use of the autofictional genre not just as a reflection of cultural hybridity, but also as a literary device enabling the portrayal of female nomadic subjectivities. *Au pays de mes racines,* on the other hand, has been read mainly as an autobiographical work, even if in an interview to *France 3*, Cardinal admits that her literary works mingle fact with fiction; as she states: "C'est difficile d'expliquer ce qui est vrai, ce qui est faux . . . ils sont peu autobiographiques mes livres . . . je brode. . . ."[5] (Duffy 293; Persson 153; Poncet). It can therefore be argued that both *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant* are autofictional since, in their presenting of an adult's recollection of a child's memories of different post/colonial contexts, they are characterized by an extremely fragmented structure in which autobiographical anecdotes from the writers' childhood and from other times alternate with each other in a nonlinear way. Furthermore, the lack of linearity and disjointed organization of the texts mimic not only the act of recovering past memories, but also the fragmented nature of the autofictional narrating selves, which are portrayed as female subjects split between two cultures. The ways in which both authors play with the autofictional mode differ, yet they both reflect and intertwine with their post/colonial contexts.

Published in 1980, *Au pays de mes racines* is written in the form of a diary which describes Marie Cardinal's return journey to Algeria, the country where she was born and brought up, after being away for twenty-four years. In the text the author mingles fiction with her personal impressions of the new Algerian political situation and her memories of its colonial past. Cardinal fled the colony for the metropole in 1956, during the period in which Algeria violently fought against France for independence (1954–1962). The outbreak of the conflict occurred because of a combination of different factors: France's overt aversion to Islam, its exploitation of the colony's

[5] "It's hard to explain what's true, what's false . . . my books aren't autobiographical . . . I embroider. . . ."

economic and cultural resources as well as the resulting lack of financial, literacy and political opportunities for Algeria's Muslim population (Zack 64; Cooke 61). In July 1962 – more than a century since the beginning of the French colonial rule – Algeria finally became an independent country at the cost of the lives of 17,500 French soldiers and between 200,000 and one million Muslim Algerians (Paul et al. 89).

In *Au pays de mes racines*, the narrator presents her colonial memories in a nonlinear way, through a series of "illustrations juxtaposées"[6] where "le passé et le present se mêlent"[7] (Cardinal 166, 181). This autofictional narrative style mirrors the tumultuousness of Algeria – her putative "mère"[8] (54) –, portrayed as characterized by a history "pleine de chevauchées, de razzias,"[9] which "se raconte"[10] in a fictionalized way (Cardinal 122, 128; Marrone 125). Moreover, the language adopted can be considered to reflect the post/colonial relationality between the narrator and the colony/metropole. Although the protagonist declares to have known "l'harmonie"[11] only when in Algeria and therefore to strongly identify with Algerian culture, the novel is written in French – the language of the colonizer (Cardinal 6). According to Laurie Corbin, in writing her journal in the language of the oppressor, Cardinal shows "that the oppressed can both identify with and reject cultures that oppress them, lacking a language that might permit them to speak their sense of themselves without struggle" (142). The Algerian author Assia Djebar adds that "l'autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme une fiction,"[12] thus corroborating the fact that *Au pays de mes racines,* in recounting autobiographical anecdotes through the language of a culture depicted as domineering, can indeed be read as an autofictional work (qtd. in Marrone 122).

[6] "Juxtaposed illustrations."
[7] "Past and present overlap."
[8] "Mother."
[9] "Full of rides and raids."
[10] "Is told."
[11] "Harmony."
[12] "Autobiography which is written in the opposing language is woven like a fiction."

In 1984, Marguerite Duras published *L'amant*, a memoir in which she recounts her adolescence in Saigon, French Indochina, during the 1920s, and her affair with a wealthy Chinese man in a fictionalized way. French colonialism in Vietnam lasted more than six decades, from 1883 until 1954 (Rydstorm 191). As Saigon was the most populous and economically flourishing city of Vietnam, it was also the one most affected by French imperialistic measures, such as the imposition of a modern and controlling state centralization of the natives and a rigid categorization of indigenous people based on cultural and ethnic diversity (Peycam 503). For this reason, Vietnam's societies were very stratified under the French colonial rule.

In *L'amant,* Duras engages with autofictional strategies in various ways. Firstly, the fact that the story is mainly written in the present tense, regardless of the time frame being referred to, aligns with the prospective nature of the autofictional genre (Jordan 76). Additionally, the narrative revolves around a series of photographs (such as the opening image of the young Duras crossing the Mekong river on a ferry), which, in their being presented in a nonlinear, circular way, appear as vivid fragments of the memory of an autofictional subject (Helmi Kalini 716; Morgan 272). The language adopted, too, mimics this lack of linearity – which is typical of autofictional works –, since it is characterised by the use of ellipses as a literary technique reflecting the gaps riddling the narrative. Such an elusive style represents an aesthetic choice Duras makes to stress how the self, in its being fragmented, composite and multilayered, cannot be fully rendered through words and images, but it can only be evoked through the adoption of fictional elements as well as the manipulation of silence (Morgan 278). Indeed, she recognizes the impossibility of faithfully reproducing her personal story when she states: "L'histoire de ma vie n'existe pas"[13] (Duras, *L'amant* 14). Therefore, she resorts to autofictional techniques such as the adoption of the

[13] "The story of my life does not exist."

systematic shift from first-person to third-person narrator, which distances the author from the narrator and the protagonist. In particular, Duras replaces the predominant autobiographical "je" with fictional epithets such as "elle", "la petite," "l'enfant,"[14] in the scenes with the Chinese man, which are the most intimate ones. This duality due to a fictional intrusion transposes the post/colonial tension imbuing the content of the novel on a stylistic level.

In-betweenness as a Mode of Inquiry and Narration

The Nomadic Narrative Subject or the Feminist Autofictional Subject

In establishing a link between Rosi Braidotti's feminist nomadic project of sexual difference and the main characteristics of the autofictional narrative subjects portrayed in *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant*, this section of the article intends to shed light on the points of contact between autofiction and feminist issues, particularly as pertains to the notion of in-betweenness marking the different post/colonial contexts in which the two novels are set.

In her book *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994), Braidotti states that within the phallogocentric scientific, religious and legal domains, women have traditionally been relegated to the role of "Other," as opposed to the figure of "Self," which has for centuries been symbolized by the white, middle-class, heterosexual man (98, 152). In order to rework the notion of difference or "otherness" in terms of positivity and empowerment, Braidotti created a nomadic political project of sexual difference, whose scheme consists of three levels which all deal with the theme of sexual difference from various standpoints.

[14] "She," "the little one," "the child."

The first phase is called "Difference Between Men and Women" and is aimed at untethering the concept of difference from its century-old link with inferiority, thus promoting women's experience as different from the pseudo-universalistic male "Self" (Braidotti 159). In interpreting Duras's statement that "women who can get beyond the feeling of having to correct history will save a lot of time," Braidotti suggests a model of investigation of female subjectivity which does not comply with the masculinist paradigm of the "Self," but which, on the contrary, strives for the construction of "an alternative female subject" (Braidotti 148, 161; Duras, "Marguerite Duras" 74).

The second level of the project of sexual difference, called "Differences Among Women," is meant to go beyond the dichotomy "Self"/"Other," male/female subject, so as to address the specificity of women's embodied experiences. The author calls for the need to distinguish between the "Woman" as "the culturally dominant and prescriptive model for female subjectivity" and its real-life epitomizations (Braidotti 164). In this way, she opens up the notion of difference to variables such as age, class, race, sexual preferences, therefore stressing the importance of women's cultural situatedness as opposed to their generic portrayals (Braidotti 163).

The third and last level of sexual difference as a nomadic political project, named "Differences Within Each Woman," focuses on women's identity from a microscopic point of view. To be more specific, this stage of the scheme tackles the multiplicity of the female subject by describing it as multilayered, material, "slit, fractured," "relational," "made of successive identifications" (Braidotti 165). Such attributes are all related to the fact that every woman's subjectivity is compound in its being engendered by the recollection of memories – hence "made of successive identifications" – and the establishment of a relation to the "other" – hence

"relational." This causes "each real-life woman" to be bound to continuously identify herself with fragmented images springing from such processes (Braidotti 165-166).

The potential Braidotti's feminist nomadic project holds for the analysis of the autofictional narrating subjects presented in *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant* is clear. Firstly, in both works the narration is carried out by female narrators who also embody the protagonists of these autofictional stories. By mingling autobiographical elements with fictional strategies, Cardinal's and Duras's texts bring women's subjectivity to the fore, thus representing different "alternative female subjects" and dispensing with the masculinist paradigm of the pseudo-universalistic "Self" (Braidotti 161). For example, in *Au pays de mes racines*, the narrator admits interweaving fact and fiction when mentioning that, while writing her personal story, she grows estranged from it, as if it were fictitious: ". . . cet ensemble de jouissances et d'angoisses transcrites apparaît subitement comme un roman, . . . le manuscript me devient étranger."[15] (Cardinal 155). Similarly, *L'amant*'s narrating subject appears so alienated from "[l'] histoire de [sa] vie"[16] that she affirms: "Ça n'existe pas,"[17] thus confirming the necessity of employing fictional elements to reconstruct it (Duras, *L'amant* 14).

A criticism could be made here about the use of fiction in Cardinal's and Duras's autofictional novels: their adoption of fictional elements could be seen as invalidating the representation of their authentic experiences, for said literary devices may allegedly prevent them from faithfully depicting their autobiographical portrayals. This stance can be traced back to Genette's rather reductive definition of autofiction as a special form of fictional narration, which obliterates the autobiographical value of this genre (Genette 87). As a counterargument to this, it

[15] "This set of transcribed pleasures and anxieties suddenly looks like a novel, . . . the manuscript becomes foreign to me."
[16] "[The] story of [her] life."
[17] "It does not exist."

is worth taking into account Ivan Jablonka's concept of "method fictions," presented in his essay *L'histoire est une littérature contemporaine: Manifeste pour les sciences sociales* (2014), which sheds new light on the value of autofictional accounts. Since "method fictions" are defined as aiming at investigating and interpreting reality, autofictional works can be considered as such in their mingling of fact and fiction, thus constructing a different type of reality which is meant to effectively represent and reflect on concrete issues (qtd. in Moulin 609). This is particularly true considering how both autobiographical and fictional elements appear as essential to the reconstruction of the autofictional subject's fragmented memories.

Secondly, Cardinal and Duras, by mainly adopting a first-person narrator throughout their narratives, expose (while fictionalizing) their personal and autobiographical lived experiences. In calling attention to the specificity of their nomadic stories, caught between different worlds and cultures, they depict the embodied standpoints of two real-life women and epitomize the heterogeneity of the "Other," as opposed to the global and abstract notion of "Woman." Indeed, their narratives hinge on the protagonists' transcultural predicament, for they appear to be torn between the culture of the metropole and that of the colony, and to have contrasting feelings about both. As the characters belong to colonialist families settled in a colony, they feel split between the social norms imposed on them by their colonial status and the love for the country where they grew up and for the people living there. This is clearly expressed by Cardinal when she shows her protagonist's inner struggle due to feeling, at the same time, French and Arab. At the beginning of *Au pays de mes racines*, the narrator declares that the reason for her trip back to Algeria lies in her desire to come to terms with her intrinsic difference, her being a "personne bicéphale"[18] marked by "l'alliance ou la guerre de deux cultures"[19] (Cardinal 17). The use of contrasting terms such as

[18] "Two-headed person."
[19] "The alliance or the war of two cultures."

"alliance" and "guerre" symbolizes not only her split identity, but also her post/colonial and ambiguous feelings towards the colony and the metropole. The motif of this in-between, fractured self recurs throughout her story, for example when she questions later on: "La coupure avec moi-même a commencé tôt: Arabe-Française, Française-Arabe?"[20] (Cardinal 50). Quite differently from Cardinal's main character, Duras's narrator never explicitly refers to her feeling of being in between two cultures – French and Annamite –, yet her transcultural status can be clearly observed when she distances herself from other white French women in Saigon who "se gardent pour l'Europe"[21] and "s'habillent pour rien"[22] by dressing in a way which can be seen as unconventional for her young age and by starting a relationship with a Chinese man (Duras, *L'amant* 27). When meeting the Chinese lover on the ferry crossing the Mekong for the first time, she is wearing her mother's silk dress with one of her brothers' leather belts, gold lamé high heels and a man's brownish-pink fedora, which makes her appear ambiguous and different from anyone else in the colony, as "aucune jeune fille ne porte de feutre d'homme dans cette colonie à cette époque-là"[23] (Duras, *L'amant* 18-20). Moreover, "la jeune fille"[24] is portrayed as characterized by an essential difference not only with regards to her behaviour and attitude towards patriarchal norms in the colony, but also concerning the perception she has of herself, as she declares: "Soudain je me vois comme une autre"[25] (Duras, *L'amant* 42, 20).

Thirdly and lastly, the autofictional subject is by definition composite, characterized by a fragmented memory and identity (Cusset 2-3). Such a preoccupation with the process of recollection and the multiplicity of subjectivity is shared by Braidotti's female feminist subject,

[20] "The fracture within myself started early: Arab-French or French-Arab?"
[21] "Keep themselves for Europe."
[22] "Dress up for nothing."
[23] "No girl used to wear a man's hat in the colony at that time."
[24] "The girl."
[25] "Suddenly I see myself as other."

which, as stated above, is described as split and in a constant state of becoming due to the reconstruction of past memories. By looking at the female narrators of *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant*, a convergence of such characteristics can be observed, as the subjectivities depicted there are presented as fragmented, located in a liminal space, and having a fractured memory. As illustrated above, both characters are described as having multilayered identities and being in between different cultures. Moreover, they both question the authenticity of their memories: "J'oublie tout," "Peut-être que je me trompe,"[26] Duras's narrator states; "[L]a mémoire, elle, me dépasse,"[27] Cardinal's protagonist admits (Duras, *L'amant* 78, 93; Cardinal 90).

Relating the three levels of Braidotti's working scheme of the project of feminist nomadism to the principal attributes of the narrative subjects of the novels considered here, it can be argued that these autofictional narrators can be assimilated to said model of female feminist subjectivity. As a consequence, Cardinal's and Duras's protagonists can be defined as "Braidottianly" feminist and "nomadic" in their rendering of women's experience not only as specifically female and different from the masculinist "Self," but also in their uncovering of a whole array of culture-specific relations and elements which are inevitably interconnected and affected. Through their nonlinear overlapping of fragmented memories and images from the past, Cardinal and Duras put forward an alternative way of representing the female feminist subject, which, according to Braidotti, cannot be fully comprehended nor portrayed within the phallogocentric system of knowledge.

[26] "I forget everything," "Maybe I am wrong."
[27] "[M]emory is beyond me."

Nomadic "Subjectivized" Subjects In Between Wor(l)ds

The mark of in-betweenness which characterizes the feminist autofictional subjects of *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant* can be ascribed not only to the above-mentioned "Braidottianly" nomadic nature of the protagonists, but also to the power dynamics contributing to the formation of their cross-cultural identities. So as to better analyze said forces, the focus will now be shifted to Michel Foucault's notions of power and of the practice of "subjectivation." Indeed, as argued by Miri Rozmarin, Foucault's theories of power can be seen as partaking in Braidotti's project of sexual difference, as they focus on the extent to which power dynamics influence the shaping of one's specific subjectivity and can therefore be deemed responsible for making it constitutively different (6-7).

In the afterword to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1983), Foucault indicates the phenomenon of "subjectivation" as one of the practices through which individuals become subjects ("The Subject and Power" 208). He considers power relations in terms of an "antagonism of strategies" or "struggles," which challenge the significance of individualization by stressing one's specific subjectivity while, at the same time, stifling that very same subjectivity (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 211). Thus, according to Foucault, power cannot be conceived of merely in terms of repression, but must be understood as a productive force causing a reaction in the individual who is subject to it. This notion of power as a creative force leads him to deduce that subjectivation, "the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject," depends on relations of power which give shape to human beings' subjectivity (Foucault, "The Return of Morality" 253). The individualizing aspect of power is embodied by institutions such as family, educational organizations and medical systems, and exercised through the relations established between subjects (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 215, 217). In this way, the

"subjectivized" subject is presented not only as an entity which is engendered, shaped and constricted by power dynamics, but also as an agent capable of producing its own influence structures. This means that, in order to break free from the individualizing and totalizing dominance impinging on individuals, one needs to develop alternative subjectivities exploring different individualities (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 216). In defining power as a productive force exerted on and by acting agents, Foucault prompts a reinterpretation of "subjectivized" subjects as capable of autonomy and resistance.

A link can now be established between Foucault's discourse on "subjectivation" and the way in which the autofictional narrators of *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant* articulate their nomadic subjectivities. These narrative subjects, in presenting themselves as female individuals characterized by an intrinsic difference, relate their stories of in-betweenness through the disclosure of the power dynamics molding and influencing – "subjectivizing" – the formation of their identities. As products and vehicles of power, such "subjectivized" narrators, albeit created yet not determined by social structures, present themselves as "agents," "active determinants" of their own alternative female individualities (Rozmarin 7). The role played by family interferences is very strong in the two books, for they embody the colonist force of attraction partaking in the "subjectivation" process of the female narrators. Indeed, as argued by Foucault, the family institution represents one of the vehicles through which productive state power can be exerted ("The Subject and Power" 215). To be more specific, both narrating subjects have a contradictory relationship not just with their families, but with their maternal figures in particular. In *Au pays de mes racines*, the narrator appears to be forged by the inner struggle related to having to choose between "eux,"[28] the Algerian people, and "nous,"[29] her family of French settlers (Cardinal 31,

[28] "Them."
[29] "Us."

151). Her role of mediator between two cultures is further complicated by the tormented relationship with her mother, which she explicitly exposes towards the end of the novel, when she recalls the moment her mother told her about her efforts to abort while she was pregnant with her (Cardinal 179-180). This episode prompted her to reconsider her relationship with her parent, as she reveals that, from that moment onward, Algeria became indeed like a maternal figure to her: "Je me suis accrochée à ce que j'ai pu, à la ville, au ciel, à la mer . . . , ils sont devenus ma mère"[30] (Cardinal 181; Haigh 66). It could therefore be argued that, even though her familiar nucleus represents the colonist "subjectivizing" force impinging on her, in choosing to adopt Algeria as her "famille,"[31] the protagonist proves she is able to resist said power dynamics and be an active determinant of her own composite identity (Cardinal 41).

Although in *L'amant* the narrator never explicitly refers to French Indochina as her "famille" like Cardinal's does in *Au pays de mes racines*, her bond with the colony can be noticed in some of the passages in the novel where she emotionally describes the Mekong river and the Vinhlong province as "beaux," "incroyables," "au-delà de toute laideur"[32] (Duras, *L'amant* 17, 116). Moreover, like in *Au pays de mes racines*, the dichotomous nature of *L'amant*'s female subject is further complicated by the maternal figure with whom she has a very troubled relationship, which was crucial to the development of her identity as she confesses: "Elle est le lieu au seuil de quoi le silence commence. . . . Je suis encore là . . . à la même distance du mystère. . . . Je n'ai jamais rien fait qu'attendre devant la porte fermée"[33] (Duras, *L'amant* 34-35). Indeed, because of the economic difficulties her family experienced after the death of her father, they were

[30] "I clung to what I could, to the city, to the sky, to the sea . . . , they became my mother."
[31] "Family."
[32] "Beautiful," "incredible," "beyond ugliness."
[33] "She is the place on the threshold of which silence begins. . . . I am still there . . . at the same distance from mystery. . . . I have never done anything but wait before the closed door."

marginalized from colonial society and felt closer, both economically and socially, to indigenous people. The narrator reports that they were disdainfully considered by the other settlers in the colony as "[une] famille de voyous blancs"[34] (Duras, *L'amant* 109). In spite of their desperate condition, her mother constantly tried to recover their bourgeois status and to reintegrate them within the French colonist community. *L'amant*'s protagonist's relationship with her family can thus be seen as the main "subjectivizing" force responsible for her in-between status, as, on the one hand, it pushes her away from the other French settlers and towards the Annamite people, while, on the other hand, her mother manifests a preoccupation with racial purity and superiority. In resisting these "subjectivizing" dynamics and choosing to forge her multilayered subjectivity, the female narrator gets closer to the man from "la Chine du Nord,"[35] not only to escape economic hardship – right after meeting him, she declares: "Dorénavant, j'aurai une limousine pour aller au lycée"[36]– but also to distance herself from her family, as she says: "[J]e serai toujours là à regretter . . . tout ce que je laisse, . . . la famille de Sadec"[37] (Duras, *L'amant* 44-45).

Conclusion

Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines* and Duras's *L'amant* can be read in light of Braidotti's model of feminist nomadic subjectivity as their autofictional narrative subjects, appearing fragmented, multilayered and reconstructed through the recollection of personal memories, bring specific and complex women's experiences to the fore. The autofictional mode through which the narrating subjects of these narratives voice their culturally located experiences allows them not only to report and confront the individuality imposed on them, but also to performatively assert an alternative

[34] "[A] family of white thugs."
[35] "North China."
[36] "From now on, I will have a limousine to go to school."
[37] "[I] will always regret . . . everything I leave, . . . the family of Sadec."

way in which to portray and articulate their pluralized identities. Their subjectivities appear to be "subjectivized," hence constituted, by power relations pertaining to the post/colonial circumstances in which they find themselves. In both cases, such forces are presented as being spawned by their colonist families and by their maternal figures in particular. These "subjectivizing" dynamics can be seen as responsible for the fragmentation of the protagonists' autofictional identities and, thus, for their in-betweenness, essential difference and post/colonial tension towards the colonists and the indigenous people. Yet, although they are produced as subjects in discourse by such structures of domination, the female narrators prove that they are not simply subjected to such constrictions, but that they also challenge the colonial norms constraining them and strive to shape their own subjectivities.

