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Krzysztof Andrzejczak
Editor’s note........................................................................................................... 5

Agnieszka Łowczani
“A Pitch of Inhuman Hellish Brutality” – Representations of Death
in Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and Coetzee’s Foe .............................................. 7

Krzysztof Kosecki
“In Our House” – the Interiors and the Exteriors in William Butler
Yeats’s Poetry .............................................................................................................. 17

Alicja Piechucka
Cult Book of Yesteryear or Catch-All Classic: The Relevance
of J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye in the American
Literature Class ........................................................................................................... 29

Katarzyna Szmigier
The changing face of war neurosis: shell-shock and Vietnam
war syndrome ............................................................................................................ 39

John Crust
Beloved: An Intertextual Dialogue ........................................................................... 49

Krzysztof Andrzejczak
Actuality as clip art; women in the fiction of Diane Schoemperlen ..................... 59

Kamila Ciepiela
Narrative dimensions of a story-in-interaction ................................................. 67

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz
Is there a reader in this book? Twentieth century literary theory
and the act of reading – a brief survey .................................................................. 79

Katarzyna Krakowian-Płoszka
Language for the Future ......................................................................................... 85

Anna Kaczerowska
The effectiveness of a teacher made placement test at the First
Certificate level ........................................................................................................... 93

Przemysław Ostalski
Back vowels in British and american English ...................................................... 105
EDITOR’S NOTE

The English Department at the Academy of Management (SWSPiZ) in Łódź is a dynamic, constantly growing community dedicated to quality post high-school education. The full-time and weekend courses we offer, on both the BA and MA levels, cover a broad spectrum of subjects and specializations and allow students to tailor curricula to individual interests. Our team of teachers are specialists in different areas of British and American cultural studies. Aside from their classroom activities, they are pursuing a variety of scholarly interests. It is only appropriate that there is a desire to document such initiatives in print, a format that still seems more visible and functional than digital messaging and archiving.

The mission of this first issue of Participations and Assessments is to allow authors to share their work and ideas, not only with other scholars, but also with students, and thus to use the research as a classroom resource. The contributions clearly combine classroom usefulness with expert investigation and perceptive judgment. The topics cover a broad spectrum of interests: representations of death in Daniel Defoe’s and J.M. Coetzee’s novels; meaningful oppositions of space and place in the poetry of William Butler Yeats; the lasting importance of J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye; the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in British and American literature and film; Toni Morrison’s Beloved as an intertextual dialogue; and the post-Postmodern reconstructions of language and text in the fiction of Canadian author Diane Schoemperlen. Alongside the literary deliberations, the volume contains assessments of a narrative as a meaning-making and identity-constructing tool, and the changing approach to authorship and reading, along with an overview of methods of teaching English as a universal second language. Studies of the effectiveness of teacher-made placement tests in various language courses and back vowels in British and American English further exemplify the variety and richness of the interests of the authors, but also the classroom usefulness of this publication.

The first issue of Participations and Assessments is important for more than its specific contents. I hope that this kind of endeavor will, in the years to come, become an accepted and permanent forum of this department’s scholarly pursuits.

On behalf of the participating authors and a still small editorial committee, I look forward to readers’ reactions and judgments, and our colleagues continued support of similar exchanges.

Krzysztof Andrzejczak
"A Pitch of Inhuman Hellish Brutality" – Representations of Death in Daniel Defoe’s “Robinson Crusoe” and Coetzee’s “Foe"

Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe, published in 1719, remains the most often translated work in Western culture. Since its first edition the story has been imitated, retold, abridged, turned into a pantomime, then into an opera. It was an instant financial success not only in Britain; on the continent, especially in Germany, it spurred so many responses that a new literary term, Robinsonades, was applied to works derived from Defoe’s original. With the advent of cinema in the 20th century Robinson Crusoe served as an inspiration for at least ten various film adaptations. It also spawned reality shows and, most recently, two TV series, Lost (2004), and an NBC riposte, Crusoe (2008). All these works use Defoe’s instantly recognisable motifs, those of a castaway, a native and a desert island, rather freely, adding new themes and characters, very often with only Crusoe’s name serving as the link with their 18th century English original.

For the purpose of this analysis all these offshoot works can be divided into two very broad categories: one retains the optimistic vision of the proceedings of a white man in exotic scenery, of his dealings with the natives and their willing reception of his advanced contrivances. These are stories of progress (material and/or spiritual), expansion, ultimate unrestrained conquering, crowning a heedless belief in the superiority of western civilisation in all its aspects (spiritual, moral, technical, linguistic), stories which contributed to the consolidation of the Robinson Crusoe myth, one of the most potent myths in western culture. The second category encompasses works which are more than variations on the same theme, merely adding new elements to Defoe’s blueprint story; they consciously reply to Defoe’s original by picking on those elements in his narrative which are either missing or unsatisfactorily depicted. These transformations question first of all blatant imperial optimism, unswerving belief in human betterment derived from the power of Christian integrity, and, recently, colonial and patriarchal dominance. Thus, the island is no longer paradisal and devoid of wild beasts, Crusoe no longer the epitome of “the whole Anglo-Saxon spirit”: industry, efficiency and “sexual apathy” (Joyce qtd. in: Roberts XXIII), Friday no longer only powerfully sculpted muscles, a brainless sponge absorbing unquestioningly anything his Master has to
offer, and women no longer few and far between, silenced by the dominant authority of the father, or relegated to non-existence in the all-for-men world of adventurous exploration and successful enterprise. Reworkings of Robinson Crusoe change over decades, evolve with times; often, they become their own responses. However, over the 290 years that have passed since its publication, one thing can be noticed: reaction to this archetypal situation becomes almost a lens, a catalyst through which we sieve a variety of both universal human ailments and deficiencies of our communal coexistence.

The purpose of this paper will be to examine both Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, which is one of the first fictitious depictions of the colonial experience, and its contemporary reworking, J.M. Coetzee’s Foe, from the point of view of their use and representation of death, which constitutes an integral part of the presented reality. The depiction of death in both novels, its metonymic translation, can be seen as channels through which colonial and post-colonial experience is voiced.

In the Introduction to Death and Representation, a study of the relation of death and culture, Elisabeth Bronfen and Sarah Goodwin point out that though culture makes death a forbidden subject, it “figures abundantly in theoretical and aesthetic discourse” (3). Yet going through a few critical works on post-colonialism one cannot fail to notice the absence of a separate entry on death; death; the onset of absence appears to be absent (Young, Ascroft/Griffiths/Tiffin, Loomba). Death – an ungraspable signified, annihilation whose metonymic representations are elimination, marginalisation, humiliation exercised to excess in a variety of ways in colonial contexts – seems to have received no focused critical attention. Is it because culture, especially that of the 20th century, has made it an embarrassment one would like to silence (a fact elaborated on by, for example, the French thanato-anthropologist Philippe Ariès)?

In “The Question of Emotion in Defoe,” Benjamin Boyce concentrates on fear as the main driving force of Defoe’s characters. Among a variety of dangers threatening them, Boyce does not mention death, which actually becomes one of the principal sources of their fright. In a manner which reverberates with Calvinist teachings, death terrifies Defoe’s characters because it signifies the beginning of the afterlife. Stewart Garrett remarks that “before Dickens the psychology of death as an introspective moment […] was simply not crucial to the delineation of the fictional character” (9). On closer analysis, however, in Robinson Crusoe, and other novels by Defoe, fear of death acts as a stimulus for self-examination. Only the imminence of death can generate fear, which summons up the images of hell, soaked in its horrific materiality. The repeatedly evoked apprehensions of death become incentives for introspection, whose ultimate outcome is moral regeneration. Defoe’s characters achieve a state of emotional composure and spiritual coherence only when they are brought to the brink of extinction; their reformation is shock therapy.
Fear of death is crucial not only in straightening the soul of a character, it also becomes an important element in the colonial context of the novel. Robinson Crusoe’s long-worked-out emotional and spiritual peace is threatened when he finds a footprint in the sand on his thus-far uninhabited island. The same fear which had been constructive in his religious conversion, now banishes his “religious hope” (Defoe 119). All he is capable of experiencing is the dread of becoming prey for savages and cannibals, and this greatly affects his communication with God. For two years Robinson remains in this varying state of “cogitations, apprehensions, reflections” and “uneasinesses” (Defoe 125), which ultimately leads him to the Burkean conclusion that “fear of danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than danger itself when apparent to the eyes; and we find the burthen of anxiety greater, by much, than the evil which we are anxious about” (Defoe 122). In the initial part of his island experience fear of death ultimately resulted in Robinson’s religious conversion; then death signified the onset of eternal damnation for his degenerate existence. Now fear of death draws him away from God; this time, however, death is not synonymous with the afterlife but denotes a threshold experience referring to the unspeakable manner of dying and the envisioned awareness of the physicality and disfiguration of his own corpse. Soon it turns out that his fears are well-grounded; to his profusely expressed amazement and horror he discovers on the shore the remnants of a cannibal feast, of which he gives an account containing a plethora of circumstantial detail.

Doubting in and negligent of his religious duties, but deep at heart a devout Christian, Robinson reacts to the cannibal practices of the indigenous people with abhorrence, turns his head away from “the horrid spectacle.” His disdain is directed not only at the cannibal practice as an instance of “a pitch of inhuman hellish brutality, and the horror of the degeneracy of human nature” but also at the natives themselves. Their practice defines them as human beings and becomes one with them in Robinson’s consciousness. He thanks God for being “distinguished from such dreadful creatures as these” (Defoe 126) thus employing an imperial dichotomy between himself as a representative of the West and the cannibals – “the others.” Their cannibal practices allow Robinson to set out a binary opposition between civilisation and barbarism, an opposition that was, as Said suggested, central to the creation of Eurocentrism and the maintenance and extension of European hegemony over other lands and its peoples (qtd. in: Loomba 44).

Robinson’s “indignation” with the native practices, “horror” at the “dismal work” they had left behind, incite in him “a murdering humour” and a long-lasting urge to annihilate the “next” that he sees there “let them be who or how many soever” (Defoe 140). The unseen moment of death acquires tangible representation as a heap of human remnants: “the blood, the bones, and part of the flesh of human bodies, eaten and devoured by those wretches
with merriment and sport” (140), “the place was covered with human bones, the ground dyed with their blood, great pieces of flesh left here and there, half-eaten, mangled and scorched … three skulls, five hands, and the bones of three or four legs and feet, and abundance of other parts of the bodies” (Defoe 159). The integrity of human beings is undone by “their fellow-creatures” (Defoe 126), which is seen as an instance of unspeakable moral transgression. Robinson’s horror at the sight of the mutilated corpses, at the wholeness which becomes transformed into a heterogeneous jumble of disintegrated parts, so distant from the European archetype of a fitting “rest-in-peace” attitude towards the dead, results in his conceiving the natives as a homogeneous group, a collective being to be duly destroyed.

The urge to kill the natives can be seen as an atavistic desire to defend and protect those of the same species, but Robinson expends constant effort to “justify the doing of it” (Defoe 142). He excuses his bloodthirsty desires on the grounds of an even greater atrocity performed by “the savages.” Thus Robinson enters the grounds of a moral justification for manslaughter, and, more generally, his deliberations become an encapsulated vision of the justified hegemony of western, Christian ideology. The barbarity of the natives necessitates their killing and legitimizes imperial rule, and thus determines and regulates colonial confrontation.

However, the possible appeal of Robinson Crusoe as a character is his authorial frankness in depicting the fluctuations of his emotions, the wavering state of his consciousness. With the passing of time the impending fear of death abates. After indulging in and finding ethical justification for his “murdering humour,” Robinson attempts to disengage from his initial emotions, and, in an exemplary fashion, in accord with the didactic purpose and tone of the novel, employs puritan reason and prudence to distance himself from the previous abhorrence leading to revengeful murderous designs.

What authority or call I had to pretend to be judge and executioner upon these men as criminals, whom Heaven had thought fit, for so many ages, to suffer, unpunished, to go on, and to be, as it were, the executioners of his judgements one upon another. […] How do I know what God himself judges in this particular case? (Defoe 131)

Additionally, Robinson defines his ethical attitude towards the natives against another group of colonizers, and thus his concept of colonialism entails the positioning of “we,” the British, against “them,” the Spanish.

…it could not be just for me to fall upon them. […] this would justify the conduct of the Spaniards in all their barbarities practised in America, and where they destroyed millions of these people; who, however they were idolaters and barbarians […] were yet, as to the Spaniards, very innocent people; and that the rooting them out of the country is spoken of with the utmost abhorrence and detestation even by the Spaniards themselves at this time, and all other Christian nations of Europe as a mere butchery, a bloody and unnatural piece of cruelty, unjustifiable either to God
or man […] the very name of a Spaniard is reckoned to be frightful and terrible to all people of humanity […] (Defoe 131–2)

This passage illustrates that even within the category “they” – the other colonizers – there is a division of attitudes resulting from reaction to human death. Though the world appears a heterogeneous jumble, the process of forging Englishness, or, more precisely, Britishness, involved a definition of the nation, or state, against another, in this case the Spanish. The British at that time were heterogeneous themselves; in 1701 in *The True-Born Englishman* Defoe described his compatriot as “that Het’rogenous Thing” (qtd. in: Young 17). Setting the British against the Spanish nonetheless evoked a sense of unity and of belonging to an ethically better nation state.

Moreover, Robinson’s rescue of Friday allows for the individualization of the so-far nameless and shapeless group of cannibals and gives room for their bisection into the oppressors and the victims. Friday, though a cannibal himself, is singled out from those who constitute “the others” for Robinson, and the fact that he himself is a would-be-sacrifice allies him with Robinson against his own oppressors. This in turn makes Robinson’s dominance over Friday seemingly devoid of imposition; quite the contrary, it is presented in his narrative as an act of wilful subjection. In Friday’s devotion to Robinson the recollection of his tangible fear of death informs his gratitude for being spared.

The colonizing process Robinson engages in with Friday is fully morally justified and awakens in Robinson a missionary enthusiasm. Faced with a colonial challenge of a one-to-one positioning, Robinson quickly reverts to the role of superior, acting out the once fantasized role of his majesty, “the prince and lord of the whole island” (Defoe 113). Foucault suggests that power extends itself in a capillary fashion as part of daily action, speech and everyday life (qtd. in: Loomba 50) and this is exactly the mode in which Robinson’s dominance over Friday manifests itself. Its ultimate goal involves a progressive denial of Friday’s identity and a challenge to and replacement of his habits, beliefs and ideology.

Before Friday’s arrival on the island, one of Robinson’s most ardent wishes is to have someone, preferably a fellow-Christian, to converse with. Sound thus plays an important role in Robinson’s subordination of Friday; Robinson’s power over him is a loud, vociferous one. It is defined as such from the very first moment of their encounter, when Robinson fires a gun and shoots one of Friday’s oppressors: “the poor savage […] was so frighted with the fire and the noise of my piece, that he stood stock-still, and neither came forward or went backward” (Defoe 156). Friday’s incomprehension of the paralysing report of a rifle makes him perform rites of reverence, placing himself in the inferior position of a slave exemplified by the initial placing of Robinson’s foot on his head.
Robinson not only endows Friday with new identity by making him speak the language of a white man, thus allowing Friday to express only a white man’s notions, but also equips himself with new identity: “I […] taught him to say master, and then let him know that was to be my name” (Defoe 158).

Having been spared physical death, Friday embarks on a process of “a liminal state of social death,” which, according to Patterson, is exactly what slavery denotes (46). He argues that slavery represents a substitute for death, and bears all the marks of life-in-death: the slave is alienated from his birthplace, family, ancestors, loses all access to such cultural meanings as honour and power. The social death of “the other” in Friday is necessary so that Robinson can produce a vociferous version of an ideal servant. Friday’s welcome social death is best expressed by his outspoken readiness to die rather than be sent away by Robinson.

Daniel Defoe used a multitude of words to inscribe the colonial experience. Coetzee in Foe apparently relies on the same technique of the first person narrative; however, by giving sound to voices muted in the intertext, he notices the potential of the unsaid. Defoe’s novel purported to be a “just history of fact,” “a story of a private man’s adventures”; as an answer Coetzee concentrates on the importance of story-telling, its truthfulness, its manoeuvring of facts, issues that become central in post-colonial discourse. In doing so, as a post-colonial writer Coetzee magnifies the cracks in the official colonial discourse.

With almost surgical precision Coetzee’s text undoes every aspect of Defoe’s carefully woven paradisal colonial setting. First of all, Cruso is a character who in every aspect of personality and endeavour challenges Robinson Crosoe’s myth. The vociferous Robinson who meticulously communicates in writing every detail of his experience and all the way through his stay on the island longs for and then indulges in spoken discourse, becomes in Coetzee’s novel a man who hardly speaks at all. Coetzee’s Cruso’s experience is a splintered, unverified scrap without finality. His unexpected, unprecedented silence and wasteland island environment that suffice for him trigger in Susan a need for constant references to Defoe’s Robinson’s story. At first she questions and challenges Cruso continuously:

May I ask Sir […] why in all these years have you not built a boat? (13)
Would you not regret it that you could not bring back with you some record of your years of shipwreck? (17)
How many words of English does Friday know? (21)
What benefit is there in a life of silence? (22)
Who cut out his tongue? (23)
How will we ever know the truth? (Coetzee 23)

Cruso’s tone is brusque, subversive. He is impervious to Susan’s demand that he conform to her book-built expectations, and thus he gradually asserts his
dictatorship over her. His meticulous mode of expression and silence suppress the outspoken Susan. His strength lies in his evasiveness, inscrutability. As an instigator of communication on the island finally Susan is defeated: “So I became deaf, as Friday was mute; what difference did it make on an island where no one spoke?” (Coetzee 35).

Since the whole colonial experience known from Defoe’s text is scrutinised and subverted, representations of death also acquire a new meaning. At the beginning of her story Susan recounts an episode which happened after the mutiny of the crew when she was put in a boat with the captain’s corpse beside her and set adrift. She rowed with the dead body at her feet until she could row no longer. She saved herself only when she slipped overboard and began to swim “towards salvation.” As long as she was stuck in the boat she was doomed to death; her salvation began only when she moved beyond, when, unburdened, she slipped overboard and moved single-handed to new territories. In a way, the dead body of the captain can be seen as symbolising the burden of Defoe’s text on Susan’s perception of her own reality. On the island there’s a sense of obligation which urges her to read her own, Cruso’s and Friday’s island experience through the story of Defoe’s Robinson. Though his experience is alien to theirs, the compulsion to read it through his story is so strong that Defoe’s text becomes a screen, a figurative dead body whose vision is so compelling for Susan that it effectively obscures her comprehension of reality. She begins to get a more clear, independent, open-minded vision of her, their, truth once she literally leaves the dead body of the canonical text behind.

However, paradoxically, the further from the island she gets the more valuable this past experience becomes for her in the process of regaining her substantiality. Cruso’s dead body and the island episodes, now gone and past, will haunt her forever; he grows more valuable to her when dead than when he was with her alive on the island. The island reverberates in almost everything she does: “the life we lead grows less and less distinct from the life we led on Cruso’s island. Sometimes I wake up not knowing where I am. The world is full of islands, said Cruso once. His words ring truer every day” (Coetzee 71).

In the absence of the physicality of the island and Cruso, Friday’s mute presence is also gradually endowed with new meaning. On the island Friday initially functions for Susan as merely “an imbecile incapable of speech” (Coetzee 22). When she hears the truth-evading story of his maiming she shuns Friday “with the horror we reserve for the mutilated” (Coetzee 24). However, Cruso’s absence marks Friday’s presence in Susan’s consciousness. For the first time she is able to consider him as a human being: “did he know the meaning of death? […] Did he know we were subject to death, like the beasts? […] I knew he knew something; though what he knew I did not know” (Coetzee 45). The literal darkness inside Friday’s mouth stands for the impenetrability
of his past and, as Susan is gradually to discover, also the impenetrability of his spirituality. Friday acquires profundity in his death as a communicator. His silence, imposed on him by the excision of his tongue, augmented by his gradually revealed inability or unwillingness to engage in any other channel of intercourse with Susan – a symbolic death of him as an interlocutor whose tongue-less mouth is the tomb of his story – actually gives him voice and becomes an objectified source of story-telling possibilities. The darkness inside Friday’s mouth can be read as metonymic not only of the unspeakable horrors of slavery but also of the profounder silencing of the slave’s marginal world in colonial discourse.

However, as has been indicated, Friday will never be a creator, a story-teller himself; the stories will always be told for him but will never be transmitted by him. Susan tries hard to inscribe him with a past and present: “Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. […] What is the truth of Friday? […] No matter what he is to himself […] what he is to the world is what I make of him” (Coetzee 121–122). Later on, when Foe undertakes to write Susan’s, and with hers also Friday’s, story, he too, feels compulsion to enliven Friday’s silence and recognises it is only they who can make it speak. The island ritual in which Friday casts buds and petals which then “sink to settle among the bones of the dead” while he, though beckoned by the dead, does not die but “floats upon the very skin of death and is safe” (Coetzee 141) must be translated jointly by Susan and Foe. Friday rows his log of wood as if “across the dark pupil – or the dead socket – of an eye staring up at him from the floor of the sea.” Foe recognises that to them Friday leaves “the task of descending into that eye” (141). At this stage Friday’s asset lies in being alive, substantial, and paying heed to the nameless dead. Ultimately, it lies in his voiceless pointing to the potential of his story, which makes Susan and Foe look down and bow at of the bottom of the ocean, where they see the past of his forefathers and thus no longer ignorantly “sleep without dreaming, like babies” (141).

In the final part of the novel the narrator, in a repeated manoeuvre, slips overboard into the depths of the ocean “among petals floating around” and “like a rain of snowflakes” descends into “the eye of the story” only to discover that “this is not a place of words.” Then comes the recognition that “it is a place where bodies are their own signs” (Coetzee 156). It is the silence of the slaves’ bodies at the bottom of the ocean, water pouring through their eye sockets, that can speak volumes, but only when that silence is construed by Foe as the eloquence of an eye’s pupil. The image of the sunken ship loaded with silent skeletons still chained in the wreck demands response in a similar manner as the case of the 1781 slave ship Zong. For insurance reasons, 132 slaves, men, women and children, their feet still fettered, were thrown overboard, alive, into the shark-infested waters of the Caribbean off the coast of Jamaica. They
perished horribly but this single case triggered the British public to act and abandon its indifference. This outrageous act was one contributor to the birth of a mass abolitionist movement.

In Defoe’s narrative, when faced with a colonial desire to sanction his white man’s authority, Robinson murders indigenous people with the exclamation “in the name of God!” He endows himself with moral justification for this murder, first of all emphasising that he is acting in order to save a white man. After all, it is the cannibals who come to the island in order to carry out their “inhuman errand”; Robinson acts in response. Secondly, the atrocity of his murder is ameliorated by Friday’s participation. At the end of their mutually performed action the scrupulous narrator feels obliged to supply the reader with a detailed register of their victory. With bookkeeper accuracy Robinson numbers death:

- 3 killed at our first shot from the tree
- 2 killed at the next shot
- 2 killed by Friday in the boat
...  
21 in all. (Defoe 182)

Having exceeded the capacity for comprehension at their numbers, in Coetzee’s post-colonial commentary the instances of death melt into a nameless heap. The many dead, the mutilated, communicate not their numbers, but amount potently in their silence. Their authority is granted by un-verbalised suffering.

Death is inscribed as an un-effaceable presence in the colonial experience. As a potent but unspeakable signifier it becomes splintered into a variety of “deflections.” And it is these deflections that appear abundantly in the index lists of any post-colonial critical text.

In numerous contemporary non-literary reworkings of Robinson Crusoe, delineation of death is always in accord with the underlying tone and message of the given work. In the most recent TV series, Crusoe, a gold-hungry English privateer is devoured by piranhas, and his Spanish counterpart is blown to pieces by his own explosive; most of the bad guys, superintended by a woman, are effectively wiped away by Robinson and Friday’s joint effort and clever contrivances. At the end Robinson can say: “Thank you, brother.” After all, “Friday is not a savage” any more; he can speak twelve languages. But this series is knowing and has its tongue in its cheek. Friday remains a cannibal. He tells Robinson not to worry about that, as along as they have a supply of goats. Robinson’s uneasy inquiry “What will happen if we run out of them?” is met with a silent diabolical grin.
Bibliography


1. Introduction

The opposition of the interiors and the exteriors is one of the fundamental elements of William Butler Yeats’s (1865–1939) vision of art, history, and politics. The poet's views were largely shaped by World War I, massive political movements, a crisis of liberal democracy, and the growth of dictatorships in Russia, Italy, and in Germany—in short, by the turbulent history of Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Ireland’s newly regained independence in 1919, and the ensuing civil war of 1922–23, were only an aspect of the above-mentioned historical, social, and cultural changes.

The interiors are parts of the estates and mansions of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, and of the courts of the Renaissance dukes of Italy. The exteriors are the streets of the Irish towns, the country ravaged by the civil war of 1922–23, and, occasionally, peasants’ cottages surrounding the aristocratic estates.

The opposition of space and place is also a metaphorical representation of the conflict of two kinds of mentality and two very different philosophies of life. The highly-cultivated and peaceful way of life, embodied by aristocracy, is at odds with the turbulent and violent world of current democratic politics. In the former, art receives adequate attention and protection; in the latter, political battles and current profits are most important.

2. Yeats's view of history in a nutshell

A key component of the view is the concept of civilisation. It is a period of about 2000 years, which has the structure of a cycle. The Babylonian Mathematical Starlight, the first civilisation discussed by Yeats, begins around 3000 BC and ends in 1000 BC. Roughly in the middle of its course, that is, around the year 2000 BC, there is an annunciation of the Greek civilisation, which, in turn, runs from 1000 BC to AD 1000. The cycle of the Greek civilisation is also divided into two parts. The birth of Christ is not only the beginning of the Christian era, but also an annunciation of our modern civilisation, which starts in AD
1000, and will last to around AD 3000. The annunciation of the next civilisation is thus to be expected around AD 2000.

The peak stage of each civilisation comes after more or less 500 years. In the case of the Greek civilisation, Athens governed by Pericles (ca. 495–29 BC) in the 5th century BC is the ideal period; our modern civilisation reaches its highest point in the Italian Renaissance (AD 1450–1550).

The development of each civilisation is also conditioned by the conflict of two opposing principles-subjectivism and objectivism. The balance between them, called the “Unity of Being”, can be maintained only for a short time, and always coincides with the ideal period of the civilisation (Stock 122–45).

Yeats expresses his views in *A Vision*, and represents the cyclical character of history and the growth of civilisations by means of the concept of gyre, sometimes narrowing, sometimes widening. Each new spiral cycle is an antithesis of the previous cycle, which is reflected in the poem “The Gyres”:

The gyres; the gyres! Old Rocky Face look forth;
Things thought too long can be no longer thought
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out!... (1–4)

3. Aristocracy vs. Democracy

In each of the ideal periods of history, aristocracy plays a major role. In Periclean Athens, democracy guarantees its citizens freedom, and makes the development of art possible. However, it is not a democracy linked to the masses-aristocrats are the primary beneficiaries of its rights. As Russell writes, Pericles governed “by the free choice of the citizens,” and “democratic processes gave power to the aristocracy, as in nineteenth-century England” (77, 79). In the Italian Renaissance, again, the aristocratic families maintain the precarious political balance in the midst of turbulent politics, which is necessary to foster the growth of art. Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464), the ruler of Florence, Guidobaldo di Montefeltro (1472–1508), the duke of Urbino, as well as the court in Ferrara, offer patronage for science, culture, and art.

Ireland, Yeats’s homeland, was in the 18th century strongly influenced by the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. Those people brought the ideas of the Italian Renaissance into the country. The descendants of them, such as Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932) in Galway and the Gore-Booth family in Sligo, were contemporaries of Yeats. At the same time, they were the social class most opposed to the dominance of democracy, massive social and political movements, but also the group most threatened by these developments (Stock 296, 299).

Yeats thus saw democracy as the influence which destroyed human freedom, individuality, and art. That is why in much of his poetry he focused...
on the “choice between Democracy, which he despised, and Aristocracy, which he loved” (Yeats, “Poetry” 178).

4. Estates and houses vs. cities and streets

Coole Park, Lady Gregory’s estate, as well as Thoor Ballylee, which stood in the immediate vicinity, are the most important symbols of aristocracy for Yeats. Another Anglo-Irish estate is Lissadell, which belonged to the Gore-Booth family. Similar importance was attached by the poet to the Italian courts in Ferrara, Urbino, and in Florence. At the opposite end are cottages of Irish peasants and streets of Irish cities-they are governed by the crowd, largely given to violent politics, and the politicians whose main electorate is the world of poor and uneducated people, or of those who place money and popular views above the established order of culture.

From a historical perspective, the contrast between these two worlds is implied in a poem “The Curse of Cromwell,” written in 1937:

You ask what I have found and far and wide I go,  
Nothing but Cromwell’s house and Cromwell’s murderous crew,  
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay  
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen where are they?...

All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,  
But there’s no good complaining, for money’s rant is on...

I came on a great house in the middle of the night  
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,  
All my friends were there and made me welcome too;  
But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through... (1–4, 9–10, 25–28)

The destroyed houses are those of the Irish landlords who lost their property as a result of Oliver Cromwell’s (1599–1658) cruel campaign of 1649–50. The “money’s rant” is the world of profit, of shop–keeping, and of parliament, which are factors behind democracy. Cromwell, who ordered to execute King Charles I (1600–49), was regarded by Yeats as “Lenin of his day” (Jeffares, Notes 349). He was an ardent revolutionary, who destroyed the established order, and replaced it with the rule of parliament. Such opposition, naturally, fits Yeats’s scheme of the conflict between aristocracy and democracy.

A more direct description of the world of democracy is provided in a poem “No Second Troy,” dedicated to Maud Gonne (1866–1953), an Irish nationalist, with whom Yeats fell in love, but who never requited his affection:

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1 Parts of poems important for the context under discussion have been italicised by the present author.
Why should I blame her that she filled my days 
With misery, or that she would of late 
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways, 
Or hurled the little streets upon the great, 
Had they but courage equal to desire?... (1–5)

The poem’s context is Irish politics at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Jeffares explains that “Yeats had been deeply disturbed by the street riots in Dublin in 1897, in part sparked off by Maud Gonne’s demagogic oratory... Yeats had come to distrust the little ‘semi-literary and semi-political clubs and societies’ out of which the Sinn Fein movement grew; he thought that the nationalists with whom he had associated in the 1890s were ‘because of their poverty, of their ignorance, their superstitious piety’ subject to ‘all kinds of fear’ ” (Notes 354).

Another poem, “The Leaders of the Crowd,” expresses very similar views: 
They must to keep their certainty accuse 
All that are different of a base intent; 
Pull down established honour; hawk for news 
Whatever their loose phantasy invent 
And murmur it with bated breath, as though 
The abounding gutter had been Helicon 
Or calumny a song. How can they know 
Truth flourishes where the student’s lamp has shone, 
And there alone, that have no solitude? 
So the crowd come they care not what may come. (1–10)

Jeffares writes that Yeats was highly critical of the political movement in which Maud Gonne was involved (Notes 385). In the essay “Poetry and Tradition,” Yeats stated that this movement, “finding it hard to build up any lasting thing, ‘became content to attack little persons and little things,’ ” and was generally full of hate (Jeffares, Notes 385).

The poem also sets “the abounding gutter” against “Helicon.” The former stands for the gutter-press linked to all sorts of political movements, while the latter represents poetry and art (Jeffares, Notes 385). The contrast is further emphasized by comparing “calumny” with a “song.” Violent verbal behaviour is typical of democracy, much as art is of aristocracy. The last lines contrast the solitude of an artist with the crowds (Jeffares, Notes 385) – in other words, they set individuality against the masses. Needless to add, art thrives if protection is offered by aristocracy, while the masses and the crowds are a concomitant of democracy.

The opposition between the two social and cultural orders is, however, more directly expressed in poems that refer to specific aristocratic estates and

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2 Helicon is a mountain in Greece which was sacred to the Muses (Jeffares, Notes 385).
mansions. The first of them mentions the Italian courts in Ferrara, Urbino, and in Florence, as well as the Renaissance ideals cultivated there.

4.1. Italy–Ferrara, Urbino, and Florence

The poem “To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery If It Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures” was motivated by Sir Hugh Lane’s (1874–1915), Lady Gregory’s nephew, offer to donate a collection of French paintings to Dublin if proper housing was found for it, and the rejection of the offer by Dublin Corporation. One of their arguments was that a public demand for a gift would have to be expressed. The attacks on Lane in the Irish Independent were considered by Yeats as philistine (Jeffares, Notes 382), that is, conducted by people of low culture, mainly motivated by material interests. They are diminutively called Paudeens and Biddies, or collectively labeled as “blind and ignorant town”:

You gave, but will not give again
Until enough of Paudeen’s pence
By Biddy’s halfpennies have lain
To be ‘some sort of evidence,‘
Before you’ll put your guineas down,
That things it were a pride to give
Are what the blind and ignorant town
Imagines best to make it thrive... (1–8)

The second part of the poem contrasts such popular attitude to culture and art with that of aristocracy. This time the description of the Italian Renaissance courts in Ferrara, Urbino, and in Florence sets the dukes and artists against the “onion-sellers” and “shepherds”:

What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
His mummers to the market-place,
What th’ onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies?
And Guidobaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino’s windy hill,
Had sent no runners to and fro
That he might learn the shepherds’ will.
And when they drove out Cosimo,
Indifferent how the rancour ran,
He gave the hours they had set free
To Michelozzo’s latest plan
For the San Marco Library,
Whence turbulent Italy should draw
Delight in Art whose end is peace,
In logic and in natural law
By sucking at the dugs of Greece... (9–28)

Ercole de l’Este (1431–1505) was a duke of Ferrara. The court of Guidobaldo di Montefeltro was located in Urbino. Both men were aristocrats and patrons of arts and of the classical Greek culture. Cosimo de Medici, in turn, was a Florentine who provided for the great development of arts in Florence (Jeffares, Notes 382).

For Yeats, the court in Urbino, which he visited with Lady Gregory and her son in 1907 (Jeffares, William 310), was the primary representation of the Renaissance ideal of the “Unity of Being.” It is there that an aristocratic family best protects the achievements of civilisation, threatened by the surrounding political instability.