To conclude, this paper has demonstrated that autofiction, being in between genres and thus enabling the authors to adopt composite and multilayered narrative voices, holds great relevance in terms of the creation of alternative ways of representing women's nomadic subjectivity. Such an effective intertwining of form and content has been observed in the comparative analysis of *Au pays de mes racines* and *L'amant*, in which the concept of in-betweenness characterizing the narrative mode of the texts is also reflected in their subject matter, as they revolve around the protagonists' culturally hybrid experiences. The composite subjectivities presented in these works of autofiction epitomize the complexity of women's identities, and are made all the more vivid and powerful precisely because of the adopted autofictional strategies, which further articulate such cultural in-betweenness both in terms of content and style.

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Supposing (Un)Certainty: Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* and the Queer Essay

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"Did not go where I was knowing" — Caroline Bergvall, *Drift*

Maggie Nelson begins *Bluets* with a supposition: "Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a colour" (1). That colour is the titular blue. But I am less interested in the colour than I am in the supposition.

I Google *supposition*: a belief held without proof or certain knowledge; an assumption or hypothesis. I am less concerned with the *assumption* or the *without proof* than I am with *certain knowledge*. I am more interested in how the essay makes space for this, for not this. How the essay makes space for supposition, for a hunch. I have a hunch, I suppose; it might be something to do with trying, thinking, *essaying*.

I start to wonder what the essay is. I go looking for people that may know. I go looking for a *certain knowledge*. I start swimming in words about essays by those with a certain knowledge. They say / the essay:

- "is a text whose ideal state . . . contests any notion that writing or thinking leads to unity, system, abstraction, mastery" (DuPlessis 40)
- "revolts against the doctrine" or "shys [sic] away from the violence of dogma" (Adorno 158)

- "sanctions failure or refusal to cohere" (Dillon 15).

I start to suppose this: in a sea of hyper-rationality, the essay is a space to explore the possibilities of uncertainty, of supposition. It hovers in entanglements instead of seeking closure or tidy conclusions. It supposes, I begin to suppose. When Nelson says, at the outset, "suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke" (1), is she putting her *lack of certain knowledge* on display? Is she contesting the notion that we might find unity here? And how manufactured is her not-knowing, her hypothesizing?

*

Suppose I go looking again. *Suppose* I find this:

- writing an essay "comes from curiosity and need — the need to examine opinions and contradictions and to interrogate cultural materials, especially those taken for granted" (DuPlessis 39)
- the essay is "the queer genre," where both genre and gender are "difficult" or "impossible" to "categorize by normative standards" (Lazar).

Suppose this: as readers we often turn to and praise the essays that do not purport to know, because they allow us to sit with our own uncertainty, with our own "obliquity" (Dillon 14), particularly when these characteristics are increasingly pathologized and marginalized in contemporary social discourse. Suppose this: by inviting uncertainty, the essay also pushes beyond the fetishization of ambiguity and towards something that lies outside of binaries — knowing and not-knowing, categorization and blurring, essentializing and destabilizing. And, in doing so, goes beyond dominant hegemonic discourses and master narratives *in favor of the queer*.

The outlandish. The unorthodox. Other.

*

Suppose the book is about blue, just for now: look at the many potential ideas and lines of inquiry on the color: its connotations (*It's a boy!*), its cultural capital (the sassy bluestocking; Blue Note Records), its aesthetic virtues (Elvis's blue suede shoe). But while the essay — if we are to call *Bluets* that — offers some insights about the color, blue serves mainly as a leaky container for a meditation, that very Montaigne-esque essayistic trait. *Bluets* meanders through facts, ideas, observations, theories, and tales of those most uncertain of human activities: love and loss. Against the backdrop of a poetic rumination on *bleue* — a topic that Nelson is not entirely certain why she is interested in herself — *Bluets* traverses the uncertainties brought about by a tectonic heartbreak and a friend's near-fatal bicycle accident. For her, the color is not just a hue; it is also the feeling of melancholy, couched in the uncertainty of when and if that feeling — brought about by heartbreak, grief, and loss — will ever subside.

Perhaps it is not really about blue at all. What is it about, if it is not about blue? Does it matter *what* it is about? Maybe it is better to ask, '*how* it is about'?

I imagine Nelson reading Wittgenstein in bed. *The meaning is the use*, she whispers to herself before rolling over and turning out the light.

*

In his description of *Bluets,* Thomas Larson compares the shape of the text to a spiral. "To achieve its end," says Larson, the spiral

> must keep moving away from where it began. Its structure is built by pulling away from the core and by keeping attached to the core. The goal (if there is one) is nomadic, a sort of nomadic mosaic. As one reads, despite its progression, the book loses its linearity and feels circular, porous, a tad unstable. (Larson)

- Indeed, the fragmented nature of *Bluets*, while decidedly poetic and rambling, means that the book does not, in Nelson's words, offer "an excuse" or a "solution" (*The Argonauts*

98). Larson might be right; I cannot hold the whole picture here. I cannot comfortably reside.

I talk about the idea of uncertainty at a dinner party. About praising doubt, and how that might help us (live). Something like Keats' negative capability, I guess. Someone tells me I need to read Rosi Braidotti ("you *haven't read* Braidotti?"). I wander around Braidotti for a while and find: Braidotti makes room for a subjectivity in flux, always in the process of becoming, and always intrinsically other. This is her nomad. Her queer.

Suppose then I mention Braidotti's nomad in this essay. A reviewer tells me I cannot mention her without putting Braidotti's ideas in the context of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's nomadology in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They say, i*f you're going to mention 'nomad'* . . . I roll my eyes but feel equally compelled by the myth of mastery and propelled by my own self-doubt. I go looking.

I start to suppose that part of my attraction to Nelson's *Bluets* is that it offers a way of thinking that is situated slightly outside of this binary, the binary that says I cannot say anything without quoting someone saying it first. I cannot suppose anything. My argument must be watertight. What is at stake in my argument? Whose side do I take? What evidence can I provide to prove your point? I do not want to write like that, I suppose. I do not want watertight. My thinking is not watertight. It leaks, like me, like my body. I want to be okay with leaking. I want to be like *Bluets*.

Suppose I take the recommendation. I retrieve some D and G from the bookshelf, where they have sat, mostly unread, since my idealistic doctoral days. They offer one potential approach to thinking about injunctions of instability in *Bluets.* I learn that the evasive subjectivity of the nomad, in D and G's formulation, mirrors the slipperiness of language in Nelson's essay. But I am not really interested in this linguistic instability. Instead, I am curious about the kind of "porousness" that Larson touches on with his idea of the spiral. About how we move in and out of the text and the

text moves in and out of us and it does not hold or unify or seek to master. I wonder if that permeability is a way of achieving a level of intimacy through relation with an imagined reader. But maybe it is this porosity that connects us to the queer, to queering.

What might a queer text look like? I leave D and G and go to the queer theorists. I find I am more relaxed, like I have undone my belt and let my tummy fat leak a little.

Teresa de Lauretis proposes that a "queer text" is a literary endeavour that withstands "narrativity," a certain "closure" or "fulfilment of meaning" (244). It is an act of resistance against homogenized or hegemonic mandates by virtue of being "kaleidoscopic," "difficult," and offering neither "solution" nor "resolution" in favour of urging an "excess of affect" (244–245). As de Lauretis has it, the queer text allows for a kind of assertion through uncertainty; it suggests that by remaining open, unresolved or inconclusive, it offers an avenue for thinking beyond "normalizing imperatives" (Dean 161).

On another recommendation from a reader (*you can't talk about queering and Nelson without discussing* that *book*) I look towards Nelson's wider oeuvre. The book that everyone knows her for, *The Argonauts*, tracks both her own journey into motherhood, and her partner, Harry Dodge's, female to male gender transition. In Nelson's own words, it is a book about the failure to adhere to what she calls "the Aristotelian, perhaps evolutionary need to put everything into categories" (*The Argonauts* 53). I suppose it would likely be the book more closely associated with notions of queering, given that "queer" is — at times more explicitly than others — the underlying subject matter of the book. But I am not interested so much in the politics of queer, or even queer as a subject matter, as *The Argonauts* performs and deals with so well. Rather, what I am circling and spiraling around is the possibility of how queering (as a verb) might open up a domain of talking about the essay, and how this might relate to notions of uncertainty and supposition; how *Bluets*

(and The Essay by extension) performs a kind of queering of genre. I want to look beyond the subject matter — the queer as topic for discussion — to the ways in which we might be able to answer de Lauretis's question: "when can literary writing be called queer?" (243). That is, to draw on and expand Lazar's own supposition, that the essay itself, as genre, maintains elements of queerness in and of itself, being "difficult or impossible to characterize," hovering in between our conclusive and tidy notions of genre. "It's not that the essay is unsusceptible to genre 'definition'; it's rather that the nature of the essay asks one to resist categories, and it starts with itself" (DuPlessis 38).

Suppose I go looking for an answer to this question: when can literary writing be called queer? I turn to one of Nelson's go-to's, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. She says:

> One of the things that 'queer' can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically. (8)

I tread carefully here; I do not wish to diminish any of the importance and necessity of the ways in which the term "queer" has enabled so many to talk about gender and sexuality. But what interests me here — before Sedgwick's "constituent elements" comes into play — is what she alludes to in the first part of this citation. If we apply Sedgwick's point here to the essay, it suggests that by performing a kind of queerness, the text also lingers in the "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning," insomuch that it cannot easily be pinned down. It works against essentializing answers and opts instead for supposition.

I go back to Nelson with Sedgwick in my arms. Her "open mesh" haunts and hovers.

> I must admit that not all blues thrill me. I am not overly interested in the matte stone of turquoise, for example, and a tepid, faded indigo usually leaves me cold. Sometimes I worry

> that if I am not moved by a blue thing, I may be completely despaired, or dead. At times I fake my enthusiasm. At others, I fear I am incapable of communicating the depth of it. (*Bluets* 14)

Suppose this: on a superficial level, there is an affective domain embodied here in the aesthetic descriptions of blue: in the self-exemplifying nature of "a tepid, faded indigo usually leaves me cold," a chill is already implied in the dullness. Nelson "fears" she will never be able to convey the "depth" of her "enthusiasm," yet she seems to suggest that in what follows, she will attempt to do just that — "I fell in love with a colour . . . as if falling under a spell" (1). The line "I fear I am incapable of communicating the depth of it," suggests that what has come before was not a "communication of the depth of it," and that she may not have what it takes to communicate that depth regardless of having just done precisely that. There is a circularity here that dismantles the intentionality of the statement, making the text "spiral" around itself and, in turn, undermines the notion that a "message" or "meaning" is actually the purpose of the fragment to begin with. The text as circular fragment does not "signify monolithically," as Sedgwick puts it.

Could this undermining of meaning also be an example of de Lauretis's suggestion that a queer text "works against narrativity," and the "fulfilment of meaning" (244)? Nelson is not telling a story or issuing forth conclusive statements. Rather, she is roving, offering suppositions and suggestions that may mean a number of things. The text makes meaning by doing, rather than by saying, and so pushes away from any straightforward referentiality of language. This fragment, like many others in *Bluets*, fails to mean any one thing, and so produces a kind of "excess of affect." It leaks, resisting "stability" and "categories" in the same way that queer does (Lazar), and rebels against the "airtight order of concepts" or the "closed" and the "deductive" (Adorno 158).

*

Another critic asks me where is the sex, the desire? *You can't write about Nelson without mentioning the clitoris.* The clitoris might be implied on every page, if you went looking for it, I suppose. Another leaky organ.

The idea of *excess* takes on elements of sexualized desire. In talking about the male bowerbird — a logical topic for a book about blue given that it "collects and arranges blue objects" — Nelson says, "When I see photos of [the] blue bowers, I feel so much desire that I wonder if I might have been born into the wrong species" (27). Again, the notion of supposition is evident in the author's "wondering." She never claims to know for sure, which further unpicks the normative "fulfilment of meaning." She also seems to say that she imagines herself as the receiving bowerbird, for whom the bowers have been collected and arranged in order to attract. Yet, by listing off all the items that a male bowerbird might collect — bus tickets, bottle caps, blue feathers, flowers — she also gives the impression of describing herself, as she has explained her own collecting of blue objects in her writing of this book. Again, there is an excess of meaning — she says neither one thing or another, all the while provoking a kind of sexualized tone in which the blue things urge a desire in her. She wants to be other than human so she too can collect, arrange. She supposes it would feel good.

Bluets jumps from one point to another, adhering to a certain porousness of the contemporary and/or queer essay that this (queer?) essay is concerned with. At times a subject continues over several "points," as in the case of the bowerbirds, which consists of points 67 through to 70 (and "concludes" with "Am I trying, with these 'propositions,' to build some kind of bower?" (28)). But for the most part, we move from point to point without ever being entirely sure what the connection is from one to the next. Number 71 reads, for example: "I have been trying, for some time now, to find dignity in my loneliness. I have been finding this hard to do" (28). The text is full of "gaps," to use Sedgwick's term, whereby there is no "watertight" argument or resolute

meaning, nor is there a conjecture of a *certain knowledge*. By playing with the prose fragment, Nelson urges the reader to fill in the blanks, the *gaps*; there is no weaving together of a linear narrative, or rounding off of edges to urge readers towards any specific reading. Rather, it is decidedly irresolute, resolutely uncertain.

Suppose another reader comes along. *Historical context*, they say. There are, of course, other ways of talking about the notion of supposition in the essay outside of queering. Postmodernism's fragmentation and deconstruction's unreliability come to mind, as does the polysemy or indeterminacy of the avant-garde, or, in the words of Mark Fisher, a pathologizing of skepticism in current academic circles (16). These are all relevant and would perhaps make for a much more watertight argument elsewhere. However, my feeling is that they are not necessarily sufficient here because they have their beginning in response, in reaction to something that has come before, to which they are either indebted to or rebelling from. On the contrary, the essay as queer text offers a kind of psychoanalytic undoing of the terms that have laid the foundations for our knowledge. To read the essay as queer text is to be, as Sedgwick's quote suggests, open to excess, lapses or gaps, to "transgress the orthodoxy of thought" (Adorno 158), whereas the contrary remains within the negation of the former. That is, to be *un*certain or to *not* know, where the verbs' construct and root remain in place as opposition. The essay as queer text, however, lets us inhabit a third place, outside of negation and its binary opposite, beyond antonymous push-back. It allows us to hover in the excesses, our gaps, our possibilities. This potentiality is, I suppose, also the site of supposition. The gesture towards knowledge is not foreclosed: the supposition does not pertain to certainty, and so remains undiminished in its possibilities. Like the leaky body. Like the queer text.

*

I would like to pause here. I am not arguing that any form of queerness is equated with an indecisive manner of being-in-the-world. It is not my intention to associate queerness with the kind of derogatory aspect of uncertainty; that by being queer, one does not *know* who one is, for example. Queerness as a term, in this regard, is problematic, as Nelson herself recognizes in an interview:

> *Queering* as a verb has never meant that much to me, especially not these days. Sometimes I might use queer as an adjective, but mostly as a kind of shorthand for a particular scene or vibe. Also, it's a little strange to talk about queering a genre, like memoir, when so many of my favorite books in that genre are already so queer. (qtd. in DeWitt)

Suppose I agree with Nelson here: it is not helpful to speak about queering as a genre. As we know, genres themselves are already problematized as categories which perform acts of closure and fail to recognize the potential for porousness. I am using *queering* here as a verb, yes, but rather than making it function as a verb in a political — sexualized, gendered — debate, I am using it as way to talk about the essay. I suppose that I am arguing this: *a queer essay offers a form of writing that allows for supposition*. That is, I am asking (please?) to borrow the term queer and use it to think about how the essay does not fit neatly into the essential categories of knowing and supposition, of certainty and uncertainty. Rather, it leaks, spills; it queers.

*

Suppose this: *Bluets* queers. It inquires. It is riddled with rhetorical questions and pervaded by self-awareness and doubt. "Suppose" suggests an invitation: *come with me, as I consider the following*. It also signifies an openness, a way of saying *I do not know for sure, but let's think about it (together) for a moment.* This invitation is further exemplified using the collective pronoun in the second sentence, "as *we* spoke" (1). Who is this "we," given that it is supplanted in the past tense? It could be us, the reader (both singular and plural), or it could be another, who Nelson is herself

talking to. In either case, perhaps even more so in the latter — a private conversation made public — the offer of conversation and consideration is one of openness.

We might then suppose this: Nelson proposes that we, her readers, enter relation with her, signifying that she herself has not decided on an answer to the supposition, making herself vulnerable to her reader from the outset. Imagine if the essay had opened with: "I will begin by saying that I have fallen in love with a color. I say this as though it were a confession; I shred my napkin as we speak." The message is effectively the same, but it offers nothing of the possibility that comes with the tone of uncertainty. She *may* have fallen in love with a color; we *may* be speaking about it as a confession while she *may* be shredding a napkin. So too, the possibility of "shredding the napkin": a telltale sign of anxiety in face-to-face dialogue. Again, there is an element of intimacy about this detail; it is the kind of thing that happens during confession, as Nelson infers, and confession is the kind of thing that happens in an intimate space. *Bluets* begins as an intimate conversation, which is the location of relationality and vulnerability, and where thinking happens. The essay offers a space for Nelson to do the thinking, rather than a place to reflect the thinking once it is done.

This performativity is the *modus operandi* for Nelson throughout *Bluets*. The tone is set by the supposition, but the text is littered with verbs like the aforementioned "suppose," such as "try," "consider," or "imagine," and auxiliary verbs, such as "might," "ought," and "could." The latter play a role in averting any direct assertion, which is further exemplified by the copious amounts of questions that populate the text. As a rhetorical device, the questions are for the reader, while they illustrate something of the elusive position of the writer. They direct our thoughts towards a kind of open inquiry, while also performing something of Nelson's own uncertainty; the questions offer no gesture of knowingness or resolution. Rather, they point towards possibility, often falling

at the end of the paragraph or answered with a gesture of attempt, rather than assertion: "How could all the shreds of blue garbage bags stuck in brambles, or the bright blue tarps flapping over every shanty and fish stand in the world, be, in essence, the fingerprints of God? *I will try to explain this*" (2).

In an often elusive or uncertain attempt — "I will *try* to explain this" — to answer some of the questions she asks both herself and her readers, Nelson presents the words of another, one who has gone before her and who may seem to know the answer to the questions she is asking herself. The answers come from those she looks to for wisdom, including some literary and cultural greats, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Billy Holiday, Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery, to name a few. Here she is, questioning notions of excess and originality, and finding an answer in the words of the Buddhist meditation master, Chögyam Trungpa:

> Does an album of written thoughts perform a similar displacement, or replacement, of the "original" thoughts themselves? . . . But if writing itself does displace the idea — if it *extrudes* it, as it were, like grinding a lump of wet clay through a hole — where does the excess go? "We don't want to pollute our world with leftover egos" (Chögyam Trungpa). (*Bluets* 77–8)

This is typical Nelson, avoiding closure of the text with anything that might masquerade as an answer. This excerpt works on an extra-performative level. On the one hand, it defers from any specific answer by placing a quote in lieu of a response to a question. On the other hand, Nelson also manages to avoid inserting her own ego by using the words of someone else to answer her own question. She seems to say that she is incapable of answering or, at the very least, uncertain of what she thinks might be a sufficient answer to the question, thereby displacing the idea that "an album of written thought" — which is what *Bluets* more or less is — performs as "original thoughts." Instead of these "original thoughts," she offers a montage of her questions and others'

answers, or others' questions and her almost-answers, effectively refraining from "polluting the world with leftover egos."

The notion of closure is also evaded in the formal characteristics of *Bluets*. The entire text takes the form of fragments, organized into bullet points; each paragraph (which are sometimes as short as a single sentence) is numericized, from 1 through to 240. While on the surface this method of organizing the material might seem like a push towards containment or even essentialism (one equals this, two equals that), they are in fact something of the opposite. Instead, this structure offers Nelson a kind of poetic opening of the text: because they are linear, the numbered paragraphs give off the air of building upon one another. On the contrary, the paragraphs are quite typical of the postmodern essay in that they are, for the most part, fragmentary. Unlike an academic argument or a linear narrative, the essay here plays with how each idea or unit of thought might follow on from each other. The units allow Nelson to dance around, to move freely between ideas, to slip. *Bluets* is, if we take the numbers literally, a list: singular items bound together by the fact of nominalization. The relationship between the items on the list is justified simply by their inclusion, their relationship to the subject as a whole. And the list might also be Nelson paying homage to others: Antonin Artaud, another great list-maker and one of Nelson's many heroes who is present as specter here; Lisa Robertson too, who is "only certain that [she] thinks insofar as [she] reads" (23).

*

Another critic: *you are writing as if Nelson's uncertainty is unintended rather than a considered and crafted element of the work.* I suppose I am projecting; I want to read work by smart women who wrestle with their own uncertainty. I want to know that the essay is a place to do this. I want to see the leaks. I want my leaks to be okay. I want my suppositions to be the place.

*

I suppose I have fallen in love with a book. *Suppose I were to begin,* I whisper to myself before rolling over and turning out the light.

*

But then I see the paradox: in her supposition, Nelson is decidedly resolute — it is something she has, I suppose, consciously cultivated in her work. In this, she effectively tricks me; I have gorged on the uncertainty so abundant in her texts, willfully choosing to ignore the trap because of how it feeds my own proclivity towards self-doubt. However, I have no doubt (I am certain!) that she is, beyond this literary façade, very sure of what she is doing here. This is not to say that she is sure of herself; quite the contrary, if we read the essay biographically. Rather, I suspect she is very sure of her own uncertainty, and of her ability to be with that uncertainty. It is this capacity to remain open, to possibilities, to mistakes — all the while, writing with the lyricism of a very assured writer — that makes *Bluets* such a great example of how the essay can do what the essay does; that is, to essay. It tries. It does not purport to know anything. Like Nelson, *Bluets* is certain of its own entanglement, and in fact takes shape out of its own inconclusiveness.