Another poem, “The People,” is a dialogue between Yeats and Maud Gonne, an Irish political activist and nationalist, who epitomizes the contemporary political conflict in Ireland. The aristocratic courts in Ferrara and Urbino, both symbols of the Italian Renaissance, give patronage to culture and arts, are once again set against this world of popular conflict:

‘What have I earned for all that work,’ I said,
‘For all that I have done at my own charge?
The daily spite of this unmannerly town,
Where who has served the most is most defamed,
The reputation of his lifetime lost
Between the night and morning. I might have lived,
And you know well how great the longing has been,
Where everyday my footfall should have lit
In the great shadow of Ferrara wall;
Or climbed among the images of the past–
The unperturbed and courtly images–
Evening and morning, the steep street of Urbino
To where the duchess and her people talked
The stately midnight through until they stood
In their great window looking at the dawn... (1–15)

The rule of the crowd and the low manners of the townsfolk go against the high culture of the few. Democracy and aristocracy, understood as two very different philosophies of life, are again fully contrasted.

4.2. County Galway in Ireland–Coole Park

In Yeats’s circle, Lady Augusta Gregory was the main representative of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. He was a frequent visitor in Coole Park, her estate, since 1896 till her death in 1832 (Jeffares, William 309–12). He believed that it was a place where the Renaissance ideal of the “Unity of Being” could be reconstructed (Zwerdling 63–104). The estate and its mansion were thus a paragon of aristocracy and the order of life that the poet favoured so much.
Yeats refers to Coole Park in various poems. Their major motif is the aristocratic house threatened by violent political developments, and the aristocratic social order being on the verge of extinction as a result of the encroachments of democracy, masses, and populism.

In the short poem "Upon a House Shaken by Land Agitation," Yeats refers to the reduction of the rent paid to estate owners for farming their land (Jeffares, Notes 382), which would strengthen the position of the poor at the cost of aristocracy:

How should the world be luckier if this house,
Where passion and precision have been one
Time out of mind, became too ruinous
To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun?
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
Where wings have memory of wings, and all
That comes of the best knit to the best? Although
Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its fall... (1–8)

The "mean roof-trees" are the cottages of the peasants or farmers; the eagle is the symbol of nobility, activity, objectivity, and greatness (Jeffares, Notes 382–83). It follows that the people are low, but aristocracy is high. The poem’s message can be even better expressed by Jeffares’s quotation of Yeats’s own explanation of its meaning:

I wrote this poem on hearing the result of reduction of rent made by the courts. One feels that when all must make their living they will live not for life’s sake but the work’s and all be the poorer. My work is very near to life itself and my father’s very near to life itself but I am always feeling a lack of life’s own values behind my thought. They should have been there before the stream began, before it became necessary to let the work create its values. This house has enriched my soul out of measure because here life moves within restraint through gracious forms. Here there has been no compelled labour, no poverty-thwarted impulse. (Notes 382)

The significance of Coole Park for Yeats is most fully expressed in the poem "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931". Unlike the poems discussed in the previous sections, it does not contain any overt expression of the opposition between the streets and the mansions. The fifth stanza, however, describes an aristocratic order, based on tradition, which now is coming to an end, engulfed in the world dominated by fast change rather than by stability:

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,
And every bride’s ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
Man shifts about-all that great glory spent–
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent. (33–40)
It can only be inferred that the change stems from the nature of modern, democratic civilisation.

Another poem directly related to the aristocratic ideal is “Coole Park, 1929.” Also in this case, the opposition between aristocracy and democracy is only implicit. Both poems, however, share a sombre mood linked to the awareness of the tragic end looming over the old world.

In 1919 the poet’s daughter, Anne Butler Yeats (d. 2001), was born. “A Prayer for My Daughter,” one of Yeats’s best known poems, was written in that year. It was finished in June 1919, in Thoor Ballylee—the tower which was a part of a ruined Norman castle, and which Yeats had acquired two years earlier. It was situated close to Lady Gregory’s estate (Jeffares, William 311; Glossary 394–97).

The last stanza of the poem runs as follows:

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all’s accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony’s a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree. (73–80)

Unlike in the two previously discussed poems, the contrast between the ‘democratic’ streets occupied by peddlers and the aristocratic house is directly expressed. It is also an opposition of high culture and popular views. The latter, naturally, appeal mostly to uncultivated masses.

4.3. Lissadell in County Sligo

The significance of the house of the Gore-Booth family, located in Lissadell, is similar to that of Lady Gregory’s estate and mansion. The house was situated in County Sligo, that is, where Yeats himself was born.

Eva Gore-Booth (1870–1926), herself a poet, was involved in the suffrage movement and worked towards social reform in Ireland; Constance Markievicz (1868–1927), her older sister, was a member of the Sinn Fein movement, took part in the Easter Uprising of 1916, was sentenced to death, but was eventually pardoned (Jeffares, Notes 327, 385).

The poem “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz” brings out the contrast between violent politics and the ideal of the aristocratic culture:

The light of evening, Lissadell,
Great windows open to the south,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle...
The older is condemned to death,
Pardoned, drags out lonely years
Conspiring among the ignorant.
I know not what the younger dreams—
Some vague Utopia—and she seems,
When withered—old and skeleton—gaunt,
An image of such politics.
Many a time I think to seek
One or the other out and speak
Of that old Georgian mansion...

In the present case, the opposition is especially clear—the two aristocrats were actively involved in democratic politics. Their beautiful Georgian mansion epitomizes civilisation which disappears under the influence of such politics and violence.

The poem “On a Political Prisoner” focuses on Constance Markievicz. The negative aspects of democracy, such as demagogy, hate, and uneducated masses, are brought to the foreground in the first stanza:

Did she in touching that lone wing
Recall the years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity:
Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?

When long ago I saw her ride
Under Ben Bulben to the meet,
The beauty of her country—side
With all youth’s lonely wildness stirred,
She seemed to have grown clean and sweet
Like any rock—bred, sea—borne bird... (7–18)

The second stanza implies the ease and culture of the aristocratic way of life. Freedom, both physical and intellectual, is set not only against the actual physical imprisonment, but also against the mental prison-house of democratic politics, dedicated only to the current causes.

4. 4. Thoor Ballylee

Thoor Ballylee used to be a part of Lady Gregory’s estate. In 1917 Yeats bought it with the adjacent ruins of the castle, and tried to reconstruct it (Jeffares, William 311). It was largely a manifestation of his social and political views. In this way, the poet wanted to become an integral part of the aristocratic order. The following fragment of the poem “Blood and the Moon” well summarizes his intentions:

Blessed be this place,
More blessed still this tower;
A bloody, arrogant power
Rose out of the race
Uttering, mastering it,
Though the world is dominated by violent politics and naked power, which opposes the traditional and aristocratic order, the poet decides to restore a part of the old castle, which is a symbol of this order. He does it because he wants to mock the current violence and the dominant democratic civilisation. Once again, aristocracy and its culture are above the people and their popular ideas.

Also in an earlier poem, “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” Yeats expresses the antithesis of aristocracy and democracy, with Thoor Ballylee being a symbol of the former. The Irish civil war of 1922–23, which was fought out between the Irish Free State Government and those Republicans who refused to accept the Anglo–Irish Treaty of 1921 (Jeffares, Notes 336), was for Yeats not only a direct embodiment of the kind of popular politics that he so much disliked, but, in the context of his whole vision of history, an aspect of the violent annunciation of the next civilisation. The whole poem is the longest and the most detailed expression of the conflict of culture that he was so much preoccupied with, and most dramatically depicts the approaching end of the old world:

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,

A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,
A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,

And . . . whatever flourish or decline
These stones remain their monument and mine... (41–42, 51–52, 135–36)

It is also an expression of the conflict between the permanent and the transient, that is, of time itself, which forms another major motif of Yeats’s whole literary output.

5. Conclusions

The four places, that is, the Renaissance Italy, Coole Park, Lissadell, and Thoor Ballylee, all related to aristocracy, epitomize Yeats’s opposition to contemporary democratic civilisation. Aristocracy means respect for art and culture, and lack of violence; democracy involves political struggle, violence, mass movements, and leads to totalitarian solutions. The aristocratic estates, courts, and houses
mean order, stability, and care for an individual. They are set against the crowd-governed streets, the violent countryside, and poor farmers’ houses.

The elegy “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory,” which commemorates the death of Lady Gregory’s only son on the Italian front in 1918 (Jeffares, Notes 325), has these lines:

Now that we’re almost settled in our house
I’ll name the friends that cannot sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in th’ ancient tower,
And having talked to some late hour
Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed... (1–5)

The words “in our house” refer to Thoor Ballylee and the adjacent cottages, which Yeats bought to make himself a part of the aristocratic order of culture. Major Robert Gregory died in World War I, an event directly linked to contemporary violence and democracy. The opposition between the two orders of culture is thus once again expressed.

Gregory himself is presented as a typical aristocrat, educated and versed in many skills and activities—“our Sidney and our perfect man.” The words comparing him to Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86), who was the Elizabethan courtier, soldier, and poet (Jeffares, Notes 325–26), point out to the Renaissance, that is, the period in the history of modern civilisation to which much of Yeats’s aristocratic ideal and anti-democratic sentiment is linked.

Bibliography


The topic of the present article was prompted by a friendly debate I recently had with two of my colleagues. We were discussing the twentieth-century American literature syllabus. When we got to postwar prose, it turned out that I was the only one to have included J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* on the reading list. Of course, we were under no obligation to make our syllabi identical, and in fact one of the underlying assumption was that we should strike some kind of balance between uniformity and individual preferences. What struck me was, however, the strength of the objections voices by both my colleagues. While neither of them made any attempt to dissuade me from incorporating Salinger into my course, they expressed criticism of the novel, which they regarded – at best – as outdated. My female colleague explained that she viewed Salinger’s *magnum opus* as irritatingly sentimental and was tired of literature dealing with “lost boys,” while my other fellow lecturer – a man – objected to what he considered the “violent, possibly even psychopathic inclinations” of the novel’s protagonist. The fact that those two *impromptu* comments on Salinger’s book are poles apart is itself proof that *The Catcher in the Rye* is worth discussing, especially if this discussion is to be filtered through the consciousness of a generation for whom the 1950s – the decade which saw the book’s publication and rise to fame – is prehistory. This is precisely what my argument rests on when it comes to making a case for Salinger’s first and only novel: *The Catcher in the Rye* is a multi-faceted, comprehensive and often contradictory book, which sums up many of the key themes of American literature and culture; moreover, it is a work which stands the test of time and is still – over half a century following its publication – surprisingly relevant to what we consider the essence of contemporary culture.

I might not be objective in my passion for *The Catcher in the Rye* because it is one of two novels which I hold responsible for engendering my interest in literature, the other being André Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*. I turned thirteen the summer I first read Salinger’s novel, and for me it marked the transition from the childish, naïve, *Anne of Green Gables* kind of literature to more serious, “adult” reading. Long before I was knowledgeable enough to classify the novel...
as a Bildungsroman, I realized reading it was a rite of passage for me: I had lost my intellectual innocence and I knew there was no going back. It was also around that time that I first had the opportunity to defend the novel, when a friend of the family who taught Polish at a secondary school dismissed the book as a trifle. At the time, I had no idea the book inscribed itself so well into American mythography, but I knew there was more to it than just a story about a boy who had run away from his teachers and parents.

Mark Twain famously defined a classic as “something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read” (The New Penguin Dictionary 434:18). There is, however, another category of books: those which many people do not want to reread because they consider them too simplistic. Such books are often relegated to the realm of adolescent or – worse – children’s books, and end up being taken for granted – as well as frequently misunderstood - by both children and adults. For some reason, this is often the case with European reception of American literature, which is perhaps due to our – European, that is – patronizing attitude to American culture in general. Perhaps the reason is simply that we tend to categorize literature the way we categorize people, putting both into age boxes, and we wrongly assume that a literary work featuring an adolescent hero might only be of interest to an adolescent reader. I suspect this is – to some extent at least – the case with The Catcher. This was also the case with a novel written by Twain himself, to which, importantly, Salinger’s work owes a lot: the novel in question is of course The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which Ernest Hemingway identified as the source of all American prose: “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn (...). American writing comes from that. There was nothing before that. There has been nothing as good since” (190:15). While I am not going to argue that The Catcher is “as good” as Huckleberry Finn, or better, or worse, I would like to look into Salinger’s novel in terms of what it could bring to a student of American literature at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Günter Grass once remarked that a writer must be sensitive to the voice of his time. Effectively, one measure of a literary work’s success is how well it captures the atmosphere of the age. Whatever we think of The Catcher in the Rye, we can hardly deny that it evokes the spirit of the 1950s or – to be precise – prefigures it, since the novel came out at the very beginning of the decade, in 1951. It is true that Salinger’s book is largely free from historical and political allusions, which again is an accusation that might be leveled against it. From my point of view, a novelist is not a journalist or a historian, and I firmly believe that what is most important about an era is not necessarily what made the headlines at a particular point in history. To me, The Catcher in the Rye captures the essence of one of the most interesting decades in American history. It presents the 1950s as a false age of innocence, whose picture-perfect
surface concealed the serious problems which were to explode a decade later. Critical of the society’s materialism and hypocrisy, Holden Caulfield is the porte-parole of all those who lived in the America of the prosperous and self-satisfied Eisenhower years but failed to fit in. Some critics suggest that Holden is an isolated, unbalanced person who only has himself to blame for his own misfortunes, that something is wrong with him rather than the society he lives in. However, to make such a claim is to ignore the general picture of the 1950s emerging from other literary works, which we also teach to our students. When we set *The Catcher* against the works of other fifties authors – Ginsberg, Kerouac, Plath, Lowell – we realize that all the pieces finally fit. Holden is not an isolated figure: he is the Carl Solomon of *Howl*, the Esther Greenwood of *The Bell Jar*, the young female persona of “Lady Lazarus,” and even – though Holden’s is a small-scale escapade – the Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise of *On the Road*. All those figures make up the accusatory crowd of misfits: the intelligent, creative, vulnerable youth dwarfed by a merciless, insensitive culture which rejects and ultimately crushes all those who refuse to or are unable to conform. Holden Caulfield, the hypersensitive, maladjusted adolescent, whose quest for freedom ends in a mental hospital, is the embodiment of what Robert Lowell referred to as “the tranquillized Fifties” (2535). Only a few years younger than the beatniks, Holden is among “the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked” whose fate Ginsberg deplored in the poem which was to become this generation’s bible (2634). Without Salinger’s most famous hero, the panorama of 1950s American literature would be incomplete.

The protagonist and narrator of *The Catcher in the Rye* thus positions himself between the beatniks and the anguished voices of confessional poetry. He might not be as bold as the former, unable to keep pace with them in their quest for new, extreme sensations and incapable of true rebellion and life-changing revolution, which is another thing frequently held against him by Salinger’s exegetes. With his clean, classic image of a boarding school boy, he is perhaps closer to the university-educated young men and women from good families who voiced their anxiety in confessional poetry because the society which had produced them no longer wanted to hear them out. Less rebellious than the members of the Beat Generation and perhaps not as desperate as the self-destructive speakers of confessional poems, Holden nevertheless shares with them what might be their greatest treasure: an artistic sensibility, manifested in his passion for literature, his tendency to perceive the world in aesthetic terms and his talent for storytelling revealed in the novel’s narration. *The Catcher in the Rye* is not just a *Bildungsroman*; it is also a *Künstlerroman*, the story of a rejected, misunderstood artist. This is perhaps the essential quality of the young outcasts of 1950s American literature: they are the artist figures of the era. They might not be able to start a revolution: like Holden, they are not emancipated enough; like the confessinals, they break down; like the
beatniks, they cannot find new values to replace the old ones. They might not have revolutionized anything (for even iconoclastic Beat rebellion was, all things considered, largely inconclusive), but they did sow the seeds of a future revolution. Together, they did manage to change what the French call *l'air du temps*: the would-be rebels of the 1950s paved the way for the countercultural explosion of the sixties. The fifties might have been a pseudo-idyllic, pseudo-innocent era, but in it lived the Holdens who foreshadowed the social, sexual and cultural turbulence of the next decade. Artists seldom make good social and political revolutionaries, but it is often their voice that makes revolutions possible.

The greatness of Salinger’s novel – and by greatness I mean not just its literary but also cultural value – does not just lie in the way it relates to the key issues that dominated the social and intellectual landscape of mid-twentieth century America. I strongly believe that literature should be taught in a way which enables students to see the connections between the various literary works they discuss, however distant in time they are. I also believe that literature should be inscribed in a larger cultural context. Connections, associations and the ability to contextualize do, after all, form the basis of lateral thinking, the ability which, as we hear every day, is the Holy Grail of modern education. *The Catcher in the Rye* might not be the greatest American novel, but it beautifully sums up various motifs which recur throughout the American literature course. In the previous paragraphs of this article, I have hinted at some of them. Apart from the literature of the 1950s, there is the whole tradition of the coming-of-age story, which is frequently represented in the American literature syllabus by works such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Faulkner’s *The Bear* or Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse,” to give but a few examples. It would be vulgar and simplistic to say that because students are young people they should be flooded with works which deal with the growing up of young characters. Nevertheless, it is perhaps good to compile the syllabus so that it forms not just a chronological, but also thematic, generic and structural continuum. To put it simply, we should enable students to compare and contrast several works which come from different literary periods, but belong to the same category in terms of the genre they represent or the topics they deal with. It is also worth remembering that more recent American literary works could – and should – be added to the list: my female colleague whom I referred to at the beginning of the present article has pointed out the very interesting parallel between Salinger’s work and Bret Easton Ellis’s 1985 novel *Less Than Zero*, which critics often see as the modern version of *The Catcher in the Rye*, just as *The Catcher* itself was once seen as the modern version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

For one who is – like myself – a great believer in the usefulness of syllabi which give students a sense of continuity in addition to providing them with knowledge of individual authors, works and literary periods and movements, *The Catcher in the Rye* is an excellent reading-list choice because it constitutes
a crossroads at which various other frequently discussed texts intersect. Salinger’s novel is, as I have already attempted to demonstrate, a generational novel, and as such it goes well not just with the aforementioned Beat manifestoes, but also with works such as Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, encouraging comparisons between the existential dilemmas of the Lost Generation and the younger generation who came of age in the 1950s, often described as a cross between the Lost Generation and Sartre’s existentialism. In addition to being the *porte-parole* of his generation, Holden Caulfield, the sensitive, imaginative boy with a talent for writing and literature, might also be seen as one of the archetypal artist figures of American literature, other instances of such characters familiar to students being the eponymous protagonist of *The Great Gatsby* or Humbert Humbert from Nabokov’s *Lolita*. Holden has an opportunity to demonstrate his artistic, storytelling skills because he is the novel’s narrator: as such, he makes one think of the numerous examples of first-person narration in American prose. It would perhaps be worthwhile to encourage students to compare and contrast the role such narrators play in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Catcher*, *On the Road* and *Lolita*, to give just a few examples. Such a cross-section of first-person narrators would be a good pretext for discussing the structural, psychological and linguistic implications of this type of narration, with particular focus on questions concerning points of view, the narrator-reader relationship and the often idiosyncratic use of language. Finally, there are the iconographic and thematic affinities which might be traced, and which give both teachers and students infinite possibilities. To avoid accusations of groundlessness, let me just suggest topics such as the notion of time and the related concepts of childhood versus adulthood, innocence versus corruption, obsession with the passage of time and the (im)possibility of turning it back or stopping it, which are present in most of the novels mentioned in this paragraph. In addition, there is the theme which is central to all the works in question: social and cultural critique, with particular emphasis on the criticism of consumer culture in the twentieth-century works.

As a general rule, readers of fiction should beware of simple stories: frequently, they are the ones most highly charged with meaning. Amateur readers can get away with it. They can do with a book what Robert Schumann once did with a piece of music he had played on the piano; when asked to explain the meaning of the piece, Schumann simply played it again. In a classroom situation, we cannot afford to do that, because it is exegesis that is our task. With *The Catcher in the Rye*, all too often dismissed as a simple story, the task is far from hopeless, because if we look at the novel carefully, we will be able to trace numerous literary and cultural influences and parallels.

Earlier in this article, I have attempted to set *The Catcher* against the backdrop of the 1950s and 1960s in America. Importantly, however, Salinger’s work is one
that looks backwards as well as forwards. In fact, the novel is hugely indebted to the literature of the American Renaissance. The Transcendentalist heritage is the key to understanding those dimensions of *The Catcher in the Rye* which might, upon cursory acquaintance with the text, be disregarded as insignificant. One good example is the seemingly unimportant scene in which Holden tries to encourage his ex-girlfriend Sally to escape the surroundings and milieu in which they both grew up:

> How would you like to get the hell out of here? Here’s my idea. [...] What we could do is, tomorrow morning we could drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont, and all around there, see. [...] We’ll stay in these cabin camps and stuff like that till the dough runs out. Then, when the dough runs out, I could get a job somewhere and we could live somewhere with a brook and all, and, later on, we could get married or something. I could chop all our wood in the wintertime and all. (Salinger 137–38)

The plan, which Sally, predictably, rejects, could of course be dismissed as a puerile fantasy. However, it does have serious connotations: Holden's pipe dream is the twentieth-century version of the Transcendentalist dream implemented by Thoreau at Walden Pond. This dream, seemingly no longer realizable in the modern reality, is one of life close to nature, away from the urban reality which crushes the individual and stifles the best in him. If Holden's plan inscribes itself into the world of the beatniks' alternative values and lifestyles, it is also – or perhaps first and foremost – an echo of Emerson's philosophy, whose hallmarks are individualism, idealism, freedom and non-conformism. The scene seems to imply that those ideals are impossible to resurrect a century after Emerson, even if one makes a pilgrimage to Massachusetts, the cradle of Transcendentalism. Holden's dream is brutally interrupted by Sally's pragmatic reservations. Still, it must be remembered that the ideas of Emerson and even more so those of Thoreau were to be taken up and put into practice by the hippie counterculture of the 1960s. Once again, Salinger emerges as a prophet, able to foreshadow the cultural changes of the next decade.

The neo-romantic dimension of *The Catcher in the Rye* is useful in explaining many aspects of the novel which, interpreted in purely psychological terms, result in Holden being accused of immaturity and instability. His reluctance to grow up and his wish to prevent others from growing up, his obsession with purity in every sense, his fascination with the world of children and his ensuing desire to preserve their innocence – all those elements of his psyche which culminate in the catcher-in-the-rye parable - have made Holden Caulfield the Peter Pan of American literature. However, is it not limiting to look at Holden in purely psychoanalytical terms? Is it not justified to regard his “immaturity” as a variation on one of the central myths of Western culture: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concept of the noble savage, the individual who is naturally good and innocent but inevitably corrupted by a depraved society. Rousseau’s noble
sauvage underlies the body of pre-romantic and romantic literature, including works by a classic author who commonly features on reading lists for American literature classes: James Fenimore Cooper. If Cooper’s Natty Bumppo is an incarnation of Rousseau’s pre-Adamic, innocent human being, it is tempting to see Holden as a modern-day Natty, who can hardly try to talk about the ideals which haunt him. The metaphor of the fall, which is central to Salinger’s novel, and the figure of the catcher safeguarding children on the edge of a cliff seem to encourage this pre-Adamic reading of the book. Significantly, such an interpretation of the novel enables us to place it in the context of the dichotomy between nature and culture, which is an important element of American literature.

The association with Natty Bumppo, probably the most famous pioneer hero of American fiction, brings us to another important aspect of Salinger’s novel: the symbolism of East and West. The Catcher is, as we know, set on the eastern seaboard. The West is, however, always in the background and constitutes the backdrop for the story’s poignant finale: at the start of the novel we learn that Holden’s older brother, D.B., is a writer who went on to prostitute his talent as a scriptwriter in Hollywood, which Holden associates with the phoniness of the film industry; more importantly, Holden’s quest for freedom culminates in his being admitted to a psychiatric clinic in California, where he writes down his story. Ironically, Holden manages to implement the nineteenth-century slogan which expressed the ideology of Manifest Destiny: “Go West, young man, and grow up with the country.” Like Huckleberry Finn before him, and the frontiersmen before Huckleberry Finn, Holden goes West, but he finds the four walls of a mental hospital instead of freedom. The old direction, once enabling the frontiersmen to renounce the East, which the biblical Fall associated forever with sin and corruption, no longer works for Holden, a frontiersman without a frontier, who cannot “light out for the Territory head of the rest” (Twain, The Adventures 281) in search of Eden-like innocence and purity. With its reinterpretation of the American East-West mythology, The Catcher seems to echo that other famous American novel of the twentieth century: The Great Gatsby. There, as every reader of Fitzgerald knows, the principal characters are all Westerners who have come East and who are more or less corrupted in the process. At the end of The Great Gatsby, its narrator, Nick Carraway, decides to return to his native West to regain at least some of the moral values inculcated in him during his childhood and youth. The gesture might be symbolic, but it might also suggest that there is still some hope for Nick, even though the frontier is closed. For Holden, the possibilities once inherent in the West are exhausted. Salinger’s hero cannot even attempt to look for freedom in California the way the beatniks did: he goes there to put himself in the hands of others.

Rooted, as I have attempted to demonstrate, in the literary and cultural tradition of the US, The Catcher in the Rye is, in my view, a novel which still has
resonance today. One reason why we tend to dismiss literary works produced in the 1950s and 1960s as outdated is because we have become accustomed to the cultural phenomena and pressing issues that they were frequently the first to identify. However, the fact that we are used to them does not mean we have learned to deal with them. On the socio-psychological level, the themes central to Salinger’s novel are isolation, incommunicability, confused sexuality and repressed violence. Holden Caulfield’s loneliness is evoked on almost every page of the novel, and manifests itself most conspicuously in the numerous phone calls he makes and in the long series of disastrous encounters and largely one-sided conversations he initiates – all are part of his desperate attempt to make contact with other people. His failure in this area is often interpreted as symbolic of the teenage predicament: Holden’s age is supposedly to blame for his being misunderstood and alienated. If this is the case, it is one more reason to regard the novel as universally relevant and its appeal as timeless: the ordeal Holden goes through is simply what every adolescent has to bear. However, Holden’s situation is more complicated than that. The Catcher is an atypical Bildungsroman because, unlike in more classic examples of the genre, the protagonist does not really grow up as the story unfolds, and the novel’s rather pessimistic and disturbing coda makes it clear that no miraculous transformation or maturation process has taken place. Whenever I explore The Catcher, I cannot help thinking that Holden’s problems stand no chance of vanishing because they are inherent in modern culture. They are the problems which, several decades following the novel’s publication, are still identified as the ones eating our souls. Sociologists, psychologists and cultural critics speak about them every day: the isolation which is aggravated by the increasing fragility of family ties; the fact that people seem to be losing the ability to talk to each other; the lack of signposts which makes not just one’s sexual identity but also identity tout court fragmentary and uncertain, and, to make matters worse, the uncertainty does not end with one’s teens; the sexuality and violence which, being omnipresent in the media and popular culture, are increasingly taken for granted and generate people’s indifference rather than concern. In Holden’s world, the world of the 1950s, these problems were not yet commonly articulated, which perhaps shows that Salinger is a perceptive and observant critic of culture, ahead of his time and thus able to identify the ailments which the majority were to notice many years later. While some of the sources of Holden’s problems, such as the generation gap, a phenomenon which was first noticed and named in the 1950s, might have faded or at least – if we are to believe sociologists – become less acute by the time the twentieth century came to its close, new phenomena bound to aggravate the situation came into being. To put it simply, loneliness, incommunicability and brutality are exacerbated rather than eradicated in a world where five-year-olds have exchanged soft
toys for computer games and where terrorist attacks are broadcast live on television.

The protagonist of *The Catcher* is frequently perceived – especially by men, which is itself an interesting coincidence, worth exploring on another occasion – as a seriously unbalanced and potentially dangerous youth, whose preoccupation with violence might make him a future psychopath. I strongly disagree with such an interpretation. It is true that Holden often imagines himself in violent, extreme situations, but he does not really use violence himself and admits he cannot fight. To accuse him of psychopathic inclinations is to go too far. It would be as justified as claiming that the female persona of Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy” or “Lady Lazarus” is likely to become a serial killer murdering males. It would perhaps be worthwhile to abandon the psychoanalytical point of view altogether and start looking at *The Catcher* as a literary work rather than a case study. The anger, frustration and images of violence which invade Holden’s mind might be his reaction to the unbearable pressures of a culture which he cannot accept and which does not accept him. The projection of imaginary violence, the angry interjections directed at “perverts,” “morons” and “phonies” might in fact be expressive of the individual’s helplessness vis-à-vis a crude, indifferent, brutal culture, the culture of Stradlater, not Holdens. It is a defence mechanism, a cry for help and, in literary terms, an attempt to make the reader’s emotional involvement proportional to that of the narrator/speaker. Holden exaggerates for the same reason why Plath’s female speaker hyperbolizes: to make himself heard and understood in a world which misunderstands him and in which his voice is likely to go unnoticed.

*The Catcher in the Rye* is, in my view, not just a novel steeped in its time, but also a novel which is ahead of its time, identifying numerous problems which are still relevant today. One – though by no means the most important – measure of a literary work’s greatness is the way it integrates into the socio-cultural bloodstream. Salinger’s novel has passed this test as well. It has undoubtedly achieved the status of a cult book, whatever we think of the validity of the term. Popular culture abounds in references to it. The lyrics of Billy Joel’s 1989 song *We Didn’t Start the Fire*, which are a list of all the people, historical events and cultural phenomena which shaped the twentieth century in America, feature *The Catcher in the Rye*. In the 1997 film *Conspiracy Theory*, Mel Gibson’s obsessive character has a collection of a dozen or so copies of *The Catcher* at home. A feature film dealing with the murder of John Lennon, which was released two years ago, is entitled *Chapter 27*: the title is of course a bitter reference to the fact that Lennon’s murderer, the deranged Mark Chapman, had a copy of Salinger’s novel in his pocket at the time of the killing and claimed the book had actually inspired him to commit the crime. It might of course be argued that the quality of these cultural references is sometimes dubious or that they distort the meaning of the novel. Nevertheless, there is no escaping...
the fact that they exist and must be recognized as proof of the book’s wide-ranging cultural impact, which adds to the academic debate on Salinger’s most famous work.

The present article is merely a handful of suggestions, a starting point for a thorough discussion of Salinger’s novel and its literary, cultural and sociological implications, past and present. Critical analyses devoted to *The Catcher* are so varied and frequently so contradictory that they necessitate the formation of individual opinion. This is perhaps one more reason why it makes worthwhile classroom material: it is a novel which is thought-provoking enough to evoke a personal response from the student. If Witold Gombrowicz was right in claiming that literature is to set problems rather than solve them, *The Catcher in the Rye* is one literary work which fits the formula. Back in the 1950s, a teacher was fired from a high school in Kentucky for including Salinger’s novel on the reading list. Today’s teachers should perhaps think twice before deleting *The Catcher in the Rye* from their syllabi, though their keeping their jobs no longer depends on such decisions. However simplistic that may sound, they should give the novel a chance because it is a captivating, multi-dimensional work, which gives students food for thought and whose reading is a memorable experience. At the beginning of Salinger’s novel, Holden the literature lover divides writers into those he would like to phone and those he would not, despite the latter’s intellectual and artistic merits. It is interesting to see whether students would like to call J. D. Salinger or not, and what they think of the novel. As far as *The Catcher in the Rye* is concerned, Chapter 27 has not been written yet.

**Bibliography**


**The changing face of war neurosis: shell-shock and Vietnam war syndrome**

Both World War I shell-shock and Vietnam syndrome are manifestations of what is now known as a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The name and the description of the illness were defined in 1980s, mainly as a result of Vietnam veterans’ (and their legal representatives’) efforts to become liable for financial compensation. Stephen O’Brien claims that one of the first literary presentations of PTSD is the legend of the wizard Merlin, who withdrew from social life after taking part in a battle, yet historical cases started being recorded in the 19th century (survivors of railway accidents, American Civil War veterans) to intensify in the 20th. Although undoubtedly it is not a new illness, PTSD is a sign of the times. It marks the advancement of the general conditions of living and stresses that well-being is not only a matter of physical health but also general level of satisfaction derived from one’s existence.

No one can avoid taking part in some emotionally upsetting event. Most of us are lucky enough not to be involved in wars, great natural catastrophes, prolonged domestic violence or sexual assaults. Yet it would be impossible not to live through bereavement, relationship breakdown, a car accident or, in case of women, a miscarriage or a complicated childbirth. It is obvious that such events are accompanied by mental anguish. Nevertheless, most people are able to function well again after experiencing trauma. Although individual differences may occur, the healthy period of recovery usually lasts up to six months while the continuation of undesirable symptoms, that is impossibility of adjustment, is classified as PTSD.

The most typical complaints of PTSD sufferers are evolve round three clusters of symptoms. The first one deals with the stressful even itself – the sufferer might be unable to talk about it, feel uneasy in circumstances reminding him/her of the event yet might have ‘flashback’ memories and nightmares (including even hallucinations) in which s/he has to relive it once again. The second group of symptoms are various forms of unpleasant physiological arousal, such as insomnia and anxiety, which inhibit concentration. The last group influences interpersonal relationships as the sufferer is emotionally numb, withdrawn and indifferent to his/her surroundings. Occasionally, due to irritability and
detachment, the patient may be aggressive (Bentall 478; Gelder et al. 90–91). These can be found in most PTSD victims, irrespective of sex or kind of experienced trauma. The official description of PTSD claims that the symptoms “must not be merely an acceptable and culturally sanctioned response to a particular event” (O’Brien 36). This part of the definition points to the fact that a description of any mental disorder is historically and culturally dependent while gender roles undoubtedly play a crucial role in deciding what kind of behaviour is or is not appropriate for a member of a given sex.