*

"How to explain," inquires Nelson, "in a culture frantic for resolution, that sometimes shit stays messy?" (*The Argonauts* 53). It cannot be explained, I suppose. That is, the "messy shit" of life operates outside of the hegemonic norms of knowledge, resolution, and certainty. In "a culture frantic for resolution," uncertainty is not particularly marketable. Rather, we seem to desire the opposite. As Rebecca Solnit says, there is a "relentless pursuit of certainty and clarity in a world that generally offers neither, a desire to shove nuances and complexities into clear-cut binaries" (53). Solnit calls this trend "naïve cynicism," and argues that it manifests in the media — whose

inability to say "we do not actually know" something is a product of the 24-hour news cycle and the complete necessity for hyperbole to maintain viewing numbers — and amongst politicians, where "style over substance, attitude over analysis" always triumphs (52–53). Late capitalism will tell us that books need to be, resolutely, *about* something; booksellers need to know where to put them; marketers need to know what label to give them. Nelson's *Bluets* is about several things, as the publishers tell us: "depression, divinity, alcohol, and desire," a sort of "pillow book" about the author's "lifelong obsession with the color blue" (dust jacket). What the publishers do not say, of course, is that Nelson traipses and dances through these subjects with indecision, uncertainty, and a failure to commit to any one point of view in particular. Like poetry, the essay's uncommercial bedfellow, *Bluets* is essentially unmarketable — it does not fit anywhere. Sound familiar? Yes, like a gender-queer individual, they do not fit either. The same could be said for the essay; it is, in some ways, pre- and post-genre. Or, as Lazar playfully argues, the essay is not "genre-normative." From Montaigne to Woolf, from Emerson to Nelson (and her place in the crowded field), the essay has always been somewhat queer in that it looks to explore the leaks. The essay, at its best, inhabits the place that Nelson calls "the great soup of being in which we all actually live" (*The Argonauts*, 58). The essay as queer text opens rather than closes; it relates, rather than dictates; it generates rather than defines. And, in doing so, as Adorno suggested, it "transgresses the orthodoxy of thought" (171). I will try to explain this. The essay is not this or that. Suppose it is this *and* that. The essay is *and*.

Hence, I am back where I began. I began where I am hence, back.

Suppose I were to begin by saying.

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Aleksandar Hemon's Photography-embedded Migrant Literature[1]

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Fig. 1. Photograph by Velibor Božović, unknown location. Featured in Aleksander Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), p. 0.

[1] I am grateful to Kalani Michell for her insightful suggestions and for always encouraging me to think outside of the box. I am also grateful to Ernst van Alphen, with whom I initially worked on this essay as part of my master's thesis and to Sonia Weiner, whose phenomenal migrant literature class first introduced me to Aleksander Hemon's writing. Conversations I had with Velibor Božović, Ksenia Robbe, Liesbeth Minnaard and Katherine Oktober Matthews further inspired the way I encountered the photographs in this essay.

At first glance, the photograph above of a man and his reflection appears unremarkable. He is shown in front of a small, old mirror bolted against a wall with a furrowed brow and puckered lips, adjusting his collar. Upon closer scrutiny though, several ambiguous aspects of the photograph make deciphering the subject's location and the time the shot was taken difficult. The way the man's face is partially obscured by a shadow on his right and by the framing on his left, combined with his gaze being directed at the photographer and by extension the viewers, paints an indeterminant picture of who he is. This particular framing of the man requires viewers to imagine all that cannot be clearly seen. Moreover, it is unclear what "event", ritual, or moment in time viewers are supposed to be observing here. Is he preparing to go somewhere? When we meet the man's gaze as he appears to be fixing himself up for something or someone that remains beyond our frame of knowledge, our attention is drawn to the live and futural quality of photographs themselves (Benjamin 1931; Schneider 2009; Behrend 2013). At the moment they are taken, the photographer and subject know that the image will be encountered again, and both seem to recognize this future occurrence here, locking eyes, exchanging glances, and unsettling the position of the supposedly "objective" viewer. Thinking about the futural dimension of photography implicates us viewers as participants who are unable to passively encounter the details and indexes in images, but instead are tasked with dynamically co-creating while we look at them.[2] Such instances of photography do not really show us what "has been" (Barthes 1980) but rather what is and "will be" (Bolt 2004). They do not so much capture the past as they anticipate the present and future. The futural dimension of this photograph is complicated by its placement next to and within a verbal object. The photograph, which appears on the verso of the title page of Aleksandar Hemon's novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008), raises key questions about the relationship

[2] Ariella Azoulay (2008) and Marianne Hirsch (2019) discuss this kind of active photographic viewing as a means of recognizing a subject's agency.

between the visual and the verbal in literature that thematizes migration. Namely, what qualities of this mixed form lend itself so well to stories about migration, how can this form change the way we encounter migrant literature and photography alike, and in which ways does it alter reading practices?

Introduction: Photography-embedded Migrant Literature

Hemon's novel is one of many hybrid photographic/literary works by migrant authors wherein the constellation of photography and prose plays an important role in relating experiences of migration after and in the wake of political violence. Additional migrant authors who employ this mixed form of photography-embedded literature include G. B. Tran, Michael Ondaatje, W.G. Sebald, Hanif Kureishi, Edward Said, Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Teju Cole, Julio Cortázar, among others. This is a form of literature which embeds photographs into text and which includes biographies, memoirs, and poetry collections, among other textual genres. In migrant literature, namely literature written by migrants about their experiences while and after moving to a new country, these text-image relationships often concentrate on themes of belonging, loss, and memory.[3] In light of the fact that many 20th- and 21st century migrant authors left their countries of origin due to instances of political violence, such as wars, genocides, and colonialism, the mixed aesthetic of this form can benefit from being situated in relation to these complex and often emotionally-charged experiences. By more closely and critically exploring this subgenre of photography-embedded migrant literature, we can better understand why this form lends itself to

[3] The term *migrant*, as opposed to immigrant or emigrant, does not arbitrarily position these authors as either moving to or from locations. Even if they geographically move away from political violence in their "home" countries, some eventually choose to move back, and the term *migrant* can better accommodate both this geographical flexibility and the often-mutable nature of contact zones in the 20th and 21st centuries. It should also be noted that not all migrant literature is trauma literature, as not all migrants move as a result of political violence. For an extended discussion of this term see Minnaard (2008: 1-50).

migrant stories and develop further insights into the relationship between these two medial forms, literature and photography, in non-antagonistic or hierarchical terms.

Exploring text-image relationships in this way requires first reconsidering the familiar scholarship on the medium of photography that is based on binary concepts of time and the genre of migrant literature that relies on the figure of the double. From Henry Fox Talbot's famous early words about the camera holding "a mirror up to nature" (1), to Roland Barthes arguing that photographs emblematically show that which "has been" (*Camera Lucida* 77), photography has typically been thought of as a means of recording reality and connecting the past with the present. Classical theoretical texts on migrant literature often view the migrant author and/or characters as existing between worlds, encompassing a "here and there" quality to them.[4] Bhabha (1994) most canonically frames the migrant figure as being doubled and between worlds.[5] These frameworks conceptualize both the photographer and migrant author in ways that limit their aesthetic agency. Similarly hampering is the way in which scholarship regarded the photographs in literary works as illustrative of the prose or as indices of the past (Armstrong 1998; Barthes 1980). Critical of these limiting approaches, Sonia Weiner (2018) discusses how novels themselves can be a form in which migrants assert their sense of home in texts with images, which can in turn supplement the lack of belonging they may experience in their homeland or host country.

Several other scholars have similarly explored the interplay between photography and literature in non-hierarchical terms, relying on concepts of the image/text (Mitchell 1994), phototextuality (Nobel and Hughes 2003), photo-texts (Horstkotte 2008), and icontexts (2011). These terms illuminate the importance of looking at the clash and coalescence between the visual and the verbal and the importance of both media within a written text but tend to overlook the

[4] See, for example, Bhabha (1994), Aciman (1999), and Sayad, Macey, and Bourdieu (2004).
[5] For alternative readings of this phenomenon, see Adelson (2002: especially 244-248).

significance of this intersection on paratextual levels.[6] Building on these aforementioned terms but focusing specifically on the visual-verbal interplay in migrant literature, Ofra Amihay (2012) and Weiner (2014) discuss the use of photographs as being significant both thematically and aesthetically. Amihay suggests that the photographs themselves become metaphorical representations of the way in which migrants move across space, while Weiner locates the importance of the fracturedness inherent in photographs as emblematically shedding light on the split between fact and fiction with which migrant writers often play. Expanding upon earlier work by Silke Horstkotte (2002), Amihay and Weiner address the ways in which photographs in migrant literature upend readers' expectations by contradicting the prose. Although this is sometimes true, and although the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction are central to both photography as a medium and migrant literature as a genre, this mixed-media form does something more important than either solely illustrating or upending – more than simply confirming the "truth" of literature or problematizing it.

Photographs in migrant texts resituate readers to the paratextual dimensions of books and, in doing so, fundamentally alter conventional reading practices. It is for this reason that the term *photography-embedded literature* contributes to this body of scholarship on visual/verbal entanglements and intermedial studies, especially in, though not limited to, the context of migrant literature. The embeddedness of photographs in literary works is akin to the embeddedness of hyperlinks in documents. When there is a photograph in literature, as with a hyperlink in a document, we may ignore it, but if we do, we necessarily miss a major part of the story. The photograph's embeddedness encourages readers to perform scan and search functions with respect

[6] See Genette (1987) for a canonical discussion of paratexts, materials surrounding and about the "main" text but remaining simultaneously outside of it. For a more nuanced discussion of paratexts within various medial forms, see Stanizek (2006).

to what they have already read in the book and what is absent from the prose but epitextually significant, or indexed, through the photographs.[7] This approach insists on the performative and future-oriented nature of the photographic medium, rather than encountering it as supplementary, documentary, or explanatory (Schneider 2011; Behrend 2013). We can observe this by focusing on how readers/viewers of such works are compelled to simultaneously scroll, scan, and return to the photograph(s) in question within the mixed media constellation, which fundamentally alters the sense of temporal stability and orientation experienced during the encounter between photography and literature (McPherson 2006; Weibel 2003). How do viewers and readers "move" through such works in ways that are not as aligned with a linear progression of a novel, but are rather more similar to a hyperlinked document?

Aleksandar Hemon's novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008) and memoir *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You* (2019) serve as points of departure for exploring this reconfiguration of photography and literature in the context of contemporary migrant literature. Hemon, a Sarajevo native, was in the United States in 1992 when war broke out in former Yugoslavia, preventing him from returning home. His parents fled Sarajevo when it was under siege and were granted approval to move to Canada as refugees in 1993. *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You* is comprised of two volumes, each with their own book cover. *My Parents: An Introduction* is a memoir about Hemon's family history, centered mainly, though not exclusively on his parents' lives, and *This Does Not Belong to You* revolves around Hemon's life. The two memoirs meet in the middle, with ten pages of family photographs connecting them. The narrator of *The Lazarus Project*, Vladimir Brik referred to as "Brik" throughout the book is a Bosnian migrant and author who uses the finances he received to write a

[7] On the epitext, see Genette (1997), which he describes as "any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space" (344).

book that requires tracing the life and story of the deceased Jewish emigrant Lazarus Averbuch in Eastern Europe with his photographer friend, Ahmed Rora Halilbasic, referred to as "Rora" throughout the book. Averbuch escaped the pogroms in Kishinev, moved to America, and was then shot seven times by the chief officer of the Chicago police at the time, George Shippy, in 1908. The specific reasons as to why Averbuch visited Shippy's house remain unknown to this day, and the details of his death also remain incomplete. Shippy claimed to have shot Lazarus in self-defense because he appeared as a threatening anarchist.[8] Even though Lazarus was likely completely innocent and was simply labelled a probable anarchist as a foreign migrant in xenophobic Chicago, Shippy's report went unquestioned by the rest of the police force and the public[9] Hemon alternates between contemporary chapters beginning with one of Velibor Božović's photographs and historical chapters beginning with an image from the Chicago Historical Society Archive.

Articles on Hemon's work by Ward (2011), Weiner (2014), and Aykol (2019), situate *The Lazarus Project* within the here/there discourse in which migrant literature and photography are conventionally discussed. In contrast, this essay draws on techniques of transmedial storytelling (Jenkins 2017) and the concept of "scanning-and-searching" in mixed media reading practices (McPhereson 2006) in order to offer a more complex understanding of the relationship between photography and literature in Hemon's works. According to Jenkins, transmedial stories are those that encourage "encyclopedic impulses" by weaving together multiple storylines across a range of medial forms (1-3). McPherson posits that readers often experience a fear of overlooking essential information when encountering mixed media texts, which encourages them to search for it and re-

[8] Roth and Krauss explain that "[t]he name Averbuch, was, to the mass of Chicago's populace, synonymous with anarchy, communism, malevolent foreigners, and violence" (6).
[9] See also Weiner (2012: 216).

scan what they have encountered, leading to an engagement with the work in non-linear, non-spatially contiguous and participatory ways (203-207). Building on these approaches, this essay explores how these two medial forms are uniquely reconfigured to relate migratory experiences of visual and verbal exchange for authors who migrate after and during political violence. By refusing the traditional binary frameworks for interpreting migrant authors and photographers, as well as the typical positioning of the photographic medium as either confirming or subverting prose, one can gain a more nuanced understanding of how this particular combination of texts and images offers a unique form of expression for the many complexities that accompany migration after political violence and the way in which this form prompts a novel experience of reading literature. Approaching the photography in Hemon's work as embedded hyperlinks recognizes how it reconfigures the encounter with life narratives that actively reconstruct the complex cultural processes he and his parents endured when moving to North America during and after the war in Bosnia. Hyperlinks in novels forge connections to materials internal and external to/from the texts in which they are situated and call on the reader to engage with material more actively as a participant (Landow 2006; Modir, Guan and Aziz 2014). In light of the way our cognitive linear attention is constantly interrupted while reading, we are encouraged to scroll back, inspect photographs more closely and migrate between the print and digital world the information prompts us to search for, just as one moves between a document and the links to other objects, documents, and websites embedded in it.

Intermedial Scanning and Searching

From the very first pages of *The Lazarus Project* it is clear that the work challenges its readers with different tasks than a standard reading process might imply. Instead of diving into a story by

reading and imagining, we, the readers, are asked to decode images, remember various histories, and actively connect the visual and verbal in multiple ways. To "read" this work, we must participate in the embedded histories and life narratives which often overlap within it. There are many connections between Hemon, Brik, and Lazarus, and likewise between Božović and Rora, that must be worked out. Božović and Hemon are friends in real life, and their journey through Eastern Europe to research *The Lazarus Project* was enabled by the financial support Hemon received from a McArthur genius grant, which facilitated him to write his novel. In addition to using both contemporary and historical photographs, Hemon constructs his narrative in multiple languages – Yiddish, Hebrew, and Bosnian – and does so by building on memories of the events he discusses, historical stories, newspaper clippings, and records from different time periods and parts of the world, calling for a reading strategy that can work across multiple medial forms.[10] The dynamic movements we make as readers parallel the multidirectional experiences of the migrant author, photographer, and characters alike.

The inclination to search and scan in this work is apparent right from the start once we consider the way in which the words from the previous page, Hemon's author note, shine through the previous image of the man in front of the mirror (fig. 1) and provoke the action of flipping back to view him (which you may also be doing now, within these very pages) and also looking to see if the subsequent pages provide information about him. This action of scanning the image and searching the previous and subsequent pages helps readers feel a sense of control over pertinent information about the author and photographed subject that might have been missed upon first glance (McPherson 205). The movement between the subject of the photograph and Hemon as an

[10] The novel is written predominantly in English, but Hemon includes phrases from these other languages which he italicizes and does not translate them (see for example 38, 123, 160, 198). Additionally, there is Hebrew writing on the photographs of gravestone (222).

author foreshadow many connections that exist between his own journey and his characters' movements. With little information about the photographs available in Hemon's novel, readers can either continue to move forward in the book or try to locate the photographs elsewhere. On the recto of the opening to the *Lazarus Project,* we learn that this photograph of the man in front of the mirror was taken by Velibor Božović, prompting curious readers to put down the novel and search for Božović online (fig. 1). On Božović's website, we discover a collection of photographs from the novel, including the image on Hemon's verso (fig. 1) with the sentence "the only one who was not me" underneath it – a sentence that does not appear in the book. This rather decontextualized caption simultaneously puts distance between the photographer, subject, and viewer and it piques our interest. Although we are kept at a distance, the curious ambiguity of the image online and in the novel encourages us to continue to try to piece together and learn more about the interconnected stories; the choice of which platform to use is left to us.

One photograph included in Božović's online archive but absent from the novel, which illustrates his aesthetic style of excess and unboundedness, is an image of pages of writing (fig. 2). It is unclear to us as viewers whether these are pages from books, newspaper articles, or pieces of writing from something else entirely. The quote underneath it – "I imagine my life to be big, so big I cannot see the end of it. Big enough for everyone to fit into it" – further speaks to the centrality of unboundedness to Božović's aesthetic. Additionally, because the photograph is of pages of writing, it seems to address the unboundedness of photography and literature alike; an aesthetic feature that can, as Leslie Morris argues, liberate mixed-media projects from limited binaries and that is inherent to transmedial stories (17). The kind of transmedial reading that the *The Lazarus Project* calls for functions differently on Božović's web-based archive of the photographs and quotes from the novel. Božović's introduction to this work confronts us with the idea that the

photographs exceed the form of the novel, and thus to approach them solely as additions to the text would be limiting. Božović explicitly writes on his website that "the photographs are intimately and deeply connected with the book, but they also speak of something that is beyond its limits." The connection is clear through the placement of a phrase or sentence from *The Lazarus Project* under each photograph. These quotes from the novel were selected by Božović rather than Hemon and the placement of the quotes does not align with how they are placed in the novel. Božović's archive includes fifty images, a large number compared to the mere eleven that appear in the novel form of the story, and yet those fifty are also only a small fraction of the 1,200 photographs he took for this project.[11]

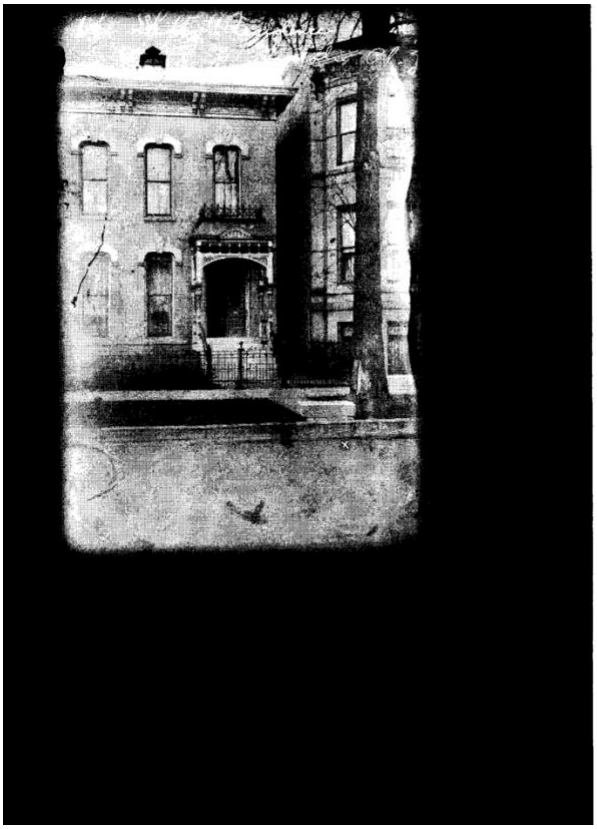
When we click on an image, only the photograph initially appears. After hovering over it for a while, the words show up in small text at the bottom of the images. When we click on the quote, however, nothing happens, perhaps signaling Božović's slight prioritization of images over text. Neither forms of *The Lazarus Project*, in print or in digital form, demand a singular kind of engagement with it, nor a linear reading of it, an indication that the story cannot be contained within a single medium. In this sense, they both act as "writerly works" (Barthes 1970). Writerly, as opposed to readerly works, enable the reader to engage as a co-creator of meaning rather than a passive recipient of it. Božović's and Hemon's projects exemplify the former, as they prompt us, time and time again, to choose the order through which we engage with their materials and to scan it once again to search for what we could have missed at first glance.

[11] See Božović, Velibor. "The Lazarus Project." VeliborBozovic.com, http://veliborBožović'.com/projects/the-lazarus-project/.

Fig. 2. Velibor Božovic, unknown location, 2008. Image part of the images that make up "The Lazarus Project." VeliborBozovic.com, http://veliborBožović'.com/projects/the-lazarus-project/.

Migrating Story-Worlds: The Biblical and Historical Lazarus

The written prologue and images in the printed space of the novel raise other questions through their evocations of different historical moments and mythical figures. The prologue, a quote from the book of John, describes the resurrection of the biblical Lazarus. Notably, Hemon chooses not to include the source of this quote, inspiring us to look it up and therein momentarily leave the peritextual and textual space of the novel. In the book, the inscription at the top of a photograph details the fact that this is the residence of Chicago's Chief Police officer at the time, George Shippy, demonstrating how the mixed-media configuration causes us to migrate across different temporalities (fig. 3).



The time and place are the only things I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain, and now I plunge:

Early in the morning, a scrawny young man rings the bell at 31 Lincoln Place, the residence of George Shippy, the redoubtable chief of Chicago police. The maid, recorded as Theresa, opens the door (the door certainly creaks ominously), scans the young man from his soiled shoes up to his swarthy face, and smirks to signal that he had better have a good reason for being here. The young man requests to see Chief Shippy in person. In a stern German accent, Theresa advises him that it is much too early and that Chief Shippy never wishes to see anybody before nine. He thanks her, smiling, and promises to return at nine. She cannot place his accent; she is going to warn Shippy that the foreigner who came to see him looked very suspicious.

The young man descends the stairs, opens the gate (which also creaks ominously). He puts his hands in his pockets, but then pulls his pants up—they are still too big for him; he looks to the right, looks to the left, as though making a decision. Lincoln Place is a different world; these houses are like castles, the windows tall

Fig. 3. Photograph from the Chicago Historical Society, Unknown Photographer, 1908. Featured in Aleksander Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), p.1.