Much has been written about the relationship between women and madness. The double standard of mental health sets an impossible example to women – if they fit their traditional gender role their behaviour is pathological according to the standard of mental health, which is based on masculine values. On the other hand, if they come closer to the standard, they are regarded as unfeminine. The history of psychiatry proves that many typically female disorders like hysteria or depression have been caused by oppressive conditions of life and limited professional options offered to women. Many publications have been devoted to medical malpractice in which male doctor exercised their power over female subjects. It is worth mentioning here, among many others, Phyllis Chesler’s *Women & Madness* (1972), Elaine Showalter’s *The Female Malady* (1987), Jane M. Ussher’s *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness* (1991), or Brant Wenegrat’s *Illness and Power: Women’s Mental Disorder and the Battle between the Sexes* (1995).

The link between masculinity and madness, however, has not been researched that much. Apart from studies into alcoholism and violence as counterparts of female depression relatively little has been written about transgression of traditional gender roles and psychiatric diagnosis in males. However, the analysis of behaviour of PTSD male sufferers from two different periods shows surprising differences in both understanding and expression of masculinity. The shell-shocked World War I and Vietnam soldiers have been chosen for comparison due to the impressive number of cultural presentations and their impact on Britain and the USA respectively.

Shell-shock was the first massive outbreak of psychosomatic illness in the world. The variety of symptoms baffled the military doctors, who initially contributed them to organic causes, such as proximity to exploding shells (hence the name) or gas poisoning (Busfield 214–215). Moreover, the number of affected soldiers was enormous – it is estimated it reached 80 thousand (Busfield 215). The symptoms of the illness, conversion neurosis with hysterical traits, dangerously resembled the well-known female malady, attributed to attention seeking adolescent girls and bored upper class ladies. Since the epidemic proportions of ‘unmanliness’ were dangerous to the army morale, some sufferers were court-martialled for cowardice, others discredited as homosexuals.
Such an image of a shell-shocked soldier fuelled the popular imagination and many literary presentations of the Great War veterans evolve round the effeminate, passive and gentle man. Surprisingly, prose about shell-shock was written foremost by women as men avoided the subject or treated with some contempt. As Showalter puts it “women understood the lesson of shell-shock better then their male contemporaries: that powerlessness could lead to pathology, that a lasting wound could result when a person lost the sense of being in control” (190). It is women novelists who “appropriated the theme of shell-shock, and fixed it in the public mind” (190). The most important texts include Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and Pat Barker’s *The Regeneration Trilogy* (1991–1995).

The main character of West’s novel, Chris Baldry, suffers from amnesia, which is caused by his subconscious wish to wriggle out of his respectable, upper middle class masculinity and its duties. He must have found the cannons of reserved manhood oppressive to his true self. Instead of being active, industrious and self-confident, he turns meek, mild, shy and gentle. He becomes outspoken about his feelings, including grief and sexual desire, is able to weep in public, which is unbecoming for an English gentleman. The emotional detachment of his family life can be best exemplified in the fact that his wife fails to inform the psychiatrist treating Chris that they had a child who died at the age of two. He rejects the shallow elegance of his conventional existence in favour of a genuine bond with Margaret, a common girl he abandoned years ago as he was not able to rise above the prejudices of his social class. Margaret stands in direct opposition to his snobbish wife, Kitty. The former is a true companion, who can comfort him, the latter a trophy, which can be displayed to impress others, to prove the owner’s wealth.

The new Chris, dependable and emotional, is definitely more androgynous than the previous one. The uninhibited expression of his female features makes Chris an integrated person, yet is socially unacceptable. Even Margaret realizes he has to be “cured” otherwise he will become a laughingstock, “his delusion turned to a senile idiocy” (West 183). Although the exact moment of Chris’s recovery is spared the reader, the novel ends with “healthy” Chris wearing “dreadful decent smile,” marching like an automaton across the lawn, ready to get back to Flanders (187).

Probably the most famous literary victim of shell-shock, Septimus Warren Smith, follows a similar path. Woolf ironically presents the idealistic zeal of Septimus, who joined the army “to save England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (64). Nevertheless, despite lack of experience and feeble health, Septimus seemingly flourishes during the war – as “he developed manliness, he was promoted” (64). Apparently, war turned this delicate boy into a man, allowed him to grow up, see Europe and gain new experiences. The newly-
acquired masculinity lasts for a short time. Immediately after the death of Evans, Septimus’s friend and officer, he “congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (64). Later, however, Septimus realizes that he mistook emotional numbness for courage and self-restraint. His inability to feel is accompanied by fits of fear, obsessive thoughts, hearing voices, visual hallucinations and, finally, suicidal urges.

Although the cause of Septimus’s breakdown is not openly expressed in the novel, the role of Evans seems crucial to it. Their relationship is described by Woolf not in terms of friendship but adolescent fascination. Evans, “undemonstrative in the company of women,” is clearly very demonstrative towards Septimus, who in all likelihood, falls in love with his officer – “they had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other” (64). It is the first, and, as it turns out later, the only, intimate bond he ever forms with another human being. It is likely that the death of Evans might have opened Septimus’s eyes to the true nature of their relationship. In order not to admit to himself that he is homosexual, Septimus marries an Italian girl, brings back home his “spoils of war” and no longer feels anything apart from loneliness and fear.

It must be mentioned that Woolf equipped Septimus with her own experiences with insanity and psychiatric treatment as many of his symptoms coincide with hers. Especially important here is the encounter with medical establishment. Doctors patronise Septimus, discuss his symptoms and impose the course of treatment in his absence with his wife, thus ignoring his ability to decide for himself. Sir Bradshaw suggests submitting Septimus to rest cure, which was more frequently administered to women than men. Such incapacitation and inactivity emasculate Septimus even further.

Recent presentations of shell-shock, notably in Pat Barker’s trilogy, also concentrate on exposing gender roles as the factor responsible for the onset of illness. Men, taught to believe that suppression of emotion is a core of manhood, are not able to deal with fear and compassion they are mercilessly exposed to during the trench warfare. Not being able to express their feelings, they fall victims to conversion neurosis as it gives their shameful mental anguish a more respectable physical manifestation. Furthermore, their wish to prove their manhood through warfare has been cynically disappointed.

They’d been mobilized into holes in the ground so constricted they could hardly move. And the Great Adventure – the real life equivalent of all the adventure stories they’d devoured as boys – consisted of crouching in a dungeon, waiting to be killed. The war that that had promised them so much in the way of ‘manly’ activity had actually delivered ‘feminine’ passivity, on a scale that their mothers and sisters had scarcely known (Barker 98).

To a certain extent, this presentation was not far from the most known historical cases – many war poets, some also victims of shell-shock, were
indeed homosexual (Sigfried Sasson, Wilfred Owen) or bi-sexual (Rupert Brook). Moreover, the best known classics of children’s literature (such as A.A. Milne’s Winnie the Pooh’s books) were written by World War I veterans. It can be seen as an escapist tendency as it both avoids open confrontation with the painful memories and embracing a typically feminine occupation of child care. Though some war memories definitely find their repercussions in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (Nazgul-caused illness or Frodo’s depression following the destruction of the one ring can be seen as shell-shock in disguise), his earlier texts or the writings of A.A. Milne and C.S. Lewis are free of any disturbing unpleasantness.

Another war that resulted in a massive number of psychiatric cases was the Vietnam conflict. Cinema has undertaken the subject in an outstanding number of pictures. Jean-Jacques Malo and Tony Williams in their encyclopedia entitled *Vietnam War Films* list over 600 international feature, TV, pilot and short movies dealing with the Vietnam theme. Apart from some Vietnamese and French pictures, undoubtedly the most memorable ones have been created by the American film industry. Many them have become classics, such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Taxi-Driver*, or the Rambo series. Despite the differences between them all, they can be divided into three, sometimes overlapping, categories depending on their time of action – before, during and after the war.

There are relatively few film presenting the characters before the war. Some of them might dwell on idyllic images of small town life, like *Deer Hunter*, which dwells the sheltered existence of Russian Americans and their pastimes. Male bonds are formed through hard work in a factory, communal celebrations and hunting. This peaceful and orderly existence is contrasted with the havoc of war. Likewise, the protagonist of *Born of the Fourth of July* is brought up in a conventional household, cultivating religious and national values combined with the ideology of sacrifice. It seems that men who enlist seem to regard military service not only as a patriotic duty but also a trial of their manhood, understood as responsibility, bravery, loyalty and stamina. The harsh reality of war clashes with their idealism.

Nevertheless, the most striking pre-war film is the first part of *Full Metal Jacket*, which takes place in a marines training base. Training teaches aggression, ruthlessness, sexism. The recruits are to feel worthless unless they quickly adapt to the new environment and learn to be tough. The training is filled with mottos and sayings that become ingrained in the soldiers’ psyche, such as “You are a killer. Let me hear your war cry!” “This is my rifle this is my gun this is for fighting this is for fun” or “A day without blood is a day without sunshine.” And “We kill everything we see.” No wonder that after such a training well-mannered suburban boys turn into killing machines. Ironically, they are nearly exterminated single-handedly by a childlike, female sniper, which seems a just punishment for their exploitation of native women.
Another group of Vietnam films takes place during the war. Despite their great diversity most feature similar scenes: jungle ambushes in which the unbearable heat and the labyrinth of plants makes the soldiers panic and shoot aimlessly, sometimes hitting their own comrades and searching villages for guns which end in massacres as the Vietnamese-speaking peasants do not understand the Americans’ interrogating them. To relieve the stress of combat and muffle the remains of conscience, soldiers indulge in drug abuse and brutal sexual encounters with local women. Men seem to be simultaneously abhorred by the amount of violence and addicted to the adrenaline rush it provokes.

Undoubtedly the most numerous category is the one presenting the aftermath of war. Some films are exclusively devoted to the depiction of mental disintegration of a veteran, who clearly feels alienated from mainstream civilian life. *Taxi Driver* can serve here as a classic example. As Travis Bicke gradually becomes more and more isolated, his fascination with guns and his own masculinity grows. He enjoys the idea that he can be dangerous because he is fit once again and armed. The feeling of loneliness is intensified not only by the use of voice over, journal or letter writing but also long shots devoid of people. Similarly, Nick in *Deer Hunter* chooses not to come back from Vietnam at all as risking his own life in Russian roulette gambling sessions gives him a pathological sense of power. Some veterans choose to take part in different wars or dangerous missions like Rambo or Maj. ‘Dutch’ Schaffer in *Predator* as if the world without war could not offer them anything worth their attention.

Many films also feature a Vietnam veteran in a supporting role – he might be a wife-battering drunkard in *The Human Stain* or sexual pervert like *Wild at Heart* Bobby Peru. In fact, their being veterans is irrelevant for the structure of the film yet it is included to activate the Vietnam psychopath stereotype. They do not need to be developed further as characters as the fact of Vietnam service should be enough to attribute to them any imaginable atrocity.

Depiction of Vietnam veterans focuses on their “hypermasculinity,” especially uncontrollable aggression. As Busfield notes, “expressions of rage and anger, which may enhance power and the capacity to control others” are typical for men since masculinity in patriarchal cultures is indeed manifested through the execution of authority (94). *Taxi-driver* or the *Rambo* series can be a case in point here. In *Jacob’s Ladder* it is even suggested the ferocity is due to the fact soldiers were given drugs boosting aggression to fight more effectively. Unfortunately, their killer instincts became directed against one another before the enemy even attacked. Another feature of a super male is his physical fitness. Though historically, an average recruit was a undernourished working-class teenager, most Vietnam films are filled with athletic hard bodies. Enormous biceps and perfectly toned chest-muscles of Rambo make Susan Jefford claim humorously that the conflict of *First Blood* is a hard body versus numerous soft bodies. Last but not least, potent yet shallow sexual drive is one more proof
of maleness. Soldiers are frequently depicted with Vietnamese prostitutes or raping local women and young girls. Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War* presents a brutal gang rape and murder, soldiers in *Full Metal Jacket* discuss sex mechanically and frequently share women. Misogyny becomes an integral part of “hypermasculinity.” As Philip K. Jason puts it, 

“[ln] a crude semantic equations of the battlefield, killing gooks is the same as fucking them – and being a man in the military environment means being a killing and fucking machine. The metaphor of fucking the enemy, of course, turns the enemy into women and vice versa. Thus, in a sense, all enemies are surrogate women. And to the white-bread American grunt, the dusky Vietnamese man – small boned and sparse in facial and body hair – was a figure simultaneously effeminate and menacing, whether friend or foe (30).”

No wonder, after such experiences they cannot adapt to civilian life as women, liberated by the second wave of American feminism, find their crude chauvinism unacceptable. Unable to form authentic bonds or experience intimacy, Viet vets find alternative outlets for their sexual urges - Travis in *Taxi Driver* watches porn films, paralysed soldiers in *Born on the Fourth of July* move into a Mexican brothel.

The change in women’s expectations about masculinity is best exemplified in the much discussed *Coming Home*. Although Sally is married to a potent marine, she has never been fully sexually satisfied by him. She achieves fulfillment (crudely symbolized as her first orgasm) with a paralysed Luke, who, due to his impotency, can be seen as a new model of non-phallic masculinity. Luke offers Sally a true partnership on equal terms as his physical de-masculinisation teaches him to be emotional and sensitive. During the time of the Vietnam conflict a new, alternative model of manhood emerged as a result of hippie counterculture. Although a long-haired, beaded youth in frilled psychedelic shirts never fully reached mainstream fashion it undoubtedly modified the way ordinary men started to perceive and express themselves. A muscular vet with a crew cut and dark-coloured uniform was no longer what women wanted as he stood for old, patriarchal values while the atrocities he must have committed against women and children stand for his rejection of domesticity and its duties while feminists demanded greater involvement in household chores from their partners.

One could wonder why the film industry focused so much on bloodbaths and atrocities of war and abandoned the “gentleman soldier of World War II films made famous by John Wane and others” (Jeffords 154). Several reasons can be enumerated here yet the fact that the media coverage brought war pictures straight into civilian TV screens seems to be crucial. Undoubtedly, some soldiers have always committed war crimes yet when they come back home, they would be welcome as heroes – liberators or defenders. The everyday brutality of combat – suffering, blood and pain – used to remain
in the background while the official propaganda presented warfare as heroic and an average citizen might have preferred not to ponder too much on what it actually involved. Ordinary people want to forget that the purpose of war is killing. In the case of Vietnam, such carefree ignorance was simply impossible as mutilated corpses, burned villages and screaming children were presented daily life on TV and front pages of newspapers and magazines (Butler xviii). Likewise, the advancement of technology and medicine made many severely wounded soldiers survive. In previous conflicts people who suffered comparable wounds would die while in Vietnam they were taken by helicopters straight from battlefield onto an operating table (Scott 9–11). Thus, maimed and disfigured veterans reminded everyone who saw them that war indeed is a bloody and merciless business.

Another important fact is that the average age of a recruit was nineteen, which meant that not fully emotionally formed individuals were forced to grow up in abnormal circumstances (Scott 56). Their first experience of death could be killing a Vietcong youth, their first sexual contact could be with a Vietnamese prostitute shared with a few platoon colleagues. They undoubtedly must have deformed their budding maturity making the later functioning in peacetime pathological as they formed inappropriate patterns of behavior.

It is also noteworthy that British soldiers in WWI took part in the war voluntarily. They either wished to enlist as they considered it their duty towards the King and the country or yielded to social pressure. The general feeling was that a man should fight and if he did not want to his masculinity was questioned. That is why, most of the soldiers sent back from the front to Britain wanted to get back to the trenches to prove themselves and others they were not afraid. The small number of pacifist was ostracized. Consequently, the shell-shocked veterans, who knew the discrepancy between official propaganda and the horror of war, must have felt alienated yet the society was not antagonistic towards them. The situation was totally different in the case of Vietnam. Throughout the war, the amount of support for the US involvement was steadily diminishing, there were many public demonstrations condemning American foreign policy. Men tried to wriggle out of going to the army, there were cases of burning the drafts (the opening scene of Hair recalls the custom) or leaving for Canada. The general feeling was that the men who go there must be psychopaths enjoying massacring women and children while those who refused to go, risking legal consequences, were true men. Thus, the discharged soldier was not necessarily welcome cordially as a hero, but sneered at – Ron Kovic in Born on the Fourth of July quickly learns that. It undoubtedly escalated the veterans’ frustration, which was released in aggression.

From a contemporary perspective, the behaviour of World War I shell-shock victims, is more congruous with modern ideas of masculinity. It is more and more acceptable, even encouraged, that men are not ashamed of showing their
feelings and talking about them. Greater flexibility of gender roles, growing acceptance towards homo- and bisexuality and awareness of the mechanisms of psychosomatic illnesses makes us realize that some aspects of shell-shock would no longer be perceived as pathological nowadays.

It is also noteworthy that traditionally any excess of masculinity tended to be defined not as a mental disorder but as delinquency; that is, they may be viewed as unacceptable but not raising questions of possible psychological disorder. Consequently, (...) there has been something of an asymmetry in the response to male and female exaggeration: problematic female behaviours have tended to be viewed as mental disorder, problematic male behaviours as evidence of wrongdoing (Busfield 104).

In Vietnam films, however, the brutality is no longer viewed as personal wrongdoing but as a sign of severe mental illness, which marks an important watershed in the history of psychiatric diagnosis, notorious for its gender bias – badness becomes madness, so to say. As Pauline Prior observes in *Gender and Mental Health*, the tendency to perceive antisocial personality, substance dependence and violence as characteristic disorders associated with men is a relatively new trend in medicine.