This detail and the wear and tear quality of the photograph bring us to BCE, 1908, as well as the 21st century. Hemon's visual and verbal reformatting of the biblical and historical Lazaruses' stories at the start of his novel highlight his process of reinscribing these histories in relation to one another and our contemporary moment. This echoes Marek Jancovic's perspective of how the act of reformatting programmatically reinscribes histories to avoid loss (197), as well as Jenkins' notion of transmedial stories as intrinsically performative (3). According to Jenkins, transmedial

stories function by calling on us to interact with them as they weave together interrelated characters and their narratives, which causes an "encyclopedic impulse in both readers and writers" (10).

The multiple time frames in the photograph come across through the inscriptions that reference the biblical Lazarus, as well as the layers and shadows that call attention to the scars from the brief encounter between Lazarus Averbuch and George Shippy, their lurking presence in the present and the eerie concern of their seeping into the future. The different levels of light, a brightness glimmering at the top left contrasted with shades of dark grey at the bottom, as well as the blurriness in the image have a ghostly, ominous affect. The fact that this shot was taken from a distance and includes various borders, such as the house's closed gate and windows covered by shades, gives off an aura of mystery, which is heightened by the white "x" marked in the bottom right corner. Hemon's selection of photographs from the Chicago History Museum resonates with what Rebecca Schneider describes as an intentional, future-oriented use of photography, a "call toward a future live moment when the image will be re-encountered, perhaps as an invitation to a response" (255). Eager to make sense of this photograph and decode the signs within it, our glance is directed to the recto of the page, on which Hemon's narrator, Brik, shares that, "the time and place are the only things I am certain of, March 2, 1908. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain" (1). Are we meant to take these "facts," both in the prose form and in the inscription on the photograph, at face value? The fact that Hemon addresses the failure of words and photographs alike in both works further complicates how we approach the theme of truthfulness.[12] Beyond questioning the veracity of the content, we are encouraged to rethink how we approach the photograph itself; not only as marking what has been, but also what is and what could be.

[12] See, for example, Hemon 2008: 90-94 and 184-189.

Another historical photograph that Hemon embeds in his novel, which calls attention to both past injustices and present/future concerns, is the police portrait shot of the deceased Lazarus Averbuch with Captain Evans (fig. 4). The inscription in the image merely states both of their names. Their positioning, however, is notable: Evans' name on the left upper corner and Averbuch's on the bottom, can be understood as representative of the power that Evans had over Lazarus. Beyond these white, cursive inscriptions, when we look closely at the wall on the left-hand side, there appear to be marks that look like letters and/or symbols. Though their shapes and significances remain unclear to us, they show textual elements in the photographs and, in this way, subvert our conception of them as solely visual objects. Like the complex transmedial aesthetic dimension in the shot itself, this photograph serves to bring our awareness to the transtemporal ethical injustices of xenophobia; a problem spanning across the century between the two Lazaruses. Furthermore, Hemon's problematization of photography's status as evidence enables him to reappropriate police photographic styles of mug shots for his own purposes. It is possible to see Hemon's use of this image as playfully reclaiming the style that oppressive police forces used when photographing migrants.[13] Hemon's choice of photographs that exemplify and problematize police photography indicates how he works within this genre in ways that are potentially similar to postcolonial authors choosing to write in and appropriate the language of their (former) oppressors.[14] This kind of aesthetic re-appropriation further demonstrates the significance of the transmedial nature of Hemon's practice.

[13] On police photography of migrants, see Reinhardt (2007: 15-20).
[14] For a discussion of the ways in which authors write in the language of their oppressors subversively, see, for example, Armitage (2000).

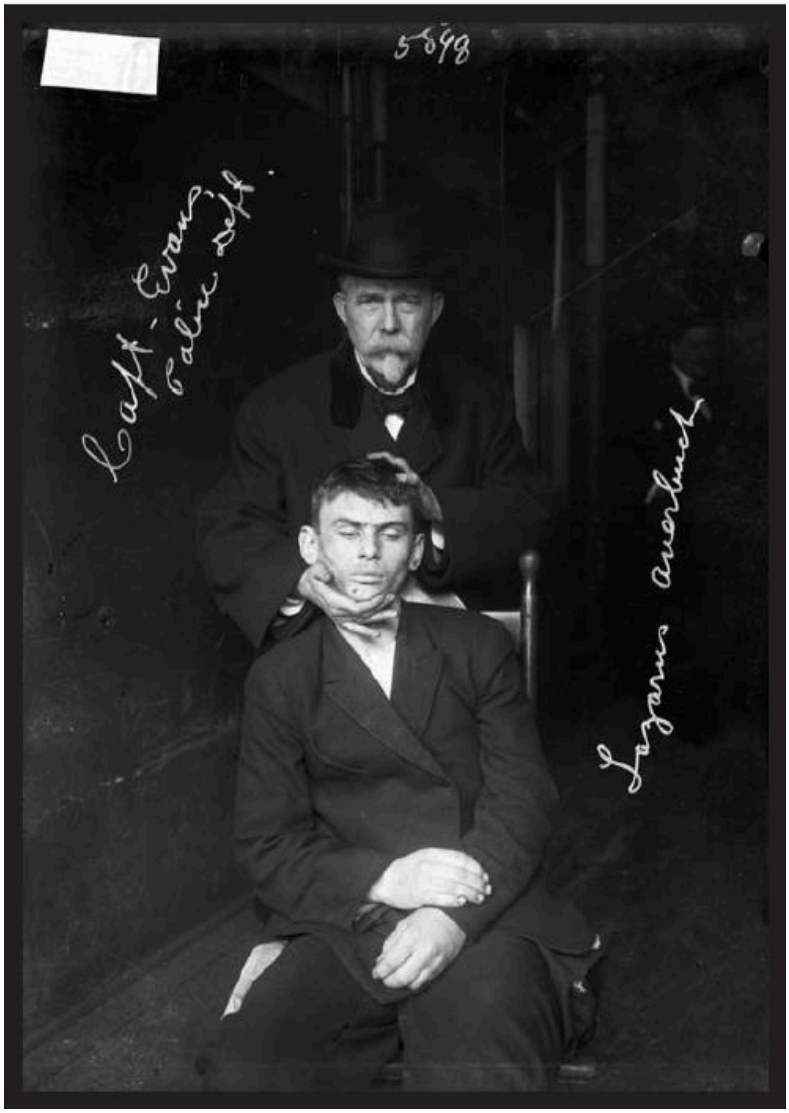


Fig. 4. Chicago Historical Society, Unknown Photographer, 1908. Featured in Aleksander Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), p. 52.

Visually and Verbally Unfolding Life Stories

The reconstruction of life stories through embedding photographs is quite differently executed in *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You* (2019). Aside from the barcode on the side of Hemon's personal memoir, there are not any other indications that this side should be

read second; instead, the choice of where to begin is left up to us. One major difference between each part is that *My Parents: An Introduction* reads primarily chronologically, whereas *This Does not Belong to You* is a collection of anecdotes, reflections, and stories relayed non-chronologically. The photographs that connect the two memoirs do not merely show what has been described verbally in parts of the memoirs, but rather tell additional stories with their own significant content. The non-chronological nature of Hemon's memoir speaks to the way in which his work requires us to scan and search for different pieces of his family puzzle. For example, pages 26 through 28 include three distinctly different sections: a discussion of the nature of memory, then a discussion of his present, and lastly an anecdote from his school days. The photographs which are constructed as a family archive in the center of the two volumes notably brings his and his parents' memoirs to a full circle of 360 pages of connected, transtemporal content. Strikingly, reviews of Hemon's work claim that it is 350 pages, as they outright exclude the pages containing photographs.[15] By merely glossing over these ten pages, readers will overlook how Hemon's embedded photographs individually function as hyperlinks signalling important information and, when seen as a whole, evoke the medium of a family album. Moreover, the way he frames the photographs vertically requires that we flip our heads or turn the book to its side in order to view them, thus while we may not necessarily always jump to another platform as hyperlinked documents engage, the photographs similarly call on us as participants to form connections with other material. The futural nature of the images is present in this work but functions differently than in *The Lazarus Project*. For example, an image of Tata and Mama holding Canadian flags (fig. 5.) invites us to search for the places in which he discusses their experience of migration and, in doing so, we migrate across the mediums of images and texts.

[15] See for example Chakraborty (2019) and Szalai (2019).

Fig. 5. Unknown Photographer and unknown date. *This Does Not Belong to You*, p. 183 and *My Parents: An Introduction*, p. 178.[16]

We are also invited to rethink the snapshot and its placement in this book form as something that does not merely document a moment. Rather, certain symbols in this still, such as the national flags these people hold in their hands, mark a movement towards belonging to Canada, if only on a superficial nationalist level. Thus, even in the moment of it being taken, the snapshot anticipates our looking and participating in the unfolding of their migrant journey (Schneider 264). The multiple ways in which the different people in this image direct their glances, in addition to the young child standing behind Mama, remind us of the multiple generations present in this captured moment as well as different constructions of (un)belonging.

[16] Notably, the pages with the photographs are not physically numbered in either volume so I have provided page numbers that correspond with whichever side the reader begins from.

These transmedial constructions and multiplicities are further but differently configured in the subsequent image (fig. 6).

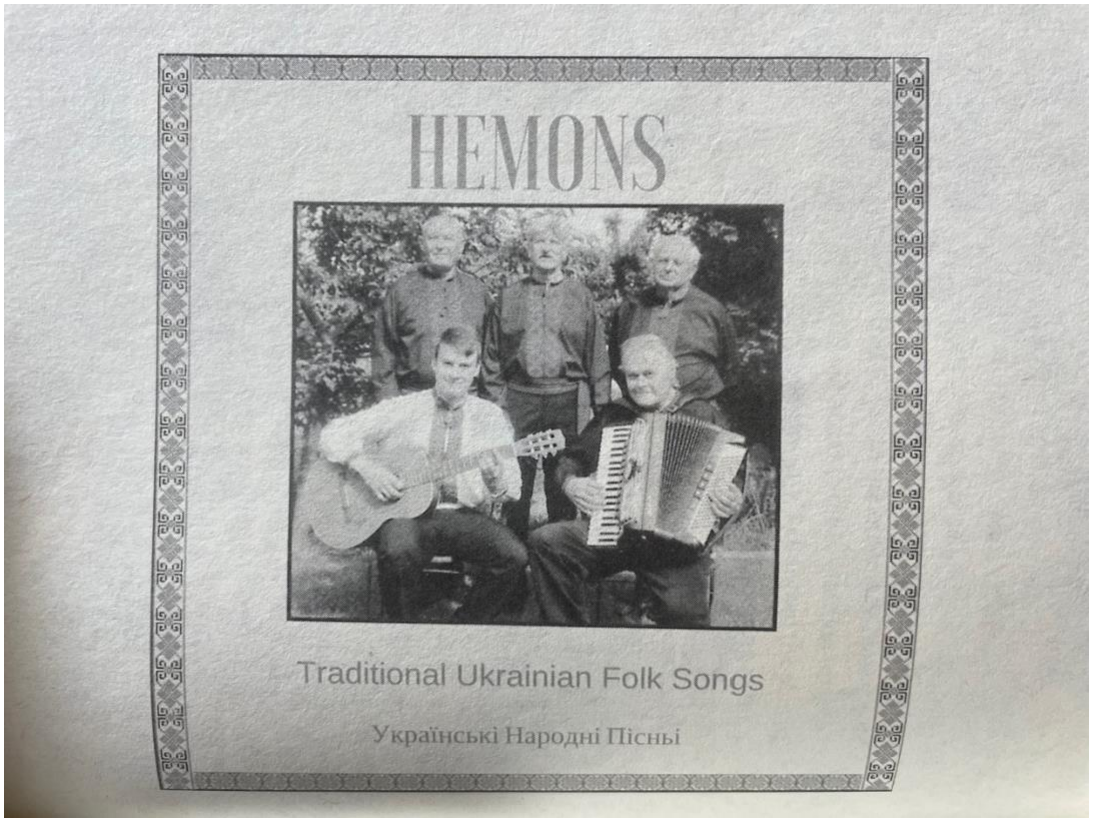


Fig. 6. Unknown Photographer and unknown location. *This Does Not Belong to You*. p.184 and *My Parents: An Introduction*, p.177.

This photograph (fig. 6), which includes multiple frames and textual messages, is transmedial in the liberatory ways described by Jenkins and Morris, but it evokes starkly different emotions than the previous image. This photograph features five men, presumably from Hemon's family, two of whom hold instruments: a guitar and an accordion. They are framed between writing, evoking a sense of belonging by being framed under the heading "HEMON" and above the caption stating in both English and Bosnian that this group plays "Traditional Ukrainian Folk Songs." Hemon and

his parents are of Ukrainian Christian origin, but they are agnostic. By juxtaposing these photographs, Hemon prevents us from situating the migrant as either being back in the "homeland" or in the "host" country, nor does he allow us to understand the image as simply an index of the past. Rather, the juxtaposition in this part of his volume calls for a transmedial engagement that aligns with the complexities of migration after the Bosnian war and the heightened charge of encountering this image today, in light of the catastrophe currently faced by Ukraine since the Russian invasion in 2022.

While searching and scanning across the visual and verbal mediums, the shortcomings of both photographs and prose are addressed directly by Hemon. Specifically, the middle of *This Does Not Belong to You* evokes philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous claim from *Tractatus Logigo-Philosphicus* (1922) that the limits of language are the limits of our world (122). Hemon frequently reflects on the failure of words to capture, describe, and create, and the incompleteness and fragility of memories, and his use of photography thus testifies to his belief that the visual and the verbal remain inextricable from one another. Moreover, in his discussion of certain memories that are not visible through the images, Hemon suggests that photographs are of course also not an all-encompassing medium that can essentially capture more from the past. This evokes W. J. T. Mitchell's notion of writing as incomplete in its "limits of space and writerly ingenuity," while photographs are not whole pictures since they always impose a frame that can never include everything that was supposedly "there to be taken" (289). The incompleteness of both forms of expression are aspects of photography and prose to which Hemon's text purposefully draws our attention. As such, he reminds us of the complexity of constructing representations of life stories and the potential of embedding photographs in order to articulate otherwise overlooked aspects of these complexities.

Conclusion: Reading Photography-embedded Literature as Co-Creation

Hemon's photography-embedded migrant literature requires us to rethink the way in which we interact with the shapes of books and the entangled malleability of photographs and prose. In the sometimes complementary and sometimes antagonistic intersections of them, his works refuse to be categorized in the binary-based frameworks in which they have been situated thus far. Rather than understanding the photographs as either subverting or confirming the texts, they function as embedded links to memories, stories, and histories that can be approached as individual parts, but also as part of greater narrative journeys and arches that we as readers co-create. Looking at the paratextual, peritextual, and epitextual dimensions of Hemon's project by positioning the photographs as akin to hyperlinks embedding new information reinstates photography in non-essentialist, nonbinary ways, situating it as central to the unfolding of stories, memories, and migrations between these realms cross-temporally. *The Lazarus Project* and *My Parents: An Introduction/ This Does Not Belong to You* evoke the past, present, and signal to the future through the text-image intersections and transhistorical concerns. It is this last temporal dimension that importantly breaks away from well-rehearsed, overly-used theorizations about photography and migrant literature that situate the medium and author as being geographically and temporally in either the past or the present. Liberated from this limiting context, photography-embedded migrant literature illuminates, through its very form, the complexities of movement during and after political violence and means of conveying those experiences aesthetically.

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„*Mad Days Out*“ – Ein beatlesker Erkundungsgang zwischen Nationalität und Transkulturalität

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In ihrer Monografie *Music and Translation* betont Lucile Desblache (61), dass die „ability for ‘transcultural mediation’[1]“, die Musik leisten kann, immer noch häufig verkannt werde. Dabei könne gerade Musik als „powerful mediator . . . of culture, blending musical ideas with the spectacle of human agency“ fungieren, wie auch Stan Hawkins (257) hervorhebt – wobei dieses Zitat bereits eindrücklich verdeutlicht, dass es die Künstler:innen sind, die eine ganz entscheidende Rolle als Mediator:innen zwischen verschiedenen Kulturen spielen sowie über Grenzen hinweg transkulturelle Botschaften lancieren können. So betont etwa Guillermo Goméz Peña (70), der selbst Performancekünstler ist:

> The role that artists and cultural organizations can perform . . . is crucial. Artists can function as community brokers, citizen diplomats, ombudsmen, and border translators. And our art spaces can perform the multiple roles of sanctuaries, demilitarized zones, centers for activism against xenophobia, and informal think tanks for intercultural and translational dialogue.

Bei einer Beschäftigung mit der Historie einer der erfolgreichsten Bands aller Zeiten fällt dagegen immer wieder auf, wie sehr zur Erklärung von deren weltweitem Erfolg gerade eine spezielle Form nationaler Zugehörigkeit herangezogen wird. So sei gerade auch eine Art plakativer

[1] Vgl. Ehrhardt 503-527; im Original: „médiation transculturelle“.

Zurschaustellung ihrer ‚Englishness'[2] für die Beliebtheit der Beatles im Allgemeinen und ihren unerwarteten Siegeszug in Amerika im Besonderen wesentlich verantwortlich gewesen. In diesem Kontext findet der britische Humor der ‚Fab Four', der gerade auch ihren als so authentisch angesehenen Umgang mit der Presse vor allem in der frühen Phase ihrer Karriere Anfang der 1960er Jahre prägte und in ihrem ersten Film A Hard Day's Night (1964) als unwiderstehlicher Lausbubencharme inszeniert wurde, genauso Erwähnung wie ihr Liverpooler Akzent, der Scouse, der zuvor als Merkmal der Arbeiterklasse vor allem aus London nur ein Naserümpfen erntete, oder auch ihre öffentlich zur Schau gestellte Liebe zu Tee, die auf unzähligen Fotografien dokumentiert ist. Darüber hinaus gilt die Musik der Beatles als das Modell eines „British pop sound" (Bennett 1923), der die „British Invasion", den Siegeszug britischer Musik zu Beginn der 1960er Jahre nicht nur in Europa, sondern – von vielen Zeitgenossen ungläubig beobachtet – auch in Amerika begründete.

Allerdings stellt gerade diese vermeintliche ‚Englishness' bereits bei den Beatles einen Ausgangspunkt für transkulturelles Handeln dar, das sich zum einen in ihrem ironischen Umgang mit Stereotypen ihrer Heimat spiegelte, zum anderen (kommentierend) Bezug auf die britische Lebenswelt nahm, die – etwa als Einwanderungsland mit langer Historie – schon per se transnational und transkulturell geprägt ist, was für Liverpool als Hafen- und Heimatstadt der ‚Fab Four' noch einmal ganz besonders galt. Diese Attitüde gipfelte in der Zuwendung der Band zu indischer Musik, östlichem Sound und dessen Instrumenten, genauso wie in einem verstärkten Interesse an transzendentaler Meditation und der entsprechenden Kleidung in ihrer zweiten

[2] In diesem Aufsatz verwende ich den Terminus der ‚Englishness', um auf die (vermeintlich) speziell nationalen Stereotypen, die der Heimat der Beatles und damit auch ihnen zugeschrieben werden, zu rekurrieren. In der Literatur findet sich jedoch auch der Terminus der ‚Britishness'. Wenn dieser sich im Folgenden in Zitaten findet, verstehe ich ihn im Kontext meiner Studie als Synonym zu ‚Englishness'.
[3] Vgl. auch Stratton 45-46.

Schaffensphase ab Mitte der 1960er Jahre, die so den sich manifestierenden Diskurs über alternative Lebensentwürfe entscheidend mitprägte und vorantrieb.

In diesem Aufsatz werde ich zunächst mein analytisches Vorgehen erläutern, in dem Musik – verstanden als transtextuelles und transmediales Konglomerat mit transkulturellem Potenzial – den wesentlichen Fokus bildet. Daran schließt sich ein Einblick in den Diskurs um die (vermeintliche) ‚Englishness' der Beatles an, auf den meine exemplarische Analyse folgt. Diese untersucht im Rahmen einer „Mini"-Fallstudie eine Fotografie der ‚Fab Four', entstanden bei der *Mad Day Out*-Session am 28. Juli 1968, auf ihr transkulturelles Potenzial und bezieht wesentliche Assoziationen und Konnotationen aus dem Feld der Musik, wie Diedrich Diederichsen es definiert,[4] für ein tiefergehendes Verständnis dieses Potenzials mit ein. Das Fazit diskutiert schließlich zusammenfassend die wesentlichen Aspekte der Analyse und gibt einen Ausblick zu transkulturell basierter Forschung im Bereich der populären Musik.

Musik als transtextuelles und transmediales Konglomerat mit transkulturellem Potenzial – Methodisches Vorgehen und Untersuchungsgegenstand

Musik verstehe ich in meiner in diesem Aufsatz durchgeführten Untersuchung im Anschluss an Diederichsen als transtextuelles und transmediales Konglomerat, das gerade nicht nur die Musik im klassischen Sinne, Lyrics, Tonträger, Fernseh-, Radio- und digitale Programme umfasst, sondern auch Aspekte wie etwa Performance und öffentliche Inszenierung über „Kleidermode, Körperhaltung, Make-up" (Diederichsen XI) berücksichtigt, um den vielschichtigen Phänomenen und Prozessen gerecht zu werden, die dem Feld der Musik inhärent sind. Diese „Vielfalt medialer Möglichkeiten" (de Toro, „Überlegungen" 44), über die sich Musik artikulieren kann, eröffnet

[4] Vgl. hierzu im folgenden Abschnitt.

eine sehr große Bandbreite, transkulturelle Botschaften zu lancieren, wie es unter anderem Desblache – wie in der Einleitung zitiert – beschreibt. Die transmediale Eigenschaft von Musik kann so zu transtextuellen Inhalten führen, die das Potenzial haben, „multiple recodifications and reinventions of cultural signs" (de Toro, „Globalization" 23)[5] zu entfalten. Zur Unterscheidung der Transtextualität gegenüber der Transmedialität erläutert de Toro („Hacia una theoria" 231), dass letztere

> acentúa el diálogo entre diversas expresiones mediales, esto es, principalmente entre diversos tipos de medios, artefactos, técnicas, [mientras] el término de transtextualidad destaca el diálogo entre todas las posibilidades de expresiones textuales, sean éstas de naturaleza lingüística o no-lingüística. Mientras la transmedialidad subraya el tipo de artefacto, la transtextualidad resalta su contenido.[6]

Transtextualität und Transmedialität in diesem Verständnis sind per se ein „transkulturelles und nicht-national geprägtes Phänomen, da mediale Wirkungen sich immer transnational und transkulturell verhalten", wie de Toro („Überlegungen" 45-46) betont. Dieses Potenzial zur Transkulturalität, die durch Transtextualität und Transmedialität geschaffen wird, möchte ich hier im Hinblick auf die Beatles in einer „Mini"-Fallstudie analysieren, damit deren (vermeintliche) ‚Englishness' hinterfragen und in einen größeren Kontext von Musik einordnen.

Ausgangspunkt meines „beatlesken Erkundungsgangs", wie ich meine Studie überschrieben habe, ist daher auch nicht etwa ein Song der Beatles, sondern die von den Beatles geschaffene Ikonografie – insbesondere über Fotografien inszeniert – als Teil einer Definition von Musik im Diederichsenschen Verständnis. Diese war und ist so wesentlich für die erfolgreiche

[5] Vgl. auch de Toro, „Hacia una teoría" 219.
[6] Zu Deutsch: Transmedialität „betont den Dialog zwischen verschiedenen medialen Ausdrücken, d.h. vor allem zwischen verschiedenen Medientypen, Artefakten, Techniken, während der Begriff Transtextualität den Dialog zwischen allen Möglichkeiten *textueller* Ausdrücke hervorhebt, seien sie sprachlicher oder nicht-sprachlicher Natur. Während die Transmedialität den Fokus auf die Art des Artefakts legt, betont die Transtextualität den Inhalt desselben" (Übers. d. Verf.).

Selbstinszenierung der ‚Fab Four', dass sie bis heute ganz entscheidenden Einfluss auf die Szene der populären Musik ausübt:[7] „The Beatles' fashion and style iconography were – and still are – invitations to listeners to join the Fab Four, to find and express their own identities through imagination," so Katie Kapurch (258); und Steven Stark (135) ist davon überzeugt, dass „[i]n a world in which their look was so important to them, the Beatles understood from the beginning the importance of images".

Neben ihren Albumcovern – man denke nur an den Gang über den Zebrastreifen bei *Abbey Road*[8] – gelten insbesondere einige der von den ‚Fab Four' publizierten Fotografien als einflussreiche und weithin stilprägende (Kunst-)Werke. Dies zeigt sich bereits bei frühen Ablichtungen der Beatles, wie etwa denjenigen, die Astrid Kirchherr Anfang der 1960er Jahre in Hamburg von der Band aufnahm und die sich von der gängigen Inszenierung von Pop- und Rockstars der Zeit maßgeblich unterschieden:

> Die Abzüge, die Astrid herstellte, waren eine große Überraschung. Sie hatten nicht die lebendigen Farben der Agfafilme, die damals bei den Fotografen sehr verbreitet waren. Vielmehr waren es grobkörnige Schwarz-Weiß-Aufnahmen, die eher im späten 19. als in der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts gemacht zu sein schienen. Und auch die Figuren wirken beinahe viktorianisch, sie standen da zwischen den schweren alten Maschinen, und ihr angestrengter Versuch, cool dreinzublicken, betonte ihre fast lächerliche Jungenhaftigkeit, Unschuld und Verletzlichkeit nur noch stärker. Es waren jugendliche Outlaws auf der Flucht im Dschungel der Großstadt, mit hochgeschlagenen Kragen, die Gitarren wie Gewehre im Arm. So entstand nicht nur ein entlarvendes Selbstbildnis dieser Popgruppe, sondern hier war das Vorbild für alle anderen, die später folgen sollten. (Norman 268)[9]

All die (offiziellen) Fotografien von den Beatles stellen bereits vielschichtige Kunstwerke (der Selbstinszenierung) dar, die die verschiedenen Aspekte der Musik nach Diederichsen meisterlich vereinen und hierbei nicht nur ein Zeitkolorit repräsentieren und imagebildend wirken, sondern

[7] Vgl. etwa Kapurch 247-248; Mendoza Guardia 190-191; Neaverson 159.
[8] Vgl. Halpin 165-166; Norman 767; The Beatles 341-342.
[9] Vgl. weiterhin Leigh 32, 35; Stark 127-129, 224-226; Neaverson 150-152; The Beatles 52, 107.

ein Spiel mit den verschiedensten Referenzen darstellen, die Assoziationen und Konnotationen musikalischer, kultureller, politischer und gesellschaftlicher Art hervorrufen – folglich als transtextuell und transmedial einzuordnen sind. In diesem „dialogue [which] is not only internal, between different musics, but also with other art forms" (Chanan 12) stellt gerade der spezifische Umgang der Beatles mit nationalen Stereotypen im Hinblick auf ihre englische Heimat, der im Dienste der Infragestellung dieser Stereotypen lanciert wird und schließlich zur Schaffung einer Art transkultureller Identität genutzt wird, einen wesentlichen Aspekt dar.

Von swingenden Gentlemen und humorvollen Scousern – die ikonisch inszenierte ‚Englishness' der Beatles

Wie bereits erwähnt, gilt die ‚Englishness' der Beatles und deren Zurschaustellung als großer Garant für ihren Erfolg im Allgemeinen und gerade auch für ihre Beliebtheit in Amerika. In einem solchen, vor allem zu Beginn nahezu hysterischen Ausmaß hatte noch nie eine europäische, ganz zu schweigen von einer englischen Band, über dem großen Teich ‚eingeschlagen'. Oded Heilbronner (100) argumentiert:

> The Beatles' 'Englishness' may also . . . be a factor in their phenomenal success outside Britain. As with many other English successes beyond the boundaries of the island throughout the 1960s in musical and other genres (the 'British invasion' of the USA in 1964, James Bond films, Swinging London fashion), the Beatles' Englishness was a relict of Imperial British pride founded largely (even before its disintegration following the Second World War) on popular English cultural values. But in contrast to the musical 'invasion' of 1964 which was characterized by English groups influenced by American rock'n' roll, blues and American consumer culture, the real British musical 'invasion' started after 1965, when many English groups, led by the Beatles, represented the English way of life in their songs to American and European audiences.[10]

[10] Vgl. weiterhin Campbell 60; Cox 270; Fitzgerald 53-85; Stark 239; Inglis, „Men of Ideas?" 6.

Die Insel und ihre Kultur galten in den frühen 1960er Jahren als innovativ, progressiv und ‚erfrischend', wobei nicht nur die Musik das Label des besonders ‚Hippen' verliehen bekam. ‚Swinging London' symbolisierte mehr als jede andere Stadt die ‚Swinging Sixties', wo das Leben pulsierte; die englische Filmbranche und Mode- sowie Designindustrie avancierten zu Vorreitern weltweit und repräsentierten die junge Generation einer lebens- und spaßbejahenden Nachkriegs-Konsumgesellschaft. Gleichzeitig wurde der zuvor so oft im Süden Englands belächelte Norden gerade wegen der Herkunft der Beatles aus Liverpool kulturell aufgewertet, wozu der dort entstandene Mersey-Beat entscheidend beitrug.11 In diesem Kontext erarbeitet Andy Bennett (192) zwei Merkmale im Sound der Beatles, die er als wesentlich für das bezeichnet, was im Laufe der 1960er Jahre als „British pop sound" bekannt werden sollte. Auch wenn er betont, dass die Beatles nicht per se als „quintessential 'British' pop group" (192) klassifiziert werden können, hebt er einerseits deren Akzent als auch die Entwicklung eines eigenen Sounds aus einer Verbindung von amerikanischem Erbe, europäischer Musik und Innovationsfreude, die den Grundstein für eine eigene Musiktradition legte, hervor.12

Wie Heilbronner (107-109) erkennt auch Bennett (193) andererseits in den Lyrics der Beatles – so seien etwa die Songs auf dem Album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Band* vornehmlich zu sehen als „commentary on aspects of British social life" – eine Tendenz zu „britischen" Themen, Motiven und Bildern, die – teils verbunden mit dem als typisch englisch angesehenen Hang zur Tradition der Music Hall, teils verbunden mit der ebenfalls stereotypisierten nostalgischen Anlehnung an die Edwardianische Ära ab Mitte der 1960er Jahre – auch über nationale Grenzen hinaus transportiert wurden und werden.[13] Diese können jedoch auch als

[11] Vgl. ausführlich Cox 270; Stratton 44; Stark 240, 303-304; Sandbrook, *White Heat* 245-247.
[12] Vgl. Bennett 192; Halpin XI, 3-5, 74-76; Stratton 45-47.
[13] Vgl. ausführlich Engelskircher, „Beatle Boots" 63-64, „Transtextualität"; Cox 274; Kapurch 252-253; Stratton; Faulk 9; Heilbronner 109; Sandbrook, *White Heat* 439-440, 445-447; Bennett 193-194.

humorvoller oder gar sarkastischer Kommentar, als „way of ridiculing the institutional fabric of everyday British life“ (Bennett 203) gesehen werden – und damit wiederum als Teil des berühmten (selbst-)ironischen britischen Humors, der auch von den Beatles so oft bemüht wurde. Ähnlich verhält es sich auch mit der von den ‚Fab Four‘ so oft öffentlich zur Schau gestellten Liebe zu Tee, dem englischen ‚Nationalgetränk‘, die auf unzähligen Fotografien dokumentiert ist sowie aufgrund der Wahl der Motive und Hintergründe immer wieder als eines *der* nationalen Stereotypen britischer Kultur ironisch kommentiert wurde.[14]

Äußerlich zeigte sich die ‚Englishness‘ der Beatles vor allem zu Beginn ihrer Karriere etwa in ihrer von Manager Brian Epstein verordneten Kleidung, ihren „matching collarless suits, boxy short jackets, heeled boots and dark sweaters“ (Cura 106),[15] die Heilbronner (109) als edwardianisch bezeichnet. Durch diese wurde das Image der ‚Fab Four‘ von einer Gruppe rüder Teddy Boys in schwarzen Lederklamotten, die auf der Bühne rauchten, aßen, tranken und teils ihr Publikum anpöbelten, zu gepflegten höflichen Gentlemen ‚aufpoliert‘, die sich am Ende eines jeden Auftritts synchron verbeugten (Mills 113; Heilbronner 109). Richard Mills (30) sieht dies als „antithesis of 1950s music and sports stars who were depicted as macho, whereas […] the Beatles [… were] young, skinny, long-haired fashionable fops“. Heilbronner (109) hält diese Art von Bühnenkleidung und -verhalten gar für das typische Auftreten von „lower-class northern artists“, wobei die Beatles für die Auflösung von Klassengrenzen verantwortlich gewesen seien und zugleich als Symbol einer „successful social integration typical of the cultural life of England in the 1960s“ (111) fungierten. Darüber hinaus ordnet er auch ein weiteres Markenzeichen der Beatles in ihrem öffentlichen Auftreten in diesen Kontext ein: den von der Band zur Schau

[14] Vgl. etwa auch noch aktuell die Posts zum *National Tea Day* am 21.4.2022 auf dem Instagram-Kanal von johnlennon (abgerufen am 22.4.2022); zu dem ikonisch inszenierten Teetrinken der Beatles und dem transkulturellen Potenzial dieses nationalen Stereotyps aus translatorischer Perspektive vgl. Engelskircher, „Transtextualität“.
[15] Vgl. weiterhin Mills 28-30; Stark 133.

gestellten britischen, sarkastischen Humor, der zum Teil auch auf ihre Liverpooler Wurzeln, zum Teil auf damalige Comedy-Programme wie die *Goon Show* der BBC zurückging, sowie ihren Hang zur Selbstironie, den sie insbesondere im Umgang mit der Presse ‚auslebten' und so wegen ihrer (vermeintlichen) Authentizität weitere Sympathien gewannen.[16] Auch George Harrison hielt den Humor der Beatles für einen der Erfolgsgaranten und ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal der Band:

> Auch wenn man einen Hit hatte, brauchte man noch zusätzlich etwas, um sich von allen anderen abzuheben. Die Beatles waren in der Tat sehr lustig; selbst wenn man unseren Humor nach New York oder sonst wohin verpflanzte, kam er großartig an. Wir alberten herum und verzogen keine Miene, wirklich, und das liebten die Leute. . . . In unserem Fall kam der Humor noch geballter, schon weil wir vier von der Sorte waren und uns gegenseitig Bälle zuspielten. Ging einem von uns der Saft aus, hatte der andere schon die nächste witzige Bemerkung parat. (Harrison, zit. nach The Beatles 128; vgl. 145)

John Lennon glaubte bereits 1964, dass ihr Humor den Beatles geholfen habe, mit dem überbordenden öffentlichen Interesse und den damit einhergehenden Verpflichtungen umzugehen:

> Was uns immer geholfen hat, wenn es wirklich hart kam, war unser Sinn für Humor. Wir können über alles mögliche lachen – einschließlich über uns selbst. Auf diese Art meistern wir alles, wir sehen alles ironisch – auch uns. Wir nehmen alles nicht so ernst. (Lennon, zit. nach The Beatles 120)

Kari Kallioniemi (94) allerdings hält die teils so überbetonte ‚Englishness' im Oeuvre der Beatles für „overused and clichéd". Die als typisch englisch klassifizierten Merkmale seien eher regional, sprich basierend auf der Liverpooler Herkunft der Beatles beruhend, denn national verwurzelt und würden deshalb im Ausland teils gar nicht richtig verstanden. Er fasst zusammen, dass „the Beatles were predominantly a modernist pop group, trying to distance themselves from their background – either regional or national – and thus avoiding themes of Englishness in their work, preferring an ambivalent representation of modern society" (94).

[16] Siehe zu diesem Themenkomplex etwa Bedford 24; Davis 92; Southerland 10; Heilbronner 102; Stark 35-36, 60, 163-165, 212, 219, 223; Inglis, „Men of Ideas?" 10.

Die von Kallioniemi hier beschriebene ambivalente Darstellung der Gesellschaft, die er bei den Beatles ausmacht, bietet bereits einen Ansatzpunkt, um die Relevanz der so oft bemühten ‚Englishness' der ‚Fab Four' zu hinterfragen. Mein ‚Erkundungsgang' soll hierbei anleiten zur Entdeckung des transkulturellen Potenzials im Schaffen der Beatles, wobei die genannte Ikonografie als Aspekt der Definition von Musik nach Diederichsen die Grundlage für diese Untersuchung bildet, da sie in ihrer Vielschichtigkeit der Komplexität des Untersuchungsgegenstands Rechnung trägt.

Mad Days Out – vom ‚English Garden' in die Welt

Was heute Soziale Medien für die Selbstdarstellung (von Künstler:innen) leisten, wurde in den 1960ern über ‚traditionelle' (Fan-)Presse der Öffentlichkeit zugänglich gemacht. Fotoshootings gehörten so zum Alltag der Beatles und dokumentieren nicht nur die Wandlungsfähigkeit im Stil der ‚Fab Four', sondern auch ihre musikalischen Anliegen und damit verknüpfte Botschaften. Dem begrenzten Platz, der für diesen Aufsatz zur Verfügung steht, geschuldet, werde ich nur eine Fotografie im Rahmen einer „Mini"-Fallstudie untersuchen können, deren Analyse aber tiefgehend vornehmen. Sie soll hierbei exemplarisch stehen für Beobachtungen, die ich im Rahmen meines Forschungsprojekts zu den Beatles bislang gemacht habe.

Die im Folgenden untersuchte Fotografie ist eine Aufnahme Tom Murrays, die bei der so genannten *Mad Day Out*-Session am 28. Juli 1968 entstand. Sie ist in die zweite Schaffensphase der Beatles einzuordnen, als sich die Band von ihrem ‚Saubermannimage' und dem eher klassischen Rock'n'Roll-Sound emanzipierte und sich psychedelischen Klanglandschaften sowie musikalischen Experimenten im Studio zuwandte. Dies spiegelte sich auch in ihrem neuen Stil – die uniformartige Anzugmode, Rollkragenpullover und Pilzkopffrisuren wichen längeren Haaren,

Bärten und farbenfroher Hippiekleidung; John Lennon hatte begonnen, seine berühmten ‚Granny Glasses', die mittlerweile ebenfalls ikonisch gewordene runde Nickelbrille, zu tragen.[17] Die vier ‚lads from Liverpool' waren erwachsen geworden und individualisierten sich auch zunehmend von der Idee des vierköpfigen Monsters zu mehr und mehr eigenständigen Künstlern mit teils bahnbrechenden Ideen, die die Geschichte der populären Musik maßgeblich veränderten.[18]

Fig. 1. Photography by Tom Murray USA, Ltd.

Die Aufnahmen der *Mad Day Out*-Session entstanden an unterschiedlichen Locations, teils in Schwarz-Weiß, teils in Farbe, teils nostalgisch, teils humoristisch inszeniert. Der in Lennons Song „I Am the Walrus" besungene „English Garden" ist Teil der ikonischen Fotografie und soll an dieser Stelle als Ausgangspunkt dienen für die Analyse des beatlesken Spiels mit nationalen Stereotypen, deren Infragestellung, Kommentierung und Überwindung. Passend zu ihrer bunten Kleidung, die ihre Pionierstellung in Sachen Mode der damaligen Zeit unterstreicht,[19] posieren die

[17] Vgl. etwa Engelskircher, „Beatle Boots" 65-66; Kapurch 253-255; King 204.
[18] Vgl. Roessner, „The Rise" 263; Zolten 50; MacDonald 249; Stark 321, 410.
[19] Vgl. Kapurch 247, 249-251; Gregory 145; King 18, 30-32, 134-135; Roessner, „We All Want" 152; Whiteley 57-58; Marshall 164, 170.

Beatles in einer Blumenlandschaft, die einerseits auf die ‚Flower-Power'-Bewegung, andererseits durch die überbordende Flora auf ein exotisches Ambiente verweist, das die indischen Einflüsse, die nicht nur das Songwriting der damaligen Beatles prägten, aufgreift.

Das 1965 veröffentlichte Stück „Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" gilt als eines der ersten Lieder in der Geschichte der populären Musik, in dem eine Sitar verwendet wird – wenn auch noch gespielt wie eine Gitarre, da George Harrison erst später Unterricht bei Ravi Shankar[20] nahm. Kathryn B. Cox (275) betont dennoch die Innovativität des Songs: „This timbral evocation would have been novel to the ears of most European and American pop listeners at the time, and in combination with ambiguous lyrics, the track exuded a mysteriousness that appealed to countercultural listeners."[21] Paul McCartney (zit. nach The Beatles 209) erinnert sich:

> Es ist schön, wenn man anfängt, die beiden Arten von Musik zu verbinden. Die Anfänge waren ganz schlicht, und dann wurde [es] . . . anspruchsvoller. . . . Es . . . hilft Leuten, sie [die indische Musik] zu verstehen – weil sie sehr schwer zu verstehen ist. Aber wenn du dich hineinfühlst, ist indische Musik das Größte.

Der revolutionäre Sound der Sitar faszinierte jedoch nicht nur die Beatles, sondern hatte insgesamt „enormous repercussions in the music world" (Guesdon und Margotin 280).[22] Die Verwendung der Sitar in „Norwegian Wood" war so für die Beatles nur der Beginn ihres von indischer Musik und deren Instrumenten beeinflussten Songwriting. Vor allem Harrison tauchte immer tiefer in deren speziellen Sound ein, was mit seinem wachsenden Interesse am indischen Lebensstil insgesamt, etwa über die praktische Ausübung der Transzendentalen Meditation, einherging. Auf dem 1966 erschienenen Album *Revolver* ist einerseits Lennons Stück „Tomorrow Never Knows"

[20] Ravi Shankar (7.4.1920-11.12.2012) war ein indischer Musiker und Komponist, mit dem George Harrison eine enge Freundschaft verband.
[21] Vgl. hierzu auch Halpin 140-142; Zolten 42; MacDonald 165-166.
[22] Vgl. weiterhin Cox 275; Halpin 140; Reising und LeBlanc 93.

aufgrund des durch die Tambura und die Sitar erzielten „harmonic drone“ (Cox 274)[23] von indischer Musik inspiriert; zum anderen gilt Harrisons „Love You To“ auf demselben Album als „absolutely unprecedented“ (Reck 102)[24] in der Geschichte der westlichen populären Musik, weil er sich nun auch an der formalen Struktur indischer Musik orientierte und neben der Sitar auch eine Tabla zum Einsatz kam.[25] Harrisons „Within You Without You“ – 1967 veröffentlicht und wie bereits „Love You To“ mit Musiker:innen des Londoner Asian Music Circle eingespielt – ist weiterhin aufgrund seiner „stunning combination of Eastern and Western music . . . , one of the first of its kind to be released on a rock/pop album“ (Halpin 143).[26] Mit „The Inner Light“ (1968) ging Harrison sogar noch einen Schritt weiter: Seine Lyrics lehnten sich nun konkret an östliche Philosophie an, genauer an „Kapitel 48“ aus *Tao-Te-King. Das Buch vom Weg und von der Tugend* Lao-tses aus dem 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr., einem Klassiker des Taoismus.[27] Durch seine „extraordinary synthesis of separate musical and lyrical traditions (in this case, Indian instrumentation, Chinese philosophy, and Western popular music)“ (Inglis, „Revolution“ 115)[28] wird das Stück zu einem transkulturellen Song auf diversen Ebenen.

Jason Toynbee und Byron Dueck halten fest, dass die musikalische Beschäftigung mit fremden Kulturen oftmals den Beigeschmack des Exotismus trägt. Diese könne jedoch auch im Kontext einer „authentic spirituality, emotionality and primality [sic!], and as a source of sounds, ideas and musicians that can refresh stagnating Western traditions“ (32) verortet und als Möglichkeit einer auf gegenseitigem Respekt beruhenden kulturellen Annäherung und Verständigung betrachtet werden. So ist die Hinwendung zu indischer (Musik-)Kultur in den

[23] Vgl. auch Hamelman 282; Halpin 142, 151; MacDonald 189-191.
[24] Siehe weiterhin etwa Hamelman 282; Venturo 99; Halpin 141.
[25] Vgl. etwa Cox 275; Hamelman 281; MacDonald 194; The Beatles 209.
[26] Vgl. auch Guesdon und Margotin 395-396; Marshall 173.
[27] Vgl. Hamelman 286; Guesdon und Margotin 446; Inglis, „Revolution“ 115; MacDonald 274; Everett 153.
[28] Vgl. auch MacDonald 275.