Thus, the behaviour of WWI and Vietnam veterans, regarded as pathological by their contemporaries, is a yardstick against which the concepts of masculinity can be measured. The analysis of cultural representations of soldiers with PTSD shows how dramatically social expectations about gender roles changed between the two military conflicts. Ironically, what was considered pathological 80 years ago is acceptable, if not desirable, nowadays and *vice versa*. In the case of the first conflict, feeling fear and powerlessness was thought to be unmanly. In the second one, lack of any inhibitions in the exercise of authority and power was regarded as pathological.

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**Films**


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“Beloved”: An Intertextual Dialogue

Throughout Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the narrator touches on the concept of “storytelling” (58), hinting at “words ... the language...” (62), a subtle exploration of “the voices of women...” with “the right combination, the key, the code...” (261), the interweaving and formulations of a distinct text. Beyond the actual story of *Beloved*, the text here seems to be illuminating another story as well. It seems to be speaking to other stories, to earlier storytellers. *Beloved*, a literary landmark, appears to be engaging in an intertextual dialogue with its literary antecedents, such as Harriet A. Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Harriet E. Wilson’s *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *The Signifying Monkey*, explores an African-American literary theory whereas “all texts Signify upon other texts...” (xxiv), that “black texts ‘talk’ to other black texts” (xxvi) in a “language of tradition” (124). In a sense, what the earlier works could not say, Morrison has empowered those works and helped fill in the narrative gaps, allowing them to speak, to signify, with greater clarity and freedom. Together, in a communal effort, they are all telling the story of the African-American female experience in this country’s social-historical fabric, an experience haunted by slavery, plagued with racism.

Morrison certainly would have studied these two historical works, literary landmarks in their own right: Jacobs’ autobiography printed in 1861, the first woman to write a slave narrative; and Wilson’s book published in 1859, the first novel written by an African-American woman. Interestingly, significant patterns can be found that carry over into *Beloved*. In Jacobs’ narrative, she details her efforts in trying to escape slavery, most importantly for the sake of her children. “Never should I know peace till my children were emancipated...,” she insists (138), as she attempts to articulate “feelings as only a slave mother can experience” (141). Jacobs quotes her master’s frightening declarations at the sight of her children: “These brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of these days” (80); “I knew the doom that awaited my fair baby...” (90); and she describes the trauma, “the human beings, driven away like cattle...” (106), “to be sold with horses and pigs!” (156); “Husbands were torn away from wives, parents from children, never to look upon each other again...” (106). As Jacobs explains it, “Always I was in dread ... slavery would succeed in snatching my children ... This drove me ... frantic ...” (150); “my heart was
like a tiger’s when a hunter tries to seize her young” (199). In a comment that ripples through Beloved, Jacobs declares: “Death is better than slavery” (62); “I prayed for ... death” (62), emphasizing “how much easier it would be” to see her child “die than to see her master beat her about” (86–87). In an interesting observation, Jacobs insists, “the slave ought not to be judged by the same standards as others” (56), a comment that warrants serious consideration when reading Beloved. Constantly hounded and harassed by the master, an apparently well-respected physician in North Carolina, Jacobs relates how he reminds her, again and again, that she is his slave, required by law to submit to his will and desires, sexual desires included. Jacobs escapes, as do her children, to “Northern soil, though I no longer called it free soil” (193); “It made me sad to find how the north aped the customs of slavery” (163), recalling a reprimand directed to her: “Get up! You know you are not allowed to sit here” (175). She eludes slave hunters in New York until her freedom is finally purchased, the notion of having to be “purchased” a dismaying concept she had to bear.

Our Nig shares a similar disappointment at racism’s persistent hold in the north. In a “world ... full of hateful deceivers ...,” (6) “a sneering world” (7), Jim, described as “a kind-hearted African” (9) obtains “his treasure, – a white ...” (14), a documentation in itself of what is preferred in the so-called haven from slavery. Jim dies, and at the urging of Mag’s new husband, she dumps her children, whom she refers to as “the black devils” (16). One of the children, a little girl, Frado, is left as an indentured servant in a white household. In the Bellmont home, Frado is seen as “not very black ...” (25), which, apparently, is a good thing, though one daughter harps, “I don’t want a nigger ‘round me ...” (26). With the need for a household servant, Frado’s presence is tolerated, but her living quarters is “an unfinished chamber over the kitchen ...” (27), quarters deemed “good enough for a nigger” (26). Frado is subjected to “vociferate orders” and “a few sudden blows to quick Nig’s pace ...” (66), “punished by a whipping” (29), “waiting always ... to run hither and thither from room to room” (29); “From early dawn until after all were retired, was she toiling, overworked, disheartened, longing for relief” (65). Echoing a feeling that death is preferable over such slave labor, Frado comments: “I ha’n’t got no mother, no home. I wish I was dead” (46); at another point, “Frado hoped” Mrs. Belmont “would end her misery by whipping her to death” (82). Frado is allowed to attend school briefly, but “such privileges should cease” (41) because “Mrs. Bellmont was in doubt about the ability of attempting to educate people of color, who were incapable of elevation” (30). Jack, an adult son in the family, is an ally of sorts, sympathizing with Frado: “Same old story, is it: knock and bumps? Better times coming; never fear, Nig” (70). As a so-called friend, he does little, if anything, to alleviate the hardships, which makes for an illuminating view of the north. The narrator then charges: “Watched by kidnappers, maltreated by professed abolitionists, who didn’t want slaves at the South, nor niggers in their
houses, North. Faugh! to lodge one; to eat with one; to admit one through the front door; to sit next one; awful!” (129). Such an indictment, however, seems carefully balanced with presentations of good whites in the novel. *Beloved* picks up a lot of this as it describes the cruelties that pervade the land even after slavery is abolished.

In his essay, “Beloved: A Womanist Neo-Slave Narrative; or Multivocal Remembrances of Things Past,” critic Bernard W. Bell notes “the silences in the slave narratives due to authorial compromise to white audiences and to self-masking from a painful past ...” (8). Morrison, he says, “privileges the authority and epistemology of black and Third World women in America.” Through Morrison’s efforts, and others like her, African-American women, past and present, are getting their proper foothold in society, their due respects, which, for the longest time, was denied. The story is being told, the full story, and it is receiving the center stage it deserves. In an interview, Morrison explains: “I have this creepy sensation ... of loss. Like something is either lost, never to be retrieved, or something is about to be lost and will never be retrieved. Because if we don’t know ... what our past is ... then, it is not known by anybody at all ...” (8). Interestingly, Jacobs’ autobiography and Wilson’s novel were lost, forgotten, then rediscovered in the last few decades. But while the scholars have worked diligently to recover these earlier texts, the contemporary narratives such as *Beloved* are empowering the older works. As critic Marilyn Sanders Mobley adeptly notes in her essay “A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in *Beloved*”: “Morrison’s novel exposes the unsaid of the narratives, the psychic subtexts that lie within and beneath the historical facts” (359).

The notion of historical facts are suspect to begin with, as suggested by critic Cynthia Griffin Wolff in her essay, “Margaret Garner: A Cincinnati Story.” Wolff examines the true story of Margaret Garner, on whom the protagonist Sethe in *Beloved* is based: a young mother who escapes slavery, then kills her child in an effort to “free” that child from the slaveholder who tracks them down. In comparing fiction with so-called fact, Wolff sees “a fundamental problem with ‘facts’” because, typically, “victims of extreme brutality often retain sanity only by explicit failures of recollection” (417). Additonally, the newspaper coverage of the actual incident and the subsequent proceedings, which, of course, would have carried a particular white slant, “constituted some sort of serialized novel,” Wolff explains, but had “none of the aesthetic intensity or moral coherence of fiction ...” (431). She calls the journalistic accounts of fact “a concatenation of confusion ...” Such a story, as Wolff sees it, the kind of story “no one wants to tell and no one wants to hear” (417), demands “a reconstruction of ‘reality’ ...,” in that it “can never be exact or correct or first-hand ... because these stories must be told (imperfectly) by others, ‘truth’ can come only from telling and retelling” (418). The kind of storytelling, Wolff says, is “necessarily a communal effort ... the necessity of community ... a union of women ...” A notion of
a community of texts, and an interchange of signifying between these texts, will undoubtedly, bring the full story to greater fruition.

In *Beloved*, the narrative comments on “news in a newspaper,” and that “It would have to be something ... white people would find interesting ...” (156). The bottom line is that “it must have been hard to find news about Negroes ...” news that would have been fair, objective, not slanted, not “colored” a certain way. “All of this was advertising ...,” the narrator asserts in a subtle way (48). Advertising, of course, can be misleading, worded in a way that is sometimes outright false in conveying information. The portrayal of American society through the written word, through much of its history, perhaps seems to rest closer to the precepts of advertising: “... The fact that none of it was true ...” the narrator laments. Compounding this problem, the written form was also a newer kind of text, often a privileged text, a different narrative from the more traditional oral narratives long associated with African-American storytelling. Slavery, racism, the cultural biases that had been enforced, perhaps left the feeling that “nothing important to them could be put down on paper” (125); Sixo, who eventually “stopped speaking English because there was no future in it” (25), also bears relevance here. The attitude in much of mainstream America in the time of slavery, and even after slavery, saw blacks as “gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke” (125). At one point, the white girl Amy, one of the more kind-hearted white characters in the novel, describes “a old nigger girl ... can’t barely stick two words together. She don’t know nothing ...” (80). But the way someone strings words together to textualize something can vary from culture to culture, based on one’s particular traditions and grammars of articulation. Gates appears to touch on this as he speaks of a “language of tradition” (xxi), one of “black difference” (xxii), noting that written text “seems to be aspiring to the status of oral narration ...” (xxvi). African-American written texts, as we know them in American literature today, undoubtedly went through a metamorphosing process, an adjusting process perhaps, that is deep-rooted in the oral traditions. Add the racist environment that would have slowed this textual formation, “a Eurocentric bias,” Gates says (xx), and it is understandable how a contemporary novel such as *Beloved* is signifying a fuller, richer voice for the earlier voices of that storytelling community.

In both Jacobs’ autobiography and Wilson’s novel, a close analysis can detect a certain amount of silencing of voice, figuratively and literally, consciously and unconsciously perhaps. “I lost the power of speech,” Jacobs writes, in describing a lingering winter illness while hiding in a cramped space; “I had been in an unconscious state ...” (122). The long winter of slavery, a symbolic reading might suggest, likely affected her ability to articulate everything she wanted to tell, or perhaps even needed to tell. She perseveres, nevertheless, and tries “to speak a few words ... about emancipating my children” (126).
The statement she was “subjected to such insults as no pen can describe,” also peaks the reader’s interest, whether it is something Jacobs or the white editor decided could not, or would not, be documented in print (77). The editor at the time, L. Maria Child, admits in the original introduction she “revised” and “pruned excrescences” from the manuscript “for purposes of condensation” (3). One may wonder today if such revising and pruning – deliberately, even inadvertently – might have denied Jacobs something she had intended to say. Understandably, the subject matter would have been difficult for Jacobs to articulate, most specifically the sexual history, violations, and constant harassment she chronicles in the text. “There are some things I might have made plainer ...,” Jacobs acknowledges, but then explains to an acquaintance it was easier to “whisper” such things to a “dear friend” than to “record them for the world to read” (xxi). One can subsequently see how Morrison’s narrative can articulate freely and boldly what Jacobs’ text could not. Morrison is able to read, and perhaps reread, what Jacobs had to describe in a certain round-about way. Together, the texts signify the brutal picture in horrifying clarity.

In the preface to Our Nig, which accompanied the original publication, Wilson writes, “I do not pretend to divulge every transaction in my own life ...,” adding that “I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home” (3). Wilson, as Gates explains in an introduction he wrote in 1982, “... remained silent about ... events in her life which, if depicted, could well result in an adverse reaction ...and could thereby do harm to the antislavery movement” (Wilson xxxv). Our Nig details the young life of an indentured servant “in a two-story white house, north” and “showing that slavery’s shadows fall even there” (1). Throughout the narrative, as the protagonist Frado is beaten, scorned, and nearly worked to death, a silencing is definitely illuminated. “Mother ... shut her up,” one of the daughters in the household demands, and Frado had “her mouth wedged apart, her face swollen, and full of pain” (36). If she tries to reveal the cruelties perpetuated against her, family members threaten to “cut her tongue out!” (72); “cure her of tale-bearing” (89); and “Tell anybody of this, if you dare. If you tell, I’ll certainly kill you” (65). The narrator admits to being “afraid to expose the cruel author of her misery ...” (83) with the notion of the author drawing interesting attention here. Is there an underlying author controlling the alleged penned author of these texts? At one point in Our Nig, the narrator discloses, “Their conversation we will omit ...” (94), a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bellmont; the husband apparently finally confronts his wife over her cruel treatment of the young black girl through the years. It seems such a chastisement could not appear in a published text at that time, or at least not penned by a black writer. The narrator concludes “some part of her history is unknown ... Enough has been unrolled to demand your sympathy. ...” (130). In other words, maybe enough has been said, and it should end at that.
Without a doubt, to undertake the writing of one of these earlier texts would have been a formidable task. As illustrated in *Beloved*, for those who had experienced slavery, or slave conditions, it was a horrendous past to contemplate. To try to put it into words, and given the atmosphere that prevailed in 19th-century America, such an endeavor would be extremely arduous, and psychologically draining. As the character Paul D explains it: “I never have talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul. ... I just ain’t sure I can say it” (71). For Sethe, the past is “unspeakable,” a part of her that, when it absolutely had to be referred to, came out in “short replies or rambling incomplete reveries ... the hurt was always there – like a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left” (58). The psychological avenue Morrison pursues here, trying to articulate what cannot easily be articulated, and saying just that, carries a kind of literary punch, which immediately adds force to what Wilson and Jacobs write. The non-linearity of *Beloved* also maximizes the aesthetic and emotional impact. Morrison is also able to signify the oral traditions, and play off that scope, which likely was not appropriately acknowledged, nor accepted, by 19th-century white editors. In *Beloved*, we see, and hear, how African-Americans used an oral text to sing their way through the cruelties that plagued them, a signification that kept them going. The narrator explains the human force, the spiritual drive and anger, that formulated a song:

> They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllable yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been. ... They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of ... The shamelessness of life... They killed a boss so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time. ... they killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. ... (108–109)

As Gates explains it, “... Our canonical texts have complex double formal antecedents, the Western and the black” (xxiv). These texts, he theorizes, hold “a tradition exceptionally conscious of its history ...” and “the Afro-American social condition ...” Though these “black texts” as written literary works “resemble other, Western texts,” such narratives hold a distinct “black difference” (xxii), writings, he says, that “are encoded” with “peculiarly black rhetorical tropes” (xxi). The tropes were in the songs, and gradually made their way to written forms. Morrison touches on this notion of the “encoded” when her narrator refers to a woman’s text, “The code they used among themselves ...,” a code Paul D is unable to decipher (132). While Paul D, as part of the African-American culture, is certainly in tune to signifying codes, the narrative here notes this is “a house with two stories” (47), perhaps suggesting the African-American house holds two different stories and storytellers; and though they complement one another, they tell of different experiences, with
different significations. Jacobs’ narrative touches on this realm of experience, too: “Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women” (77). Sethe underlines this to Paul D: “Feel how it feels to have a bed to sleep in and somebody there not worrying you to death about what you got to do each day to deserve it ... And ... feel how it feels to be a colored woman roaming the roads with anything God made liable to jump on you... .” (67–68). A particular code shared by African-American women, and perhaps women in general, is a part of this interstitial exchange.

Morrison fully explores this language of tradition, especially that of the African-American woman, with its codes and underlying rhythms, a narrative interweave that takes Beloved in different directions, a writing poetically sculptured with incredible aesthetic effects. The narrator describes a concept of “different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now” (62). This is linked to a language of tradition, a different language one is rooted to. “The same language her ma’am spoke, and ... the message – that was and had been there all along ... she was picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood ... ‘Telling you. I am telling you ...’” This is not only a language of tradition, but a language that makes up a women’s text, “the interior sounds a woman makes ... that eternal, private conversation that takes place between women ...” and the dialogue that exists between narrative texts (172). Morrison’s narrative suggests something to the effect of a “woman junk heaped” (174), a hint to what had happened to many women and their texts; there is a “chopping at the tight soil” (138), a labor of recovery of sorts, with Baby Suggs commenting, once she is freed, “I got a lot of digging up to do” (146). This digging up, a collective endeavor, no doubt, is the restoration of a woman’s voice, her narrative voice, her distinct text, in an African-American family and background. The narrator in Beloved discloses “the selling of pieces into place designed and made especially for them” (174), a different “order of words” (172). “In the beginning there were no words,” the narrator puts it. “In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like” (259). This sound, this description, carries a kind of motherly, and perhaps sisterly, tone. “Thirty neighborhood women” congregated; thirty perhaps representing half of the “Sixty Million and more” victims of slavery, the female half, textualizing that female part of the story: “… the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound ...” (261). It is the wave carrying their text. These voices are telling the story, the story of Margaret Garner, and others like her, “who was never allowed to speak for herself,” as Wolff explains in her essay (436).