Kontext des in den 1960er Jahren wachsenden Interesses an alternativen Lebensmodellen und Kritik am herrschenden westlichen System einzuordnen, was sich hauptsächlich in der Hippie-Kultur und Anti-Vietnam-Kriegsbewegung der Zeit artikulierte. Zur Pionierrolle der Beatles hält Dominic Sandbrook (*White Heat* 444) fest:

> On one hand, the Beatles transformation into Britain's most famous hippies lost them the support of much of the press and many conservative onlookers. Yet, on the other, it allowed them to maintain their popularity among younger listeners, for whom the band's evolution was a sign that they were still at the cutting edge of popular culture.[29]

Fremden Kulturen wurde in diesem Kontext folglich nicht nur ein interessierter, exotisierender Blick zugeworfen; sie galten als Möglichkeit des Auswegs aus einer Gesellschaft, mit deren Werten und Traditionen bewusst gebrochen wurde, sodass diese Art der suchenden Annäherung vielmehr als „step . . . towards engagement and mutual understanding" (Toynbee und Dueck 32) bezeichnet werden kann. Des Weiteren ist Musik – in der von mir verwendeten Definition von Diederichsen – per se ein transkulturelles Konglomerat, für das kulturelle und nationale Grenzen sehr schwer, wenn überhaupt, zu ziehen sind. Toynbee und Dueck (35) halten in diesem Kontext fest, „that certain practices, instruments, and sounds . . . become thoroughly indigenized in their new contexts (thus the harmonium is as indigenous in India as curry in the United Kingdom)". Einflüsse sollten daher gerade nicht nur hegemonial aus westlicher Perspektive betrachtet werden, da sie transkulturell zirkulieren (Marc).

Trotz der bereits analysierten Assoziationen, die ich aus dem Foto der *Mad Day Out*-Session extrahiert habe und die über die Kleidung der Beatles und die damit verbundene Musik transkulturelle Ideen lancieren, scheint das im Fokus stehende Bild der Beatles durch das viktorianisch anmutende Landhaus im Hintergrund wiederum die genannte Vision einer

[29] Vgl. auch Sandbrook, *White Heat* 445, 457-459, 469-470.

alternativen Welt zu konterkarieren. Es wird deutlich, dass wir uns immer noch in London befinden, das sich zwar von einer ‚Swinging' Hauptstadt zu einer „psychedelic . . . underground counterculture scene" (Cox 270) entwickelt hatte, aber immer noch in England liegt – mit dem ‚English Garden' als traditionellem Idyll eines „village green" (Stratton 53). Der Verweis auf den britischen Humor durch McCartneys vermeintlich erschreckte Mimik mit weit aufgerissenen Augen auf Murrays Fotografie, die mit einem nur mühsam unterdrückten Grinsen verbunden wird, stützt auf den ersten Blick diese Inszenierung nationaler Stereotypen.

Heilbronner (103)[30] spricht ob der Begegnung von Nationalem und Transkulturellem von „clashing identities" innerhalb der englischen Gesellschaft, im Sinne ihrer von Kallioniemi beschriebenen Ambivalenz, während Iain Chambers (94-95) hinsichtlich der Aushandlung von Eigenem und Fremden verweist auf

> . . . the possibility of two perspectives and two versions of 'Britishness'. One is Anglo-centric, frequently conservative, backward-looking, and increasingly located in a frozen and largely stereotyped idea of national culture. The other is ex-centric, open-ended, and multi-ethnic. The first is based on a homogeneous 'unity' in which history, tradition, and individual biographies and roles, including ethnic and sexual ones, are fundamentally fixed and embalmed in the national epic, in the mere fact of being 'British'. The other perspective suggests an overlapping network of histories and traditions, a heterogenous complexity in which positions and identities, including that of the 'national', cannot be taken for granted, are not interminably fixed but are in flux.

Die konservativ-traditionell ausgerichtete Variante der von Chambers genannten ‚reinen' ‚Britishness' wurde allein durch die Lebensrealität in den 1960er Jahren, durch diverse ausländische Einflüsse, Immigrationsströme, die amerikanische Popkultur, den Rock'n'Roll mit seinen Wurzeln im Blues der schwarzen Amerikaner, das Interesse für fremde Kulturen durch verstärkte Reiseaktivitäten, die Suche nach alternativen Lebensmodellen, auf kultureller,

[30] Vgl. auch Sandbrook, *White Heat* 413; Chambers 89-90.

politischer und gesellschaftlicher Ebene gehörig durcheinandergewirbelt, womit sich die hochgradig transkulturell aufgeladene Seite zunehmend manifestieren konnte. Sandbrook (*Never Had It* 299) konstatiert für die entsprechende Entwicklung in den 1960er Jahren:

> Few subjects were as controversial and emotive during the late fifties and sixties as immigration. The arrival of workers and families from the West Indies, South Asia and East Africa left an indelible mark on British life, from the appearance of towns and cities to the cadences of British poetry, the beat of British music and the spice of British cooking. The way in which the British viewed the outside world could never be quite the same after they had accepted into their midst thousands of newcomers from overseas, and similarly, the easy assumption that Britishness itself was a matter of racial inheritance was no longer acceptable in a multi-racial society.[31]

Die traditionelle nationale Kultur Englands wurde so als solche in Frage gestellt und trug der Diversität innerhalb der eigenen Kultur mehr und mehr Rechnung. Peter Ackroyd (448-449) hält ‚Englishness' gar für das „principle of diversity itself" – und Jon Stratton (47) „the idea of variety" für „quintessentially English". Konkret auf meinen Untersuchungsgegenstand bezogen zeigt sich so ein Spiel mit nationalen Stereotypen (hier dem ‚English Garden', der viktorianischen Villa und dem Verweis auf die spezielle Art des britischen Humors über McCartneys Mimik) einerseits sowie deren Infragestellung, Kommentierung und Überwindung andererseits – sowohl im Mikrokosmos der Beatles (durch ihre Hinwendung zu Hippie-Kleidung, indischer Musik- und Lebenswelt) als auch im Makrokosmos des ‚British Empire' (durch die Manifestation transkultureller Einflüsse und eine Neu-Aushandlung von englischer Identität), sodass die hier analysierte Fotografie der Beatles exemplarisch als transkulturelles, transtextuelles und transmediales musikalisches Werk interpretiert werden kann, wenn man die diskutierten Definitionen Diederichsens, de Toros und Desblaches zugrundelegt. Weiterhin findet eine Artikulation dessen statt, was Simon Frith (109) als mobile Identität bezeichnet, „a process not a

[31] Vgl. weiterhin Toynbee und Dueck 40; Heilbronner 103, 111; Chambers 90, 95, 99.

thing, a becoming not a being“. Das Nachdenken über sich ständig im Fluss befindende Identitäten wirbelt die Vorstellung ‚klassischer‘ nationaler Zugehörigkeit durcheinander und ebnet den Weg für eine neue Beschäftigung mit einer transkulturellen Lebensrealität, die vielseitiges Potenzial für alternative Lebensentwürfe enthält, für das gerade der Bereich der Musik als Experimentier- und Erprobungsfeld dienen kann.

Fazit, Diskussion und Ausblick

In diesem Aufsatz wurde ausgehend von der so häufig betonten ‚Englishness‘ für den Erfolg der Beatles das transkulturelle Potenzial analysiert, das der Musik der ‚Fab Four‘ – im erweiterten Verständnis Diederichsens – inhärent ist. Hierbei diente eine ikonische Fotografie aus der Mad Day Out-Session vom 28. Juli 1968 als Ausgangspunkt für Überlegungen, die sowohl Mode, musikalische Einflüsse als auch eine Reflexion über alternative Lebensmodelle in den 1960er Jahren sowie die Neu-Ausrichtung der englischen Identität umfassten – womit die diskutierte transtextuelle und transmediale Beschaffenheit von Musik eindrücklich belegt wird. Im Anschluss an die auf einer mikrostrukturellen Ebene bereits untersuchte Ambivalenz der englischen Gesellschaft mit ihrer Fokussierung auf spezifisch nationale Traditionen einerseits und ihrer durch verschiedene Faktoren begünstigten, transkulturellen Identität andererseits kann so makrostrukturell ein Bewusstsein geschärft werden nicht nur über die Gesellschaft zu reflektieren, in der wir leben, sondern auch über diejenige, in der wir gerne leben würden. Dies wird insbesondere in einer globalisierten Welt relevant, die einerseits vernetzter denn je zusammenrückt, andererseits aber verstärkt nationale und lokale Traditionen und Identitäten zu stärken scheint, die einer Auseinandersetzung mit und einem Respekt vor transkultureller Lebensrealität teils vehement entgegenstehen. Musiker:innen, die über ein Medium der

Kulturvermittlung verfügen, das grenzübergreifend Wirkung entfalten und Menschen zusammenbringen kann, sind wesentliche Akteur:innen in einem Feld, in dem transkulturelle Identitäten ausgehandelt, neu gedacht, neu lokalisiert und neu gelebt werden. Im Kontext der Globalisierung und weltweiter Immigration/Emigration hat Musik somit das Potenzial, zu einer essenziellen Form des Zuhauses und zur Möglichkeit einer Neukonzeptionalisierung von Heimat zu werden.

Svetlana Boym betont, dass „[l]iteral and metaphoric homes, actual places and imagined homelands as well as their porous borders will be examined together. There is no place like home, but in some cases itself has been displaced and deliberately reimagined." (210) „Imaginary homelands" (deutscher Titel: „Heimatländer der Fantasie"), wie Salman Rushdie sie für den Bereich der Literatur definierte, spielen in gegenwärtigen Gesellschaften, in „translated and transplanted cultures" (Boym 234), eine kaum zu unterschätzende Rolle und sind gerade bei einer „Relocation" durch Musik, wie Martin Stokes sie beschreibt, von ganz entscheidender Bedeutung.

Die weithin bekannte Musik der Beatles und ihr umfangreiches, vielschichtiges Erbe können in diesem Kontext dazu dienen, über hiermit verbundene Narrative Zugehörigkeit zu einer transnationalen Gemeinschaft zu generieren.[32] Mills (202) hält fest: „The traditional canon of the Beatles' songs opens a vista on the 1960s while a reinterpretation of their work by a contemporary audience conveys society as it is today and also creates a new . . . form of art." Dieser Kanon mit seiner in ihm angelegten Idee der transkulturellen Botschaft kann so auch heute dazu genutzt werden, in einer ambivalenten Gesellschaft zu vermitteln und alternative Lebenskonzepte und Formen der Gemeinschaft zu entwickeln, die der Lebensrealität in einer transnationalen Zukunft

[32] Vgl. Mills 63, 173-175, 189; Stokes 4.

gerecht werden. Um mit einem Zitat Desblaches (316) zu enden: „[M]usic can reflect the past and present but is at its best when imagining the future.“

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Parodic Transitions to Corporeal Reality: The Spectator's Experience(s) of Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*

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1. Introduction

In line with Paul O'Flinn's idea that "there is no such thing as *Frankenstein*, there are only *Frankensteins*, as the text is ceaselessly rewritten, reproduced, refilmed and redesigned" (O'Flinn 114), Francesca Saggini underlines that "*Frankenstein* is undoubtedly among those texts that have succeeded in staying alive and assertive due to an enduring cultural impact and an extraordinary adaptive capacity that could well be termed biologico-discursive" (Saggini 5). Recent collections dedicated to the legacy of Mary Shelley's novel (Cutchins and Perry; Saggini; Parrino) productively highlight the need for a more open, interdisciplinary and transmedia approach to all those adaptations and after-readings that constitute "an integral part of Shelley's novel from its conception" (Saggini 21). Both Maria Parrino (3) and Dennis R. Perry (138) agree that Shelley's readings (of, for instance, Plutarch's *Lives*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*) radically influenced the rich intertextuality of her novel. Indeed, Perry underlines the analogy between the patchwork body of the monster and the system of references in the novel with the effective image of "intertextual monster" (138). In addition, scholars' fascination with the character of the creature has resulted in a huge proliferation of literature on a considerable variety of topics such as (uncanny) otherness (Tropp; Gualtieri), the blurring of human boundaries (De

Michelis; Colombani), the disruption of parental relationship (Heholt), the double (Botting; Buenza), gender and sexual issues (Young; Picart) and political references (Baldick).

In this article, I would like to focus on Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*, a film parody of a trilogy of film adaptations of Shelley's novel: James Whale's *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* and Rowland V. Lee's *Son of Frankenstein*. Mel Brooks (and his co-writer and star Gene Wilder, who first came up with the idea during the shooting of *Blazing Saddles* in 1974; see Brooks, *The Story of the Making of* 24; Gehring 151) wanted to spoof another film genre, after his parody of western movies, and decided to target (gothic) horror and specifically the iconic Universal 1930s trilogy.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role played by the implied spectator of this parodic film. Parody is a practice that explicitly sheds light on the essential role of readers or spectators as figures involved in the process of meaning construction. This article aims to answer the following questions: what is the role of the meta-cinematographic discourse that *Young Frankenstein* conveys on gothic horror as a genre? What is the influence of film parody on our cognitive and aesthetic approach to genre films? To answer these questions, I will demonstrate that *Young Frankenstein* is a parody which exploits the features of the parodied genre for the purpose of displacing the genre itself into its spectator's corporeal reality. The most original part of this paper lies in its methodological approach. I will be applying part of Wolfgang Iser's reader response criticism to the case study of *Young Frankenstein.* This type of research method is usually mentioned as useful (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*; Harries), but not applied in scholarly work on film studies or film parody. The lack of connection between Iser's reader response criticism and film studies could be due to a combination of factors. Firstly, Iser focuses mainly on literary examples, as his work on the implied reader in prose fiction demonstrates. Secondly, there is a

general rejection in film studies of approaches that are classified as literary. However, as Carole Berger points out, the methods outlined by reader response critics such as Fish and Iser are strikingly cinematic (144). Berger, for instance, convincingly points to analogies between Iser's interest in the textual gaps and Eisenstein's theory of montage (148). Another analogy, which is mentioned but only loosely developed by Berger (145), concerns the dynamism both in the process of viewing and in the proliferation of a range of possible responses. A similar argument has been developed by Martin Barker who, adapting Iser's concept of the implied reader for film, coined the term 'implied audience' and demonstrated the usefulness of Iser's concept for a discussion of filmic blanks. While the works by Berger and Barker illustrate the relevance of Iser's theory for film studies, they remain slightly underdeveloped (Berger) or problematic in assuming a qualitative difference between the more automatic activity of gap-filling for spectators of a film in comparison to that of readers of a book (Barker). This article therefore rather aligns with Richard J. Murphy, who demonstrates that the ideas of film theorists such as David Bordwell and his co-author Kristin Thompson form interesting connections with Iser's (Murphy 122), thus showing that Iser's work is compatible with film studies. This article's primary goal too is to demonstrate the potential of Iser's theory in film analysis, by focusing on the specific case of film parody. As I will demonstrate, concepts such as wandering viewpoint, implied reader and negation that are generally applied to non-parodic literary texts show close similarities with highly influential studies on parody, such as Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* and Margaret Rose's *Parody/Metafiction*. Combining these contributions allows me to argue that the efficacy of a parody lies not only in the spectator's degree of knowledge but also *between* degrees of knowledge.

In the following pages, I will first analyse how *Young Frankenstein* uses the exact same features of the parodied texts, without extraneous elements that are typical of both modern film

parodies and Brooks' other genre parodies, by referring to Rick Altman's work on film genres and Dan Harries' study on film parody. Then, I will focus on the application of Iser's theory in order to illustrate the complexity of intertextual relationships with the target films, and finally I will refer to how corporeality collides with the abstract mechanisms of film genres.

2. A Parody of the Gothic Horror Genre

The trilogy of movies from the 1930s re-tells the story of the ambitious scientist who dares to bring a dead body back to life, which eventually becomes his worst nightmare and a menacing threat for all. Even if many crucial episodes of the novel are represented in these movies and reinvented by Brooks, the trilogy plays freely with the contents of the novel. Several aspects are substantially altered, from the omission of the frame narrative and the multiple viewpoints to the addition of Frankenstein's servant.[1] Scholars like Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation*) as well as J. D. Connor, embrace the idea that fidelity to the source text should not be an urgent issue in adaptation studies and advocate instead for seeing an adaptation as fully independent. However, when approaching the analysis of an intertextual or intermedial product such as a parody, references and comparisons to the materials targeted by the parody become unavoidable. Whether *Young Frankenstein* is considered a film very close to the novel (Brennan), a multi-layered parody of previous films (Elliot), or a parody of the 1930s adaptations (as I will maintain), the ultimate system tackled by Brooks' adaptation is the gothic horror genre, if not the horror genre in general. As outlined by Irina Rajewsky in her distinction between intertextuality and intramediality (where the former becomes a subcategory of the latter), references can be both to an individual film and to a filmic (sub)system (54), which both is the case in *Young Frankenstein* as it aims at the 1930s trilogy as

[1] On the introduction of the figure of the assistant see Saggini 24.

well as the latter's genre. I argue that the gothic horror genre is both the means or repertoire (Iser 69) through which spectator's expectations are shaped and the target of *Young Frankenstein*.

Defining genres and classifying texts accordingly has been a cultural practice since Aristotle. As Altman argues, film genres are "industrially certified and publicly shared" (16). Altman asserts that the repetitive nature of genres allows us to predict the plot development of a film (25). He agrees with Francesco Casetti, who refers to shared sets of laws that establish communicative formulae and organise a system of expectations (292). Barry Langford agrees with this view but at the same time extends it by seeing genres as constantly evolving, flexible categories. This approach to film genre is in line with Barry Grant's, who avoids genre fixity and argues that genres are non-prescriptive and always combinative (28). Langford also partially agrees with scholars who propose to analyse genre development in historical phases, from an experimental, to a classical and then to a saturated stage, and he modifies existing models into his own evolutionary, flexible one. He refers to John Cawelti, who argues that when genres move from a phase of conscious self-awareness to a phase in which generic patterns become too predictable "it is at this point that parodic and satiric treatments proliferate" (296). The reiteration of familiar traits makes film genres very attractive targets for parodies because they meet what Hutcheon identifies as an essential requirement of parodic codes (*A Theory of Parody* 93). More specifically, the gothic horror genre seems to be a particularly suitable target because its literary and filmic tradition relies on the reiteration of a set of canonical characters, situations, settings, and plots. However, as Altman duly points out, even the interpretation of parodies of canonical genres may vary owing to the multiplicity of their audiences.

Mel Brooks' parody is an interesting case because it embodies and accurately displays a significant feature of parody, that is the paradox of parody (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 69).

This concept, elaborated by Hutcheon from Mikhail Bakhtin's work, implies the coexistence of authority and transgression in a single text, which "can be normative and conservative, or it can be provocative and revolutionary" and show "reverence and mockery" (75-76). Being able to express "complicity and critique", parody "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 11).[2] Indeed, even if the gothic horror repertoire is constantly spoofed in *Young Frankenstein*, the intertextual and intermedial relationship between *Young Frankenstein* and its target films is so strong that it would be incorrect to see the parody as a complete rejection of the gothic genre's aesthetic conventions. *Young Frankenstein*, when compared to other film-genre parodies directed by Brooks, proves to be a very sophisticated and subtle genre parody because *Young Frankenstein* literally "incorporates" its targets. Its references to the 1930s trilogy concern not only the contents, but also the structure and the style: in other words, targets become a fundamental and active part of the parody itself. This allows *Young Frankenstein* to be both a parody of the 1930s trilogy and gothic horror genre.

Michela Vanon Alliata points out that Brooks' parody is mainly achieved by means of incongruity (182), which concerns expectancy violation (184) and "involves a moment of surprise or shock that results from the clash of two contrastive meanings" (187). She interprets *Young Frankenstein* as an example of burlesque, "a humorous imitation . . . that depends on an extravagant incongruity between a subject and its treatment" (180). However, she does not compare it with other genre parodies directed by Brooks. In these parodies, Brooks largely employs the strategy of the "extraneous inclusion", that is the introduction of elements that all "fall outside of the target text's general conventions" (Harries 77). Consequently, Vanon Alliata fails to observe that *Young Frankenstein* is the least incongruous of Mel Brooks' film genre parodies,

[2] In a similar way, also Elliot focuses on the coexistence of conflicting aims of parody in the specific case of gothic film parodies (27).

if we consider its close relationship with its targets. It is the one that embraces and displays Hutcheon's paradox most effectively, because it respects the codes of its targets more than any of his other parodies.

Harries takes inspiration from Altman's terminology in his study on film parody and coins a helpful terminology to describe film parody techniques. His term "lexicon" refers to "elements that populate any film text, such as the setting, the characters, the costumes, and the various items comprising the film's iconography" (8). What he calls "syntax", in turn, includes "the narrative structure in which the lexical elements reside, and functions by regulating the ways in which lexical units can be combined. In other words, the syntax is the film's plot" (8). Then, with the term "style" Harries designates what "(including sound effects, camera movements and dialogue subtitles) waves itself throughout the lexicon and syntax to add additional sets of expectations based on that particular type of film text" (8). While there is a close correspondence between Harries' concepts of lexicon and syntax and Altman's semantic and syntactic categories, Harries' "style" and Altman's "pragmatics" refer to two different aspects. For the purpose of my analysis, Harries' definition of style is more suitable than the category of pragmatics used by Altman. In fact, Altman's study *Film/Genre* focuses on an extremely wide range of practical and actual audience implications,[3] and thus clearly falls outside the scope of this article, which remains text-focused. Following Harries' terminology, my analysis focusses on lexical, syntactical, and stylistic elements to scrutinize the proximity of *Young Frankenstein* to its target movies and the gothic horror genre.

Applying Harries' terminology to Brooks' parody, it transpires that features of the classic gothic horror trilogy are reused with great accuracy. Not only does *Young Frankenstein* parody

[3] According to Altman, "pragmatic analysis treats . . . a feedback system connecting user groups" (208; 211).

conventions of the gothic horror plot, but also other codes and the mechanisms of the genre that are deeply rooted in the literary tradition of British pre-Romantic and Romantic poets and writers.[4] Among the many gothic semantic/lexical elements that appear in *Young Frankenstein*, the prevalence of night scenes and the omnipresence of thunder, the sound of which is identical to the one we hear in the classical trilogy, are recurring aspects that evidently show a very close relationship to the parodied genre. Other relevant gothic details emerge from the setting. In the opening scene, we are introduced to the story through a gradual zoom towards an almost abandoned castle (00:00-04:55). As we notice later in the movie, it has thick walls and stairs (20:01), a huge wooden gate (18:31), hidden passages (24:21; 26:37), and rooms with human skulls (27:16). The cemetery from where the corpse of the creature is exhumed is another typical semantic/lexical gothic element (see Whale's *Frankenstein* 02:00-06:25). All these details allow us to immediately recognise the gothic horror ambience because they are typical and distinctive traits of gothic literature and cinema. Their constant presence in this film leads us to consider the gothic horror as a fundamental aesthetic feature, even though – and exactly because – it remains the parody's target.

One of the most interesting syntactic elements that *Young Frankenstein* shares with its targets is the encounter between the creature and Elizabeth – a passage that is fundamental for the development of the plot both in the novel and in *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*. In Shelley's novel (195-6), the monster kills her before she and Victor Frankenstein can spend their wedding night together. The scene is adapted in Whale's *Frankenstein* (48:33-53:14) with Elizabeth surviving the encounter. This change allows Brooks to imagine a sexual encounter between Elizabeth and the monster. To do so, Brooks establishes a close dialogue both with the

[4] See Punter for further information on gothic horror literature.

novel and with the parody's two filmic targets. In *Young Frankenstein* (01:27:56-01:31:32), as we see in *Frankenstein*, the monster enters Elizabeth's room and scares her; then, he kidnaps her and carries her into a cave, as we see in *Bride of Frankenstein*. There, the monster seduces her. So, the crucial, extremely dramatic original passage remains the aesthetic and narrative reference, but it is also completely overturned by Brooks' parody, since spectators do not expect a narrative twist in which Elizabeth becomes the monster's lover.

In *Young Frankenstein*, creating a certain degree of suspense by playing with what remains off-screen, i.e., a narrative dynamic that is highly characteristic of (gothic) horror movies, this episode also represents a significant example of style. When Elizabeth is in her room, we see the monster's shadow while he walks the streets of the city and we hear his moans, but we do not see him. This happens after Elizabeth's arrival and after a dialogue between her and Frederick on their imminent first wedding night; therefore, we have enough elements to infer that we are about to see an adaptation of the episode described in the novel and represented in Whale's movies. Then, the monster enters the room, and we hear a dreadful scream off-screen in the exact moment when the camera frames the full moon, recalling the details portrayed in Shelley's description of the episode. Another stylistic feature of *Young Frankenstein* with a similar effect is the film's use of black-and-white images which reproduces the atmosphere of the classic trilogy, as stated by Brooks himself (39-40). Wes Gehring agrees with the fact that Brooks wanted to recreate the style of the 1930s trilogy by shooting in black and white, using optical devices such as wipes and iris-outs (154).

As we have seen, the nature of the bond between Brooks' parody and its target films becomes paradoxical if we consider the strong similarities that occur and are reiterated at different levels. The codes of the parodied genre are reused accurately whilst being simultaneously overturned, as I will be discussing in the next section, by unexpected narrative developments and

outcomes that disrupt the spectators' expectations, allowing at the same time a respect and a transgression of generic conventions, as Hutcheon states. This is also in line with Gehring, who considers *Young Frankenstein* as a parody that reaffirms (7) and gives tribute to its targets (166). He argues that, with *Young Frankenstein*, "Brooks accomplishes the most difficult of tasks, a horror spoof that somehow manages to remain amazingly close to the original material" (169).

3. Experience(s) of *Young Frankenstein*

The paradox of parody, described by Hutcheon as a coexistence of respect and transgression of conventions, is well displayed in *Young Frankenstein*, since it reuses and parodies material and mechanisms from both the 1930s trilogy and the gothic horror genre. However, the close relationship with the target movies emerges even more forcefully if we look at the system of references through the use of Iser's theory.

Iser claims that the act of reading is a process and consequently a text cannot be grasped as a whole in a single moment, but through "phases of reading" (108-9), i.e., only gradually from one point to another, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter. This is why he refers to the notion of "wandering viewpoint" as an inevitable condition of the reader (109). As Iser points out, the semantic fulfilment of a text does not take place in the text, but in the reader, who must rely on his/her synthetizing activity (109; 111), a specific form of creative activity that allows the reader to create a certain degree of coherence in what s/he is reading. Both the act of reading and the act of viewing take place in time, and therefore readers and spectators share the inability to grasp the whole text in a single moment. Iser explains that the reader's experience is characterised by a continuous movement from one part to another, by a constant progression and by an accumulation of information. It is here that the synthetizing activity allows the reader to gradually elaborate an

interpretation of the text, by connecting what is already known with new information coming from the progressive act of reading. Even though the act of reading generally (but not necessarily) requires more time than watching a film, the act of viewing works exactly in the same way. Similar to what happens while reading a text, watching a film implies a progression from one scene to another and the very same act of understanding that a scene is connected to another. Both reading a text and watching a film require acts of synthetizing activity, acts of creating meaning from their readers or viewers, with the only difference that a spectator's synthetizing activity operates to create coherence on the basis of audio-visual narrative information that a film's moving images gradually convey. This similarity between reading and viewing as synthesizing and coherence-creating acts makes Iser's proposal suitable for film analysis and facilitates to look at the experience of watching a film and at spectators' meaning construction as dynamic processes (cf. Barker, Berger, and Murphy).

In the case of Brooks' parody, it is important to consider that Brooks himself had been a spectator of the classic trilogy and therefore a reader who operated a synthetizing activity in his experience of these movies. In fact, Rose claims that the parodist "is to be seen in the dual role of reader and writer", as a "decoder" and "encoder" (*Parody/Metafiction* 69). Hutcheon agrees with Rose when she insists on the necessity of focusing on the "inferred encoder and encoding process" because parody is characterised by a self-referentiality "by which art reveals its awareness of the context-dependent nature of meaning" (*A Theory of Parody* 85). In *Young Frankenstein* the dual role of Brooks as both a spectator (decoder) of the 1930s trilogy and director (encoder) of a film parody emerges from the complex system of references to the target texts, whose scenes, semantic/lexical elements and their style have been selected from different moments in the three different movies and put together in a new, original order, which is the final cut of the movie. The

synthetizing and coherence-creating activity enacted by Brooks consists in a reorganisation of the target movies' narrative material and has determined the final version of *Young Frankenstein*.

How does a spectator grasp *Young Frankenstein*'s intertextual and intermedial references? Hutcheon evokes a "pragmatic ethos" that refers to "an intended reaction motivated by the text" (*A Theory of Parody* 55) when she discusses the different pragmatic outcomes of irony and parody. Referring to the importance that parodic codes be shared both by the encoder and the decoder, she argues that "the reader has to decode it [the parody] *as a parody* [emphasis by Hutcheon] for the intention to be fully realized" (93). She agrees with Rose, according to whom "the reception of the parody by its external reader will depend upon the latter's reading of the 'signals' given in the parody text which relate to or indicate the relationship between the parody and the parodied text and its associations" (*Parody/Metafiction* 41). However, Hutcheon seems not to be interested in a more systematic analysis of techniques of parody but in their pragmatic functions, as she states at the beginning of her essay (*A Theory of Parody* 24-25). She refers to the fact that "if the decoder does not notice, or cannot identify, an intended allusion or quotation, he or she will merely naturalize it, adapting it to the context of the work as a whole" (34), a situation that is likely to undermine all the communicative parodic scopes. In other words, she claims that if the decoder does not identify the parodic signals (allusions or quotations), then parody simply does not work, but she does not offer any additional observations on the experience of the decoder. So, Hutcheon gives a superficial analysis of the responses that could differ from the one intended by the text, and this results in a lack of consideration for the range of what Altman calls "multiple conflicting audiences" (208), i.e. the different cases of reception, which are nevertheless explored by Rose. Indeed, Rose describes four possible degrees of knowledge that determine the reader's experience of parody (*Parody/Metafiction* 27). These cases show that the reader might (or might not)

recognise intertextual and intermedial references according to his/her knowledge of (the existence of) the target texts. What Hutcheon does not consider is what lies between understanding and missing a parodic allusion, even when she mentions Iser's contribution after having briefly considered the case of misinterpretations (*A Theory of Parody* 88-89). But then how come a spectator of *Young Frankenstein* laughs even if s/he does not understand the allusion? In fact, there are several comic scenes that cause spectators to laugh just because their dynamic is funny, as Gehring argues (158; 159-60; 164). Rose's taxonomy of the (in)ability to decode the "signals" in a text resembles Iser's hermeneutic proposal. In fact, not only does Iser's proposal meet the cases examined by Rose, but it also expands them by allowing in-between possibilities. He refers to two types of readers diametrically opposed to each other that have been proposed by other scholars, i.e. the real reader (28) and the ideal reader (29). Instead, Iser proposes the notion of implied reader to account for the range of all possible effects caused by the text:

> He embodies all the predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader (34).

The implied reader is described both as a textual structure (the instructions given by the text, the emergence and the combination of the different perspectives on the fictional world put together by the author and the "vantage point" from which they are observed) and as a structured act (the mental, imaginative and creative activity of connecting information and creating mental images) that constitutes the vantage point of the reader and the "meeting place of perspectives" to become interrelated, towards the elaboration of a meaning of the text (35-36). In other words, the communication between text and reader is determined and enabled by structures of indeterminacy

(blanks and negation) that mobilise the reader's comprehension of the text and prompt him/her to fill gaps or react to negations by creating new mental images and meanings.

How can the concept of the implied reader be applied to *Young Frankenstein* and, especially, what are the advantages of applying this concept as an operating category? Firstly, doing so is useful as it allows to include contradictory interpretations. The construction of meaning has already been addressed in film studies through reception, cognitive and phenomenological approaches. Iser's terminology, however, provides a range of concepts that account for and describe what happens when spectators are exposed to a variety of experiences.[5] In the case of film parodies, the creative activity of the spectator consists in the ability to identify the existence of a reference and to decode it. However, if a spectator is not able to do that, Iser's differentiation between the implied, the ideal and the real reader makes it possible to understand the co-existence of two meanings that are equally valuable, do not exclude each other and are to be distinguished from the general notion of polysemy, according to which texts and films can have different meanings. The productivity of the Iser's approach, hence, lies in the fact that it allows different degrees of knowledge to coexist and to generate different experiences. In particular, applying the concept of the implied reader to *Young Frankenstein* reveals that Brooks' adaptation does not just generate a complex system of references with its target texts and, as a gothic parody of gothic horror movies, does not just embrace the paradox of parody, but that it also keeps an autonomous comic structure that can be appreciated by those who are not familiar with the target movies. The following analysis of two scenes serves to substantiate this claim.

After the monster's escape from the laboratory, the creature wanders in the countryside and meets a little girl intent on throwing flowers in a well. The naive child ignores the dangerous nature

[5] I am aware that this is not the *only* valuable approach, as the reviewers of this article, whose contributions have been extremely productive for the development of my argument, have underlined in their fine comments.

of the creature and invites him to play with her. This scene (01:02:16-01:03:50) is edited with a cross-cutting that shows the child's parents, who are desperately looking for the girl. When the girl and the creature finish throwing the flowers, she asks: "What shall we throw in now?" Then, the creature looks directly at the camera with a glance that establishes a complicity with the spectator. So, if the spectator is familiar with the repertoire and therefore with the target texts, s/he may be aware that the scene refers to Whale's *Frankenstein* (45:46-48:32).[6] In the latter, the creature meets the little girl, plays with her throwing flowers into a lake but then he naively throws her once there are no flowers left, causing her death. In the scene in *Young Frankenstein*, the monster's camera-look is an explicit way to refer to Whale's *Frankenstein* in which the young character dies. However, even for spectators unfamiliar with Whale's film, the editing of this scene still enables them to appreciate its comedy. Indeed, through the editing, the monster's camera-look insinuates that the answer to the girl's question could potentially be the girl herself. These two interpretations can co-exist, and a comic effect is achieved in both cases.

The same situation occurs in the scene that represents the encounter between the creature and the blind hermit (see Shelley 132-135). In Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (33:23-42:49) the creature is drawn towards a cottage in which a blind hermit is playing the violin. He stays there for a while, and both characters enjoy each other's company. The blind man cannot see the creature's disturbing physical appearance, and he is genuinely happy to have someone in his humble cottage and kindly speaks to him. He offers him some soup and some bread and allows him to stay for the night. The next day, while they are sitting at the table, the hermit gives the monster some bread and some wine. Then, the monster is also invited to smoke a cigar: at first, he is scared by the fire, but after being reassured that it will not hurt him, he enjoys his smoke.

[6] A similar episode can be found in the novel, see Shelley 71; 142.

Therefore, they spend a cheerful time together until a group of countrymen enter the cottage, who immediately and violently make the creature run away. In *Young Frankenstein*, the scene (01:03:51-01:08:22) is very similar to Whale's adaptation. Even though the hermit does not play an instrument (see Shelley 108-109; 132), the music he is listening to attracts the monster. The monster enters the cottage just after the hermit concludes his prayer by saying "A visitor is all I ask". The dynamic of the scene is similar for many reasons. Again, the hermit is blind and cannot perceive the exterior monstrosity of his visitor and he sincerely enjoys the company of another person. Again, he offers the creature some soup, some wine and a cigar. However, the monster cannot enjoy these gifts. In fact, in Brooks' adaptation, their encounter is not interrupted by someone's arrival but by the damaging clumsiness of the blind man, who unwillingly pours the boiling soup on his host, crushes his beer mug while making a toast and lights up his finger instead of his cigar, thus making the creature leave. Hence, even the spectator who does not recognise how Brooks is overturning Whale's adaptation can appreciate the comedy of the encounter.

The different spectatorial experiences depend on the degrees of knowledge described by Rose and can potentially coexist. Therefore, we can argue that the "general meeting point", that is the meaning of the text, cannot be identified within one specific degree of knowledge. It can only be placed *between* degrees of knowledge that determine the spectator's creative activity of synthetizing and coherence-creation described above. *Young Frankenstein* can be appreciated both by those who are able to recognise every single reference and by those who are not (or are only partly) familiar with (the existence of) its targets. Hence, parody unfolds through a range of possible processes of understanding the text, rather than through the construction of one single meaning. However, for spectators who are not or only partly familiar with the targets, the experience may be closer to slapstick or pure comedy: in other words, spectators enjoy their

viewing by appreciating the fact that *Young Frankenstein* is funny and presents many a comic situation. However, even in the case of uninformed spectators, the experience of *Young Frankenstein* is driven by parodic dynamics for two reasons. Firstly, gothic horror is a very stereotyped genre that relies on the reiteration of canonical features, characters and situations that can be easily recognised by the majority of spectators when reused in a parodic context. Secondly, as I have observed above by referring to Rajewsky, a parodic text can refer both to an individual film and to a filmic (sub)system at the same time. Indeed, *Young Frankenstein* does not just spoof its specific targets, namely Shelley's novel and the 1930s trilogy through the reiteration of characters, settings and scenes, but also the gothic horror genre in general through the reiteration of lexical, syntactic and stylistic codes that are typical of it. For instance, the tense, ominous and menacing soundtrack and the suspense generated by shadows and allusions to the offscreen characterise gothic horror films in general and are decodable even for uninformed spectators. Hence, even if the experience is therefore closer to comedy, it is very unlikely that spectators are unaware of the horror genre's general features and not able to recognise that *Young Frankenstein* parodies this genre's codes and conventions. Therefore, even if some spectators will not recognize the individual targets of *Young Frankenstein*'s parody, it is still likely that all of them are able to appreciate not just its comedy but also its genre parody.

We have seen that Hutcheon's paradox of parody allows for the coexistence of imitation and transgression of the targets and that *Young Frankenstein* embodies the gothic genre tradition by reiterating specific semantic/lexical, syntactic and stylistic elements of its targets and of the gothic horror genre in general. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider how the parody of genre conventions is handled. Since genre defines the spectator's horizon of expectations (see Jauss), a parody of genre reveals how these expectations result from a "dynamic interaction between text

and reader" (Iser 107), characterised by a dialectic interplay between retensions and protensions (111-112) that can cause the modification or even the frustration of the reader's expectations (111). Indeed, what emerges in a parodic text is another fundamental concept analysed by Iser as one of the "basic structures of indeterminacy" that shape the dynamic interaction between text and reader: negation (182). Negation regulates the relationship with the repertoire, the familiar, by invalidating the selected conventions and by making them appear as obsolescent (212-213).

> […] there are carefully directed, partial negations which bring to the fore of the problematical aspects and so point a way to the reassessment of the norms. The partial negation is aimed at the sensitive spot of the norm, but retains it as a background against which the meaning of the reassessment may be stabilized. Negation is therefore an active force which stimulates the reader into building up its implicit but unformulated cause as an imaginary object (213).

In other words, a parodic text underlines structures of indeterminacy that characterise the literary communication and, as a result, readers are invited to reformulate their relationship with the conventions of a genre.

In the case of *Young Frankenstein*, spectators' protensions are generated by the reiteration of gothic horror features and by its system of references. However, these expectations are not satisfied but thwarted. Moreover, in *Young Frankenstein* negation acquires a distinctly corporeal dimension. The majority of scenes in the movie are characterised by unexpected outcomes that cause damage to the characters' bodies or awkwardly or sexually involve them. For instance, when Igor and Frederick go to the cemetery and unearth the corpse from the grave, Igor comments that the dirty job they are doing could be even worse, because it "Could be raining!" (35:05-35:25). Immediately after this line, an unexpected downpour of rain soaks their dirty and tired bodies. This episode reproduces the exact same dynamic that we see in *Frankenstein* (02:00-05:05) and underlines the centrality of corporeality, which is a core topic in the original novel. In its paradoxical fidelity, *Young Frankenstein*'s spectators' expectations, triggered either by the

seriousness of the moment or by the knowledge of the original trilogy, are disrupted with a display of bodies suffering not only their unearthing but also the harsh (and typically gothic) weather. Similarly, in the scene of the blind hermit discussed above, the gifts that the blind hermit offers end up harming the body of the monster, and therefore the original dramatic tension dissolves into a series of awkward and damaging physical contacts. Another hilarious moment involving corporeality takes place just after the cemetery scene (35:26-37:00). Having unearthed the massive coffin, Frederick and Igor place it on a wooden chariot, similarly to what Victor Frankenstein and Fritz do in the second scene of *Frankenstein* (05:06-06:25), and they transport it through the little town. Because of the remarkable weight of the corpse, Frederick and Igor lose control of the chariot, and the coffin falls to the ground. When a police officer approaches, the two try their best to hide the corpse, but they do not manage to fully cover one of its arms, so Frederick pretends that that cold, rigid hand is his. The insistence on corporeality is also underlined by the dialogue between the police officer who asks, "Need a hand?" and Frederick who replies, "No thanks, have one!", thus ridiculing the macabre detail of the dead body.

The negation of the spectators' expectations through characters' irruptive corporeality also involves the sphere of sexuality. As already demonstrated for the encounter between Elizabeth and the monster, instead of the violent or aggressive behaviour the monster displays in the classic trilogy, in Brooks' parody, the creature seduces Elizabeth, who unexpectedly experiences pleasure. As Gehring observes, Elizabeth embodies the repressed sexuality typical of the Victorian age that constitutes a basic horror genre motif (156; 164). In addition, the introduction of the character of Inga, Frederick's sexy assistant, constitutes a disruption of the original plot since Frederick marries her and not Elizabeth. Inga and Frederick, who develop a strong attraction for each other, are involved in a series of misunderstandings and linguistically ambiguous puns throughout the movie

that keep evoking the topic of sexuality. For instance, when Frederick arrives at Transylvania train station, he is invited by his new assistant Igor to get on the chariot, where Inga is lying down on a pile of hay. When she sees Frederick, she naively invites him to have "a roll in the hay" (17:00), as she literally starts rolling on the hay, unaware of the sexual meaning of that expression. Another awkward dialogue unfolds when they are about to start the experiment of bringing the corpse back to life. Since for this purpose the table on which the dead body has been placed needs to be elevated to the open ceiling, Frederick tells Inga: "This is the moment. Well, dear, are you ready? […] Elevate me". However, she misunderstands that he is asking to literally elevate him and the table, but she realises this after Frederick comments "Yes, raise the platform" (41:16). In addition, their final sexual encounter replicates the one between Elizabeth and the growling monster, who appears to be unexpectedly well-endowed, during which Elizabeth sings "Sweet Mystery of Life" out of joy and pleasure. Similarly, when Inga and Frederick get married and they are about to spend their wedding night together (01:37:39-01:40:40), we hear Frederick growl like the monster and Inga sing "Sweet Mystery of Life". The parodic aspect of this scene (that exceeds its merely comical dimension) lies in the fact that Inga's and Frederick's sexual intercourse ensues after Frederick transferred some of his intellectual skills to the monster. Therefore, when Inga asks Frederick "You know, in the transference part, the monster got part of your wonderful brain, but what did you get from him?", spectators who are knowledgeable of the *Young Frankenstein*'s targets can easily deduce that Frederick has become well-endowed as well. Hence, Brooks' insistence on corporeality is persistent and allows him to highlight the relevance of this topic in *Young Frankenstein*'s targets (see Friedman 2022) and to modify spectators' experience with the target genre. In so doing, *Young Frankenstein* orientates its viewers towards a meta-cinematographic reassessment of the gothic genre: spectators are invited to see the gothic not as an abstract and

fixed category that regulates their horizon of expectations but rather as a flexible aesthetic category (Langford; Grant) exposed to unexpected modifications just like those bodies that undergo unexpected corporeal experiences.