The telling of the story, the ability to do so, seems to be the start of a healing process, the effort to understand, both for the storyteller and for the community as a whole. “More it hurt better it is,” Amy tells Sethe at one point. “Can’t nothing
heal without pain, you know” (78). There may be profound truth behind this comment. Pain is a signal that the healing process has begun; and to not have the sensitivity to feel that pain is to keep it buried underneath, which may be fermenting a greater degree of pain, perhaps destruction. Further on in the novel, Baby Suggs asks Sethe: “You feel this?” Sethe answers: “Feel what?” (93). If she cannot feel it, perhaps she has yet to heal it. Until one can really feel the hurt, to articulate it in such a way to see it for what it is, to acknowledge it, and to come to grips with it, perhaps only then can a healing process even begin to start. The writing of Beloved, with its textual interchange with earlier texts, seems to be Morrison’s way of entering that realm of understanding, taking control of that past, empowering it to its rightful owners, and healing. “I think Afro-Americans in rushing away from slavery, which was important to do – it meant rushing out of bondage into freedom – also rushed away from the slaves because it was painful to dwell there, and they may have abandoned some responsibilities in so doing ...,” Morrison explains in an interview. “This is a necessity for remembering the horror ... The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember... . The collective sharing of that information heals the individual – and the collective” (247–248).

In a rather illuminating observation, the narrator in Beloved notes how “the women ... were free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw and say whatever was on their minds” (199). In a way, this narrative has empowered the narratives in Our Nig and Life of a Slave Girl to do the same. “I had determined will,” Jacobs reveals (85); “... Free and independent thoughts... ,” Wilson writes (105); “She had learned how to conquer” (108). The women in these narratives went from object to subject, and the communal signification has carried their tales further, providing them with a greater say, illustrating a greater picture for the contemporary reader. It seems fitting that in the close of Beloved, the narrator writes, “He wants to put his story next to hers” (273). On equal footing, the African-American narrative can be fully told, accurately, completely, unharnessed, with their differences: her story, his story, their story side by side, speaking to each other.

Bibliography


Krzysztof Andrzejczak

**Actuality as clip art; women in the fiction of Diane Schoemperlen**

Diane Schoemperlen (1954–), a short story writer and novelist, one of Canada’s most stylistically innovative and irreverent authors today, believes that the comprehension of life and human relationships depends on our ability to decipher and analyze the way daily realities are fragmented, scattered and artificially formalized by cultural rituals and traditions. She strives, comically, often in an ostensibly trite and repetitious manner, to achieve some new mental-literary optics for our times, which she wants to capture in fluid and imaginative, constantly reworked patterns of fiction. At the same time, she shows how the flaunting of technique and playing with common speech can bring one back to realistic representation and meaning, in fact to attempts to order or explain some of the emotional and mental chaos of contemporary life.

Trying to re-formulate the rules of existing literary conduct and perception, Schoemperlen suggests that linguistic experiments, or games, practiced by writers, especially early postmodernists, should not be forgotten because they have not gone far enough, or have not been exploited sufficiently, or appropriately. In fact, she brings into play much of the early, exuberant, today largely used up tradition of metafictional experimentation. For example in the story called “Rules of Thumb: An Alphabet of Imperatives for the Modern Age,” in *Forms of Devotion: Stories and Pictures*, (Schoemperlen, 1998), she begins each paragraph with the next boxed and illustrated letter of the alphabet. The pieces of advice she puts next to such intriguingly engraved letters-illustrations serve as imaginative, humorous and surrealistic meditations on life and cultural attitudes. In Walter Abish’s *Alphabetical Africa* (1974), a once much admired postmodernist experiment, chapters also looked like artificially arranged and fragmented verbal structures. They contained only words beginning with letters which had been alphabetically designated (for example, in chapter “B” the words all start with “a” or “b”); consequently, characters had to wait until their letter came up, while the first-person narrator could only speak in chapter “I.”

Much of the American postmodernist fiction of the 1960s was similarly simplified or fragmented. Writers such as Donald Barthelme, William Gass, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon or Walter Abish, to name just a few, did not
record or mirror life but created, or negotiated, visions of reality in which daily events were frequently reduced to random, or playfully arranged images, while elusive narrators, commonly confined to voices, parodied, negated, or annihilated themselves rather than prevailed as character presences. Personality was not embraced, lives were devoid of inner existence, flattened, confined to elusive identities, turned into types, linguistic entities, symbols. They remained as fragmented and jumbled as the writing that sustained them. Social and cultural backgrounds were impoverished, or meaningless, even though a sustained, sometimes almost perverse fascination with contemporary life was frequently indicated.

When representatives of later literary postmodernism, with writers like John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut or Philip Roth, stepped in, in the later 1970s and the 1980s, such whimsically fragmented and jumbled metafictional approaches were typically reduced, or replaced by exuberant self-reflexivity. The focus was on characters that resembled conventional literary figures, or actual persons (frequently the writers themselves) who lived in, and often referred to the contemporary North American scene. Authors wanted to be seen as literary magicians and tricksters but also as dutiful interpreters of reality. In Democracy (1984), a novel by Joan Didion, the narrator, who introduces herself as Didion, acts as a classifier and interpreter of what fills people's thoughts: fragments of visual images derived from films, advertising, print, and TV. Her material, she claims, is "players," "versions," "performances," "tricks," miscellaneous items through which her characters reveal themselves. Didion is trying to arrange them so as to assemble the jigsaw puzzle of the American society.

Schoemperlen takes up the early rather than the later attempts to weave constructs of metafiction into factuality. She believes that reality can be authenticated by the resuscitation of textual fragmentation, montage, enumeration, or various other structural and verbal conceits. Blending a reliance on illusion and a search for new techniques of realism, vacillating between what might be called 3G [third generation] metafiction and biographical factuality, she fills her texts with a new sense of creative imagination and witty social and cultural commentary and thus provides the Canadian fiction of the late 20th and early 21st centuries with fresh and exuberant possibilities.

Schoemperlen insists that anything in language may be picked up and reworked through its various permutations or associations. She fills her stories with listings of well recognizable products and appliances, activities or ideas, contents of meals, ingredients of recipes, wardrobes or houses, or indexes of memories and dreams. They are frequently accompanied by word definitions, or other forms of classification, elucidation and illustration. In "Red Plaid Shirt", a woman's life is reconstructed through a detailed discussion of several pieces of clothing she has been wearing at different stages of her life. The story "This Town" sounds and looks much like a tourist guide arranged into
sections called “General Information,” “Climate,” “Accommodation,” etc. In “None of the Above” the life of a couple, David and Belinda Boyce, is shown as if it were the subject of a multiple choice examination in which one chooses one of five possibilities. A probable line of events emerges, so does a gradually solidifying, multileveled image of contemporary life with its seemingly varied but in fact limiting possibilities. In “Tickets to Spain” the narrator, who is planning to go to Spain, persists in quoting conversational phrases from a Spanish phrase book. A piece called “A Simple Story,” similarly, looks like a series of writing exercises with paragraphs called “Describe the City,” “Describe the Dreams,” etc. In Schoemperlen’s first novel, In The Language of Love (1994), subtitled A Novel in 100 Chapters, chapters’ titles are words (table, dark, woman, house, stream, window, boy, etc.) taken from the 100 words of the psychological test devised to study insanity almost a hundred years ago. In Names of the Dead: An Elegy for the Victims of September 11 (2004), her most daring publication, she mixes the list of all the victims of the World Trade Center disaster, some 3000 people, with snippets of factual and occasionally imagined information concerning, for instance, “The things they loved (or hated),” “The things they carried,” “Occupations,” “Favorite books,” “Last seen wearing,” etc. Each narrative fragment appearing in a separate paragraph is telling a specific story, but it is not intended to refer directly to the name of the victim(s) that immediately precedes it. Schoemperlen clearly tries to complement the meaning of the events rather than explain them, thus creating new, fresh and intriguing associations.

All these “literary gimmicks,” as some critics dismiss Schoemperlen’s constructs, are not the primary consideration, or aim, she explains in interviews, in fact they are meant to emphasize only the workings of the minds of her narrators, to reflect, however tentatively, the confusion and vulnerability of life today. Joanna, the heroine of In the Language of Love, a woman engaged in an endless search for moral and esthetic coherence, feels that her life is experienced as if “in sections, as separate pockets of time and affiliation”; its various stages are “like marbles set side by side.” Being, appropriately, a collage artist, she assembles the random cubist fragments of her own past. They are reworked by her memory, mediated and attached, sometimes repeatedly, to other memories, thus forming an endless trail of the mind’s screenings, filters and associations.

Like her heroine, Schoemperlen suggests that we see reality rather mechanically, or accidentally, come across an event or situation, deal with it according to temporarily formed attitude, or state of mind, then abandon it, or hold on to it to re-process it again, or to redefine its connotations, and so on and so forth. We look at life in distorting and selective ways — “we can never see things as they really are” (Schoemperlen, 1998, 118), just take it bit by bit. The past and the present thus grow out of each other as one is not more important
than the other. The fragments of memories that nourish us change and evolve as we do since “all memory is revisionist, all stories are apocryphal, all photographs hang suspended in the present tense” (Schoemperlen, 1996, 207).

Once all these textual devices and verbal games, fragments of life and slivers of memory become commonplace and obvious, Schoemperlen emerges not so much as a manipulator of language, and a wizard of metafiction, but as a rather well focused and shrewd observer of the social and cultural actuality. From behind her literary constructions unfolds a coherent reality, a vast panorama of contemporary working and middle class, urban Canada. Her main characters, almost invariably young or middle aged contemporary Canadian women, talk of their childhood, parents, physical and mental maturation, of love affairs and children. They are involved in an endless task of having both to re-evaluate the verbal and visual patterns imposed on them, and to decide what it means to be sensitive and imaginative in a world claimed by men, controlled by consumerism, imbued with paradox and terror.

Joanna, in *In the Language of Love*, is dismayed by the blandness of daily existence. She is depressed by the falsehood of human relations, the silliness of cultural pretensions, and the semi-friendliness of modern urban manners, has a need to defy them, or parody. Knowing she has to adjust because there is no chance of changing things, gives her a sense of guilt, and also a touch of rigidity in dealing with others. Broader issues come into focus, too. In a short story called “The Gate,” a twelve-year-old girl taken to the funeral of a distant relative realizes that bidding farewell to a kinsman is an elaborate and grotesque spectacle of social pretensions and evasions. In “Losing Ground,” a sensitive young girl is witness to a callous and prejudiced treatment of Indians in Manitoba. Her family see them as being permanently demoralized rather than mistreated, the parts of cemeteries in which they are buried are neglected.

Similar disappointments recur in other Schoemperlen fictions. Complaints about the limitations imposed on women in general are frequent. In the story called “What We Want,” a voice representing women in general declares: “we want to get savage and leave the whole sad world behind us...what we want is a getaway car...what we want is a change of style” (Schoemperlen, 1990, 38). Myrna Waxman, in “How Myrna Survives,” finds her life as a single woman at the age of thirty-two spiritually burnt out, “unremarkable” and “muddied.” She sometimes feels she “just wants to scream and then sleep” (Schoemperlen, 1990, 76–78).

Good life and professional stability do not satisfy the Schoemperlen women, they mock middle class values, also in themselves, and hate themselves for agreeing to participate in social rituals and pretensions because they tend to destroy spiritual sophistication, love and fulfillment. The story “Rules of Thumb: An Alphabet of Imperatives for the Modern Age,” a playful list of suggestions
about how to behave in today's society, is a bitingly ironic indictment of middle class values and snobberies:

Be ironic whenever possible [...] Never be naïve or sentimental unless you can do so in an ironic way [...] adopt a revisionist stance toward your own history. Your goal should be to make everybody believe that you have always been as virtuous, sophisticated, and affluent as you are now (Schoemperlen, 1998, 200–205).

In Our Lady of the Lost and Found (2001) the social satire is given a bold and unusual setting. The narrator, a protestant woman, takes the Virgin Mary, who comes to her for a short vacation, to the Mall. Not unlike other Schomperlen heroines, Mary confesses to the narrator that she is tired of doing what is expected of her. She would like less piety and fewer formalities, longs for the simple life – chatting over coffee, relaxed shopping, or walks in comfortable running shoes.

The men the Schoemperlen women meet frequently turn out to be selfish, duplicitous and unimaginative. They do not seem to appreciate their female partners’ wit and poetic imagination. “They have no sense of humor, none of them,” says Myrna, in “How Myrna Survives,” who has had several failed love affairs (Schoemperlen, 1990, 90). Other women feel that men are strangely inferior, or underdeveloped. The narrator in “The Man of My Dreams,” a female writer, realizes there is even something wrong in the way men dream. Men’s dreams are escapist rather than imaginative. She says: “In the stories I write, I take it for granted that these men snore and roll over forty-seven times a night while these women beside them wander and moan, commit adultery, murder, and magic” (Schoemperlen, 1990, 2–3).

Similarly, the language men use simplifies and trivializes, it does not contain the complexities of women’s ideas, or their rich body language. Consequently, relationships turn out to be superficial, tedious, unsatisfying. Even when a man is more perceptive and sympathetic towards a woman, as is the male character in “Body Language”, he understands her only when he sees her, and he is able to think about one part of her body at a time. When she is away, he is not able to imagine her as a complex identity, “the heart of the matter is no longer visible to his naked eye” (Schoemperlen, 1998, 48–49). In “Count Your Blessings,” a story subtitled “A Fairy Tale,” a woman seemingly blessed with a handsome and rich husband, pretty children and an impressive house, is unfulfilled and depressed. She secretly misses “all the things she could be doing [...] [like being] constructive, creative.” Tired of imperfect love affairs, afraid of further emotional scars, some women, for example Myrna, in “How Myrna Survives,” prefer to stay away from male companionship, or sex.

In spite of such complicated relations with men, Schoemperlen’s women eventually seek love again, for them a vehicle for survival in an increasingly lonely and frightening world, an emotional addiction. They dream of
relationships based on sensuality and sophistication, and a fuller sense of a woman’s psychic liberation and self-realization. They would like to balance trite rituals of housework and marriage with fantasy and playful invention, to free themselves from gloom and commonness, or miserable love affairs, by living out life’s imagined alternatives, fantasies or dreams. They clearly desire an existence that is more rewarding than what they are faced with. They want to escape to a culture, or a state of mind that is unlike Canadian actuality. The young woman in “Mastering Effective English” acts out her fantasies, or imagines she does, on exotic islands she flies to every year. She enjoys being where “all time passes in its own good time,” where love, colors and passions are honest and straightforward, as if they were cleansed of the biases of Western culture (Schoemperlen, 1990, 225). Joanna, in In the Language of Love, who wants to find fulfillment and joy in activities that aesthetically go beyond the obvious, tries to rework her many existential questions and fears into paper collages. Myrna, in “How Myrna Survives,” is happiest when she is writing and thus fulfills her own promise to “rescue/resurrect order out of chaos/value out of worthlessness”. In the act of writing, even lasting a few minutes, “everything makes sense” (Schoemperlen, 1990, 85–86).

Even though such spiritual escapes do not last long and boring, empty and mechanical existence re-possesses the lives of Schoemperlen’s women, their anxiety is never too far from laughter, farce or quixotic parody. Aware that happiness, or satisfaction, which their culture teaches them to believe in, are largely unattainable, these women learn that daily experiences are less painful when they are confronted with playful imagination and verbal games. They tell themselves that humor, irony and teasing attitudes satisfy and protect, and that they should tap into the comic delights of language and culture rather than reflect for hours on the intangible nature of love, luck, time or history.

In her penetrating and persuasive vision of a woman’s place in today’s urban reality, Schoemperlen stresses the need to combine the celebration of the creative self with the reconstruction of language and text. She believes that the writer’s endeavor, even when the themes are somber, needs to be treated lightly and ambivalently. She enjoys being comically suspended between the tedium of contemporary culture and the extravagance of the mind, between concern with the human condition and the desire to engage in further quirky games and fabulations. Yet she is able to do what the masters of early self-reflexivity and fragmentation were, by and large, unwilling, or unable to achieve – combines unconventional textual strategies with concern for tradition and social or historical background.
Bibliography


Narrative dimensions of a story-in-interaction

Introductory remarks

Narrative seems to offer particularly broad access to different disciplinary traditions, and to have a high level of salience for fields outside as well as inside academia. The study of ‘narrative does not fit neatly within the boundaries of any scholarly field’ (Riessman, 1993: 1). That is why analysts have not arrived at a single blueprint for narrative yet, rather different fields with their own concerns produce different models. In addition to differential approach to the form of narrative, different scholarly disciplines put different emphasis on narrative function. The present study aims at presenting narratives as a cognitive tool for meaning-making and a device of identity construction. The article will first review current approaches to narrative analysis with special emphasis on structuralist and Labovian frameworks. Further, an application of Labovian model to story analysis will be presented to illustrate how the study of a narrative structure can be harnessed to fit sociolinguistic research.

1.1. Narrative structure

1.1.1. Structuralist approach to narrative organization

There have been many attempts in literary studies as well as in linguistics to establish criteria which would define the well-formed narrative. In everyday understanding a tale always involves a teller, therefore, narrative analysis has to take into account two elements: the tale and the teller. Such characteristics, however, is true of any speech event and does not exclusively apply to narratives.