4. Conclusions

In sum, this article has demonstrated how the spectator's experience of the gothic horror genre is modified by *Young Frankenstein* and that the film's meta-discursive potential consists in a substantial reassessment of the notion of genre itself. We can therefore conclude that the more a parodic text embraces what Hutcheon calls the paradox of parody, the more a re-evaluation of the parodied genre ensues. *Young Frankenstein*, when compared to other film-genre parodies by Brooks, embodies this paradox most clearly, thus prompting to reconsider the notion of a single experience of a text by insisting on the idea of a range of possible *experiences* that can coexist vis-à-vis within a single text. This reconsideration has been partly enabled through the application of Iser's reader response criticism, which will hopefully be reconsidered as a productive approach in film studies.[7]

[7] I would like to thank the editorial board for accepting this article and especially Janine Hauthal for the thoughtful revisions that led me to the final draft. Moreover, I would like to thank Sonny Wyburgh for having patiently helped me in every phase of my writing.

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On Being a Self-Taught Writer:

Sulaiman Addonia in Conversation about *Silence is My Mother Tongue*

Elisabeth BEKERS and VUB students. Transcribed by Parham ALEDAVOOD.

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Introduction

Sulaiman Addonia is a novelist whose essays and reflections on language in recent years have featured regularly in the press in Flanders, Belgium, and beyond. Born in Eritrea to an Eritrean mother and an Ethiopian father, he fled the country strapped to his mother's back in 1976, the civil war having claimed his father's life a few months earlier. He spent his childhood in a arefugee camp in Sudan, relocating to Saudi Arabia with his family at the age of ten. As a teenager, he applied for asylum in the UK. Although he did not speak English upon arrival, he went on to obtain a BSc from University College London in 2009 and an MA from the School of Oriental and African Studies. With his Belgian partner he moved to Brussels, Belgium, where he now lives with his young family. His debut novel *The Consequences of Love* (Chatto and Windus 2008) was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, while his second novel *Silence is My Mother Tongue* (The Indigo Press 2018) was longlisted for the 2019 Orwell Prize for Fiction. A third novel, entitled *The Seers,* is forthcoming from Canongate in 2023 and the Flemish Film Fund has awarded a grant for *Silence is My Mother Tongue* to be adapted to the screen. In 2018, he founded a creative writing academy for refugees and asylum seekers and in 2019 he launched the annual

Asmara-Addis Literary Festival (in Exile). Both Brussels-based initiatives received special mention when Addonia was awarded the 2021 Golden Afro Artistic Award for Literature.

This interview took place during a webinar with the author on 7 December 2020 in the context of the "Postcolonial Literature in English" Master course taught by Prof. dr. Elisabeth Bekers, which in 2020-21 included *Silence is My Mother Tongue*. Students in the "Master Taal- en Letterkunde" and the international "Multilingual Master in Linguistics and Literary Studies" introduced the author to the guests in the audience (which included colleagues and students from VUB and beyond) and prepared and asked the questions.[1] Participants were invited to ask questions or share their observations regarding passages in the text that spoke to them in particular. Parham Aledavood subsequently transcribed the interview, which was later edited by Elisabeth Bekers.

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Elisabeth Bekers: Before we start, I just want to quickly check with you: how do we pronounce your last name? Because we were discussing this last week as well, and I forgot to double-check with you.

Sulaiman Addonia: [laughs] It's fine. I don't know. I would say Addoonia, but if you want to say Addonia it's fine. It's all the same. Can I just say, thank you so much for having me! I'm quite impressed with the variation in the class. it's amazing! You know, it's almost the world! I'm looking forward to hearing you guys, so please go ahead!

[1] Questions were asked by, in alphabetical order, Tara Brusselaers, Oindrila Goswami, Cassia Hayward-Fitch (introduction), Alieu Jarju, Nizar A. A. Milhem**,** Maja Ulasik and Hannah Van Hove.

Question: What struck me throughout *Silence Is My Mother Tongue*, was the hell that the characters are going through. Sometimes I was shocked and then the next thing came, and the next thing came. When they asked in class whether we liked the novel, I asked for a button to indicate I was thoroughly disturbed, and I liked it. What really struck me, was the little chapter "The Razor" in which the protagonist Saba receives a visit from the midwife and then in the next chapter when her best friend's grandmother tells her: "Be resolute inside yourself and strong but don't change your behaviour towards that man […]. Don't give him or anyone else the pleasure of knowing that they changed you." That, to me, was a powerful passage because, even though I was kind of shocked by what happened, I focused more on the advice that the grandmother was giving.

Sulaiman Addonia: I don't even remember the kind of emotion I had when I was writing it. The space where I was when I was writing this novel was quite strange actually, so maybe we get to talk about that. Looking back, I would say it's only when you come out of writing it that you realise that some passages are quite strong. I don't even understand how I had the kind of power to keep myself together when writing some of these scenes. Actually, the razor passage, and also the abuse the brother and sister go through, after I wrote them, it hit me how hard it must have been to write it.

Question: I was particularly struck by the part where you described that, by letting him dress her, Saba let the inner woman come out of her brother. I thought that was very beautifully written; it's a nice expression.

Sulaiman Addonia: I always tell people that Hagos, the brother, was the easiest character to write. When I was writing him, or when I found him, it felt like I was walking in the woods or the forest, and then suddenly I stumbled upon a river or a stream. It felt like he was just there, like he came to me ready; I didn't have to do a lot of work with him. Jamal, for example, was totally the opposite. I really had to work on myself as a writer to write Jamal, but with Hagos, it was very smooth; everything around him was so beautiful. Also, when he and his sister got together, there was something very sensual and very beautiful about it, that made the writing, I'm not going to say pleasurable, but it felt like it was flowing more. In that sense, Hagos was one of those characters a lot of writers would feel like blessed to work with.

Question: Did you feel while writing the novel that you're being 100% authentic in keeping certain values while describing it in English?

Sulaiman Addonia: That's a very interesting question. The thing is, I honestly lose myself when I write. If I can go back to the beginning: I had the idea of the novel when I was in London and had a thorough synopsis of the whole book, a sense of where I was going with the characters and stuff. But when I came to Brussels everything changed. I was on my own; although I came here with my partner, I was unfamiliar with the country, the language. She was working, so I felt like most of the time I was by myself, without my friends and family. So, there was this kind of alienation and there was a sense of departure from your usual self when you're in a familiar space. My idea of the novel started to take a different shape and I realised that the outline that I came with from London was not useful anymore, because I was changing myself.

For me as a writer, most of the work I do is before I start to write. When I write, I'm not aware of myself. Before I write, what I do is I try to look at the boundaries that we all have in terms of certain subjects and themes. When writing Jamal, for example, I really had to be confronted with this idea of taboos. I was extremely judgmental of characters like him. That's why I stepped back and submitted myself to the story. I can't emphasise that enough. When I'm writing, I'm totally unaware of what's happening, so I can't really say with certainty that I was aware of the whole question of authenticity. I wasn't translating or explaining values; I wasn't aware of writing in one language and taking characters from a different linguistic space. I was just writing. It's all about flowing with the characters and seeing where the story goes. For me, the story matters. Although the question is very interesting, I don't really have an answer because, I reemphasise, for me the strength in writing is submitting yourself to the story and not really becoming judgmental, but also not becoming too analytical with the characters. It's about letting it flow.

Question: Yes, it felt very organically written.

Sulaiman Addonia: Absolutely. That's for me the beauty about writing; how do you get yourself to that moment where everything feels really organic.

Question: I want to comment on the midwife. I know most of us don't like what she does [i.e., she wants to perform a ritual genital operation on Saba), but I think she plays a very important role in the camp, and, most especially, with local traditions. If Saba can be seen as the protagonist in a bildungsroman, then the midwife can be seen as the villain. But it is also through her that we're able to see the reasons why she was doing that. The midwife and the mother wanted Saba to be a

better person, in the sense that they wanted her to be in line with the traditions and the norms of their society. You can blame them, but partially you can also take into consideration that her mother has suffered a lot of misfortune, including the disappearance of her husband. In that context, we can understand the influence that the midwife has. Still, Saba's mother is persistent in not allowing the midwife to overinfluence her, in the sense that she did not agree to leave Saba behind. You can sense the bond of motherhood that she has towards her daughter despite the influence of society and the midwife.

Sulaiman Addonia: I think that's an important comment because with characters like the midwife or the mother one thinks how it is possible that people would act out of (what they think is) love, when the outcome of that love is so totally the opposite. In a way, they think that everything they're doing to Saba or to Hagos is because they love those children, but at the end of the day, love, when it's mistreated or misinterpreted, can be incredibly hurtful. That's where tradition comes in; that's where experiences, like you mention, the mother's misfortunes, also have an influence on the way we treat each other. One of the most interesting parts of writing this novel was actually tradition. When I started it, I remember that I had those characters fleeing from one country into almost a jungle, creating this kind of opportunity for them to redesign the society in whatever way they wanted to. The most interesting thing is that, even though the majority of them didn't come with any belongings, most of them have migrated with that kind of tradition. It became so powerful and that's where you begin to see humanity. When you're exiled to a place like the camp, what you really want is to hold on to things that make you feel like you're still human, that you still matter and that's what tradition does. That's why people become even more traditional than when they were back home. This is what I've discovered. Why do we hold on to tradition in the way we do

in certain communities when we are far away from home? Because tradition becomes the only reminder of the place we've left.

Elisabeth Bekers: You see this often in literature of migration that writers point to this fact that traditions, which ordinarily may be evolving in the home country, become so rigid that they can't evolve anymore when they are transplaced into a new context. I think you're right that the problem between Saba and her mother is really centred on the value of tradition. I was wondering, because I did my PhD on female genital excision in literature: you clearly suggest that the first time they try to excise Saba, the sheet catches fire and the operation is not carried out, but it wasn't very clear, to me at least, whether or not the second time around it is successful. The way the narrative develops suggests that maybe she hasn't undergone the operation after all, that even the second time it wasn't carried out. Is this something that you want to comment on or is it something that you would like to remain quite enigmatic?

Sulaiman Addonia: It's a very valid comment to make. I remember that scene where she goes to the sex worker. I actually spoke to a friend of mine, she is a woman, before I wrote it, before I even thought about writing about it. And I deliberately left it in the way I did, but if I were to make a comment, then I would say I would go with your first hunch.

Elisabeth Bekers: I really like the fact that you are not explicit about it and that it's something for the reader to think about. It's a very refreshing change from those contemporary writers who are extremely militant, but simply offer the character a way out by making them migrate to Europe or the United States and removing them from Africa.

Sulaiman Addonia: I want to say something about that, the ending. I'm quite shocked that a lot of people thought that Saba was actually coming to Europe which surprised me. I would like to have a healthy relationship with the reader, in the sense that I honestly don't think about the reader when I write. So, if a reader decides that this is what they think about the ending or that the ending led to this, then I don't want to argue with them. But I think to myself, really, is Saba coming to Europe? That's not the feeling I have about it.

Elisabeth Bekers: This also makes the novel unique in literature about refugees; a lot of refugee fiction is about refugees in the West and in your novel they move from one part of Africa to another part of Africa. For me, there is no suggestion that she goes to Europe.

Sulaiman Addonia: One of the things I was incredibly interested in when writing this novel was the intimacy because when we write about Eritrean, Ethiopian or African characters, we tend to focus more on the epic, the history, the wars, the colonial years and so on. But I felt like, for once, I actually wanted to go deep into our bodies, our minds, our hearts. This for me was the focus. When I started writing the novel in London, I wanted to do an epic. Eritrea was colonised by four different countries, the Turks, the Italians, the Brits and I think the Egyptians at a certain stage. I thought that this colonial history was big, so I wanted to do something about it, but then I felt like, for me, intimacy is epic and that's power of the individual. I wanted to focus on African characters. When you write about refugees, you don't go and say "okay, I'm writing about refugees." They're just human beings and I think that's the power: you transcend all these banal ideas, black and white ideas, and you go into that complex grey area and that's where you find interesting characters and

interesting themes. You also become very bold, because once you go into the grey area, that's when you really have to have a bold personality to carry certain of those ideas through.

Question: I was wondering how you go about finding the form for the story that you want to tell? You were describing writing as something which almost becomes you as it were, and I wondered if it was the same regarding the form and the shape of the story and is this something that comes organically, or is it something that you work out before you start writing? My second question is more related to what you have just been talking about, which is this classification of your writing as refugee literature, and I wondered how you felt about labels like that. Do you find them helpful or do you have certain questions about them?

Sulaiman Addonia: The second part of the question first: When my first novel came out in 2008, I was seen as an African writer, and then the label became something else, it became a black writer, and then it became a refugee writer. I have a Muslim background as well, so ... honestly, it's all noise, for me. People will describe you the way they describe you and you just have to decide where to spend your energy because energy is very valuable. Life is short. I spent ten years working on this novel, and I think my energy totally was with the characters, making sure that my sentences were reflecting the characters' thoughts, that I was doing justice to the story in my hand. That was where I spent my energy, day and night. Going through insomnia for years, not being able to sleep, sleeping for only 3, 4 hours. I never ever worried about whether they were going to call me a black writer or a refugee writer, whatever. My only concern was, and still is – and I owe it to my characters – to be focused and disciplined and 100% determined to do them justice. That's where

my power lies, the influence that I have. It's about me and my relationship with my characters. The rest really doesn't interest me at all.

For the first question you asked, it's very interesting because I think it's a reflection also of the kind of books that I love, the kind of literature that I've always been attracted to, the kind of writing that really makes me come alive, the kind of themes that, when I am reading, I feel that this is what I want to write. I'm talking about Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing,* for example, or George Bataille's *Story of the Eye* or Pauline Réage's *Story of O,* or Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North,* or Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero.* Those are books that perhaps not millions of people will read, but the authors are incredibly passionate about their subject and themes. That's what I love. The structure of my book comes from reading them, from this idea that I love to experiment. I love Man Ray, the photographer, the artist. I like the way painters experiment with the form, with the colours, with the landscape, with the shapes of the body. I think I've learnt a lot from that; I've learnt a lot from cinema, from the way that certain films are structured. When I wrote this novel, my influence didn't come from reading a very typical mainstream novel. I think it comes from a lot of areas, like painting, cinema, but also books that I'm very passionate about. In that sense, there's a lot of work that happens when you come to decide what kind of art you consume. You are doing the work, by observing, by noticing, by going through the journey of watching a film. Sometimes I watch an entire film without sound or subtitle. I think it's very boring, but it teaches you the power of the image, because by negating the sound or the subtitling of a foreign film, you're just focusing on the body or the relationship to the landscape, you're focusing on the colour, you're focusing on the feeling or the features, the expressions of the hands. It's hard work but, without you knowing, you're learning something

about the structure, you're learning something about the image, and that's why I think there's imagery in my prose, because of all the work that I do other than just reading the novels.

Elisabeth Bekers: I don't know how intentional this was, but in the discussion last week, it was suggested that you could see the cinema in the opening chapter as a kind of narrative frame, pulling you into the events that have preceded and are about to be related, with the screen that Jamal has created serving as a see-through canvas through which you are then taken into the story of the novel. So, the first chapter works as a narrative frame, but also in a very visual manner, and in a film the camera would then be moving through the screen and taking you into the camp from the top of the hill.

Sulaiman Addonia: That's great! I don't want to talk too much about the framing, but I think this is a very interesting observation that you made. That's to me the power of cinema and my love for cinema came through there, I think.

Question: How do you feel when people read your works and give them meanings, themes and motifs that you have never intended?

Sulaiman Addonia: I think I've briefly touched on that. The struggle that a lot of writers go through is when we're constantly told to think about the reader. When you deliver your first draft, you are told: "But did you think about the reader? This is going to be difficult for the reader…" That's when I decided to end my relationship with the people I was working with initially and decided to write this novel without agents and only show it or send it to people afterwards. I just

wanted to have a relationship with my characters, not with the readers. I think this is a sign of respect when you're honest with the readers and tell them: "I don't really think about you when I write." So, if you come back to me after you have read my work and say to me: "You know, Sulaiman, you gave me that feeling," then I'm not going to fight you because I also have respect for you, because you take from it whatever you want to take from it. I think that's a healthy relationship and I think that the novel itself is very wide, it's very open. The most important thing is that I left cracks for the reader, like the light, where you come into the novel and take from it what you really want.

Elisabeth Bekers: I think it also gives you a sense of freedom. I mean there's no editor breathing down your neck and telling you what to do and what to change. Do you want to comment on how much of that actually happens later on in the process, how much editors and publishers push you regarding the choice of title, cover, etc.?

Sulaiman Addonia: It took me about 8 years to come up with the title. I was very patient with it. I remember I was walking at night, around the Ponds of Ixelles, and it just came to me and I loved this title. With the cover, it's a very interesting story because before my editor at Indigo acquired the novel, she wanted to meet with me; I think it was in London the day after Boxing Day in 2017. One of the things that we discussed was the cover. I had had a bad experience with the cover when my first novel came out and I noticed that the publishers in the West just go for the stereotypical thing because they want to sell the novel. I was seriously worried that they were going to choose a cover that would represent their idea of a refugee camp, not the idea in the book of what a refugee camp is about. I was very open about my concerns. Even though publishers usually have the power

to decide on the cover, she said to me: “It's fine, I respect it, I respect what you told me.” So, when they came up with the cover, they were inspired by the surrealistic aspect in the book and that’s why the designer was thinking about Dalí. When in the beginning of the book Saba takes her clothes off in the cinema, she hangs out her clothes and the character Jamal starts to talk about the dispersing of the sadness. The guy [designer] was inspired by that and he saw this vision of Dali’s work in it and that’s why the cover was really beautiful and very artistic. That's why I love working with Indigo because they took my concerns very seriously.

The same happened with my American publisher Graywolf and I’m really proud that they took me seriously. When you set a novel in places that have a kind of stereotypical image, then it always becomes problematic because you’re then explaining to people and trying to put your foot down. As a publisher, you should really think about what’s in the book and what the book is trying to communicate, so the designer should actually focus on the book, not what they have an image of.

Elisabeth Bekers: It's exactly what I tell the students also when we’re reading. Don’t work with your idea but read what’s actually in the text, what we’re told in the text, not what you’ve heard or learned. I want to quickly ask you about the cover of the British paperback edition of the novel, published by Indigo Press, because you were talking about the hardback. Did you choose this as well, and what does that refer to? It is a black cover with a white canvas.

Sulaiman Addonia: I didn't decide on that cover but it’s like I said, I was happy with the first design because it was very artistic. The designer is a Nigerian designer and I think he’s a very artistic designer. He’s worked with Granta, with Jonathan Cape, so he has that kind of really artistic

background and I was happy with it. He was inspired by a paragraph in the book that reminded him of Dali, so he put the two together. I prefer the first one, but I think they just wanted to do something different with the paperback edition, so they added the black background, which makes it interesting and I have no issues with, but my favourite one is the first one.

Elisabeth Bekers: Thank you for shedding light on this as well. I'm very much aware that what we read into covers is not always what the author intended to be there. I keep on telling the students that writing, and publishing, is very much a business...

Sulaiman Addonia: With the cover, for example, it's 100% with the publishers, but because there has been an outcry, more and more publishers are taking writers' concerns very seriously, especially writers with my background because we've had really bad experiences with it, so we say you can't do that. Represent what's in our books, not your own ideas! So, I think today they're listening more and more.

Question: Maja has a question about your writing academy. She wants to know if it will pick up again after the lockdown. She's a budding writer herself. She's not a refugee but she would love to hear more about your academy.

Sulaiman Addonia: Yes, that's the plan. We definitely want to pick up after the lockdown. I'm already going to have a few meetings next week, or the week after. I'll keep in touch. Please share. The way we worked before it was 100% people with refugee backgrounds, but then we used the

academy to bring the community together. That's why in our last master class, we had 20% local or people who've been here for years. We're trying to open it up little by little.

Question: I am wondering if you see yourself as partly reflected in the novel. You too have this thing about silence and a very strong relationship with your grandmother and a passion for education, and we see the characters in similar circumstances in a refugee camp. So, do you see yourself in the character of Hagos, and in Saba as well?

Sulaiman Addonia: I see myself in the energy and the determination they have. If you survive a place like a refugee camp, you come out with a stamina and a determination. That's why it took me ten years and I never lost faith, I never came close to giving up because I just have that kind of drive and I think it's natural in me now. I think that I share that with Saba and Hagos. I also share their love for their grandmother. I don't know if you know that, but I was brought up by my grandmother. Actually, my grandmother was one of my first literary influences. We don't talk a lot about the power of oral storytelling and the power of alternative stories that we tell each other. We human beings are storytellers by nature. Whether you have a pen, whether you've got a camera, whether you've got a telephone. For example, I wrote my third novel on an iPhone. So, there are always ways in which we communicate with each other because we've been storytellers. Even the Quran came through stories, and the Bible. My grandmother was an incredible storyteller. People talk about fantasy or science-fiction as new to Africa, but actually my grandmother would tell me fantastic stories that, I remember, would leave me scared but that were empowered by the power of imagination, by her ability to use images in her stories. I think my love for her comes from

there, also from the fact that she was an incredibly strong and powerful woman, very giving, very generous.

I'm a self-taught writer. I remember when I decided to become a writer. In London in those days, we had what we called the Borders bookshop, I think it's an American bookstore there. They would allow you to get a coffee and read. I would be there from four to eleven, teaching myself grammar, teaching myself how to write. That's why I love self-taught artists. We're not classically trained, but I think we always have stories to tell and I think there's a space for us. It's the energy and the power and the drive with which you tell them that's powerful.

Elisabeth Bekers: I so agree. I don't know how we can add anything to this. These were such powerful words to conclude your discussion here. I wish there were more writers like you who would pick up their phones and start writing on their phones. I want to commend you for having written such great fiction and for having shared so many thoughts with us and making us think about so many things that maybe we hadn't thought of before. I really want to thank you for that. Keep on writing, please do!

Sulaiman Addonia: Thank you so much and maybe one day we'll have a conversation live when the whole Covid thing is over. I appreciate your questions and all your comments. Keep it going and see you soon!

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