As a literary genre narrative is usually presented in the form of a written fictitious text in which the values are used to describe and/or to explain human behaviour. It involves a setting describing where or when the story takes place and a well-developed character or characters who are involved in one or more conflicts (e.g., interpersonal, internal; with society). Theme may be directly stated or implied but the plot must be carefully fashioned with a problem and resolution so that the piece make sense when read from beginning to end. Traditional (Aristotle’s definition) narrative structure encompasses (i)
beginning that contains a setting, characters, problem(s)/conflict(s), initiating events; (ii) middle that involves turning points, crisis, rising action, climax, subplot, parallel episodes; and (iii) end that comprises resolution, falling action, ending. Polanyi (1985: 41) posits

‘narrative is the encoding of previous experiences that took place at a specific point or over a specific interval in a past-time-story-world’.

In the narrative experiences are segmented into events that are temporally ordered. The idea of narrative as destroying a state of equilibrium comes from Russian formalism of 1920s and is also echoed in Toolan (2001: 6) who argues for a minimalist definition of the narrative as follows

A perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events

Short as it may seem, this definition is overloaded with features that significantly contribute to the recognition of a text as narrative. First, there is the word ‘perceived’ that implies existence of an addressee who is an ultimate authority responsible for identification of a text as narrative. Hence it is not the teller who imposes narrative structure upon the tale but rather the addressee has to recognize non-random connectedness of events. The simple relation of successive facts does not constitute narrative. The facts have to be combined in a manner that is meaningful to the addressee. Colby (1970: 177) refers to narrative form as ‘verbal description of one or more concern-causing events’. This concern has to be aroused in the addressee and the way to accomplish it is to ‘disturb the initial state of equilibrium’ in the addressee (Toolan, 2001: 7) and ‘to bring disequilibrium and upheaval before some sort of action’ leading to the restoration of equilibrium. Thus, narrative can be defined as a change from one state to a modified state that occurs both in the addressee and the teller. According to Toolan (2001: 6) the two roles are never entirely separated since ‘the activity of perceiving relatedness of states is the enabling condition for narrative’. Hence, the perception of relatedness rests on the teller in the first place, however ‘it is idle for anyone else to insist that there is a narrative if the addressee does not see it as one’ (p. 7).

In Toolan’s minimalist definition, narrative is non-random connection of events. The facts that enter the story are selected on the basis of their relevance and contribution to the overall coherent organization of the tale as well as meaning and significance for the teller and addressee. The events are arranged sequentially but they do not have to follow the chronological sequence. Toolan (2001) argues that narrative has to have its ‘trajectory’, that is, it is expected to lead to a point at which a sort of resolution or conclusion is provided. In other words, narrative begins with disturbance of the state of equilibrium (Propp, 1928/1968) and ends with the restoration of such state that is achieved in the process of transformation and development of the story. Hence narrative is
a sequence of logically and/or chronologically related events that are bound together by crisis that has to be resolved by the end of the story. In effect, a sequence containing crisis followed by a pronounced change of state of characters involved, appears to be a prototypical narrative.

Toolan’s minimalist definition of narrative does not refer to characters of the tale. Propp (1928/1968), however, asserts that characters and the roles they play in a story are constitutive and fundamental components of a story.

Propp’s claim is that while the characters of the tales might be quite variable, yet their functions were constant and predictable. Thus looking at functions and roles of character Propp succeeded in developing a ‘grammar’ of a tale, which is still in use in modern literature. In addition to lending themselves to the overall well-formedness of a story, characters are also the most powerful means to attract readers to stories. To catch the attention of the addressee, the teller uses a array of linguistic means. Characters are usually created with a variety of descriptions and actions they are involved in. What follows is an example of how literary narrative would be analyzed. If ‘Cinderella’ is considered, the main characters enumerated are: princess (Cinderella), prince and stepmother. The characters are the units of analysis whereas the interrelationships between them are rules governing the ways that the units can be put together. From a structuralist point of view ‘Cinderella’ is the same story as ‘Snow White’ and lots of other Disney stories or fairy tales. A princess is persecuted by a stepmother and rescued and married by a prince. Whatever details are added, the basic structure of the story is always the same. And that is exactly how structuralists approach narratives. They believe that the underlying structures which organize units and rules that tie them into meaningful systems are generated by the human mind itself. Hence, the mind itself is a structuring mechanism which looks through units and organizes them according to rules. This is important, because it means that, for structuralists, the order we perceive in the world is not inherent in the world, rather it is a product of the human mind. In other words humans have to construct narratives to make sense of the world and to organize their experiences into meaningful structures.

Returning to the major issue of this section, that is the structure of narrative, the idea of change has to be stressed as crucial to the well-formedness of a tale. The change concerns not only the sequence of the events but also the characters of the tale as well as the recipients of the text. A well-organized story should encompass logically sequenced events bound together by a focus on the character. The sequence contains periods of turbulence and crisis superseded by periods of calm and peace and subsequent resolution of the...
crisis. The development of the situation in the story as well as transformation of characters lead to continuous and instant change in reader’s mental and emotional states. To revolve this state of disequilibrium, the addressee has to make efforts to accommodate the new experience into the existent system of knowledge. In this way narratives serve as a cognitive tool of knowledge organization and this is precisely how social scientists approach narrative. It is a mental device people utilize in order to construct accurate understandings of the world, their lives and themselves.

1.1.2. Levels of analysis

One of the distinctive characteristics of narrative is its inherent relationship to two spatiotemporally distant worlds: (i) that of the plot; (ii) that of storytelling. Narrative typically involves a recounting of things that are remote in space and time while the whole process takes place in another situational reality, that of the teller and recipient. Thus we have two separate worlds that come to be integrated in the act of storytelling. As Hawthorn (1985: vii) put it

*We look at the pointing arm but our minds are fixed upon what is pointed at.*

This dual life of narrative has instigated a split in the subject of study into two domains of inquiry, namely story and discourse. These are terms that have been originally introduced by Russian narratologists (Propp; Tomashevsky) when they spoke of *fabula* and *sjuzhet* (Toolan, 2001). The former denotes a basic description of the events of the story in their logical order, with accompanying portrayals of characters and their roles in the story. Story analysis seems to focus on the basic event and character patterns of narrative, with scarcely any room for evaluation or commentary. Discourse, on the other hand, looks at the techniques the authors use to present the basic story. The level of ‘*sjuzhet*’ seems to be a more interesting area of investigation than the story structure for more sociologically oriented scientists while the level of ‘*fabula*’ is exploited in literary studies. In non-literary research the focus of inquiry falls upon the naturally-occurring narrative, hence level two becomes the hard core of the study, though the level of the story cannot be excluded from the interpretation.

1.2. Sociolinguistic account of narratives

In social sciences, researchers have been drawing upon the model proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) and elaborated by Labov (1972). Labov and Waletzky demonstrated that basic narrative structures were to be found in everyday tellings of personal experience. The L&W framework proved to be useful in approaching a wide variety of narrative situations and types, including oral autobiography, traditional folk tales, avant-garde novels, therapeutic interviews
and most importantly, the banal narratives of every-day life. It enabled us to understand pseudo-narratives like recipes, apartment-house layouts, and other types of experience remodeled into narrative form. By analyzing many narratives of ordinary people in ordinary settings Labov & Waletzky made an attempt to relate the recurrent linguistic patterns of narratives to their functions.

*We will be relying upon the basic techniques of linguistic analysis, isolating the invariant structural units which are represented by a variety of superficial forms.* (Labov and Waletzky, 1967:12).

With reference to the formal properties of the narrative, Labov and Waletzky assumed the clause to be the minimal structural unit that performed the functions of a socially situated narrative. Moreover, the sequence of clauses, contrary to literary narratives, had to relate to the sequence of events inferred from the narrative or the sequence would create a different story.

*The basic narrative units that we wish to isolate are defined by the fact that they recapitulate experience in the same order as the original events.* (Labov and Waletzky, 1967: 20)

Toolan (2001: 145) illustrates the chronological sequence requirement with two narrative samples whose superficial similarity does not correspond to the actual sequence of events, hence they are two different stories. If we compare

1. *John fell in the river, got very cold, and had two whiskies.*

with

2. *John had two large whiskies, fell in the river, and got very cold.*

we clearly see, despite many similarities of form, that the two clauses represent two different stories whose different cause-effect relations produce utterly different evaluations by the teller and addressee. Labov and Waletzky (1967) claim that true narrative clauses, namely those that present the sequence of actual events, cannot be moved to any other position in the narrative, hence they are non-reversible, *fixed clauses* and the alteration of their position will result in a different interpretation of the story. Further, the authors argue for two other types of clauses whose position is not fixed since it does not interfere with the inferred sequence of events. The clauses that are freely shiftable to any position in the story describe the circumstances surrounding the core sequence of events as well as their participants and setting. There are, however, some other *free clauses* that are no entirely shiftable to any place in the sequence, rather they are movable within limits. Such clauses are termed *restricted* and they either present actions that are parallel to the main story or give a kind of comment to the main plot.

According to Labov and Waletzky the two types of clauses perform two main functions of the narrative, namely the referential one when past experience is
recapitulated and temporally ordered as well as the evaluative function when the point of the story and its tellability are expressed.

Apparently the pair of the sharply-contrasted clause types does not suffice to embrace the whole range of functions enacted by narratives. Consequently Labov (1972) expanded the earlier model of the narrative postulating six major structural components of a fully-formed narrative:

1. abstract
2. orientation
3. complicating action
4. evaluation
5. resolution
6. coda

The abstract presents what the story is about. The orientation sets the scene. Complicating action tells us ‘what happens next,’ and is, for Labov, the element that defines talk as ‘narrative.’ A ‘minimal’ narrative must contain at least 2 clauses that are temporally ordered so that they cannot be reversed without losing sense. Evaluative clauses describe the human consequences of the event; the resolution gives an ending; the coda is a linking section that returns the story to the present. For a story to be more than a ‘minimal’ narrative, Labov wants elements other than the complicating action to be present. Evaluation is particularly important, as it tells you what the story ‘means.’ Labov (1972) suggests that this element can, like orientation, spread all through the story, and allows it many manifestations. For instance, pauses or sighs during the complicating action in the story, might act evaluatively. According to Labov, evaluation may occur at almost any point in the telling though most frequently it is effected just before the resolution of the story to create delay and suspense and heighten the listener’s interest. To illustrate the claim, Squire (2000) presents a story told by someone coming late to an appointment that might look like this:

a. I had a terrible time getting to you. (abstract)
b. I left home two hours ago although I live a few miles away. (orientation)
c. I was waiting at the bus stop for half an hour, and then when the first bus came it was full, and I had to wait another twenty minutes for the next one and eventually I took a taxi. (complicating action)
d. I was getting worried because I knew I might miss the appointment and this would mean waiting another month for the next appointment. (evaluation)
e. Still, I got here on time in the end. (resolution)
f. Now I know I should start earlier. (coda)

This story attempts to use the structure to make inferences about the relation of a narrative as it is told to the underlying events as the speaker experienced
them. The events are structured sequentially to form temporally as well as cause-effect coherent narrative. At first glance it might seem that the narrative has to be considered as an entity in itself, disjoined from the real world. Nevertheless, there are good reasons why the effort should be made to reconstruct the original events from the narrative evidence. Inferences about the original events will lead the audience to greater insights on how the narrator transforms reality in reporting it. Going back over these transformations displays more about the character of the narrator as well as the narrator’s complicity in the events themselves. The addressee has no difficulty in understanding this narrative in terms of its main point, established in the evaluation section ‘d’.

The construction of this narrative can be examined more closely by looking at the causal sequence of events narrated. The analysis begins with reportability and the most reportable event (Labov 1997). The notion of reportability is well known to be relative to the immediate social situation, age and other cultural parameters. A reportable event is defined by Labov (2001) not in absolute terms, but in relation to the narrative situation. A reportable event is one that justifies the automatic reassignment of speaker role to the narrator. To be an acceptable social act, a narrative of personal experience must contain at least one reportable event. Among these reportable events, one can usually identify a most reportable event, which in the story above is in section ‘c’, as the event that is least expected and has the greatest effect upon the needs and desires of the participants in the narrative. It is the least compatible with a potential challenge, ‘So what?’ and the requirement for justification of the story in the interactional context. The most reportable event is usually the one that the story is about. Speakers rarely construct the narrative with the most reportable event as the first of the complicating actions. Every event is preceded by an unlimited number of prior events. The question of where to begin must be posed and answered by every narrator in accordance with the demand of the audience and speaker’s interactional goals and it is not infrequently made explicit.

The answer to the question of where to begin is related to a second basic concept that governs narrative: credibility. The overall credibility of the narrative rests upon listeners’ belief that the most reportable event did in fact take place in real time. The less credible the event, the less likely is it to be awarded automatic speaker reassignment.

Coda is a final comment that comes after resolution of the story. It is a signal that a story is coming to the end. Linguistically, it is realized either with the explicit announcement that the story proper is over or with the deictic shift in spatiotemporal orientation. Coda serves ‘to bring recipients back into real time, that is into the now of the conversation’. (Thornborrow & Coates, 2005: 5).

In contrast to neatly-organized literary narratives, discursive narratives display one major characteristics, namely sense-making, which contributes both to the coherence of the story and to its situational relevance. This is not
to say that literary narrative does not make sense or that discursive narratives are chaotic or unorganized. What it suggests is that they both are operant in different contexts and serve different functions. Discursive narratives that arise spontaneously in ordinary conversations cannot be so neatly organized on a chronology and cause axis since they are accounts of life events. Discursive narrative is a construction out of lived experience, without a clear sense of a beginning or end, but with a clear interest in guessing why something happened and how what happened might affect the very near future (Agar, 2005: 25). Thus the major criteria for a living story construction is the interactional goal the teller aims at in a specific situation whereas traditional narrative appears as an artifact of the author’s mind.

1.2.1. Model analysis

The report below will attempt to use Labovian model to make inferences about the relation of a narrative as it is told to the underlying events as the speaker experienced them. This is an excerpt of a classroom discussion among undergraduate students of EFL on the subject of an impact of a teacher on student’s self-esteem.

a. S.1. (erm) I can remember our high school English teacher (abstract)
b. when me and a friend of mine told her that we want to study English philology (orientation)
c. she said don’t do this subject () it’s too hard () you won’t be able to ()
to I don’t know () finish this (complicating action)
d. she said better try something else (complicating action)
e. it wasn’t very nice of her (evaluation)
f. S.2. so she lowered your self esteem (coda)
g. S.1. yeah () exactly (coda)
h. S.2. but only in this () in this personal personal situation ()
i. otherwise she was quite good high school quite a good teacher (evaluation)
j. S.1. yeah she was very good teacher (evaluation)
k. obviously we learned a lot (evaluation)
l. but (erm) I don’t know probably she was afraid that she’ll lose her job or something (evaluation)

Let us consider first the event structure of that narrative. We have no difficulty in understanding this narrative. The main point is established in the evaluation/coda section e– l. Despite the fact that this is an example of interactional narrative, it satisfies the criteria of well-formadness posited by structuralists. There is the orientation followed by complicating action as well as coda. Abstract introduces the main character of the story to be told (high school English teacher) around whom the plot builds up. Subsequently
speaker one (S.1.), who is both a narrator and a story character, presents other details of the spatial and temporal setting (the last year of a high school) that combine with a description of a situational context (talking to a teacher) and an introduction of minor characters (me, a friend of mine) to form the orientation. What follows is a kernel of a well-formed narrative, i.e. complicating action. In fact, it depicts a short and snappy episode of the narrator’s life that had a profound impact on it. The event is portrayed as a turning point in the teller’s life, hence the audience would neither be able to infer an accurate meaning nor the teller’s attitude not knowing the story. There are good reasons, then, why the effort should be made to reconstruct the original events from the narrative evidence. These inferences about the original sequence of events as well as the narrator’s complicity in them will enable the audience to reflect on how the narrator perceives and transforms reality in reporting them to others. The reconstruction of the past reality will reveal more about the personality of the narrator and the way he has transformed in the course of the events.

In the story at hand, the reconstruction of the events is not difficult, since there is one high-reportability event (teacher’s verbal behaviour) embedded in an low-reportability event (talking to a teacher). The events are organized on the two axes, i.e. a temporal axis which depicts them as simultaneous rather than sequential and a cause-effect axis that orders the events sequentially. The temporal organization of the story does not comply with the Labovian conception of a well-formed narrative where chronological structuring of events is critical. The feeling of temporal sequencing is provoked, though, because the audience, relying on their knowledge of the world, have expectations as to how the situation would develop (having graduated from a high school students continue education at colleges). Further, the audience are drawing upon the immediate interactional context that informs them of the narrator’s current position (he is a college student of English). It seems that the temporal structure of the story events can be successfully recovered from the immediate contextual evidence as well as dominant discourse cues. Superficially, then, there are no overt linguistic markers of temporal organization, rather elaborative inferences that go beyond the literal meaning are made on the basis of the participants’ prior knowledge and their following the co-operative principle (Grice, 1975). They infer the chronological order of the story from the assumption that what the narrator is saying is a relevant contribution to the on-going interaction. Hence, combining situational discourse and dominant discourse cues adds to the comprehension of the story on the part of the addressee. This is the audience who recognize the relevance of the tale at this point of interaction, agree to the telling of the story and make their own contributions to it. Story-telling becomes a collaborative enterprise where parties providing new building blocks contribute to the overall well-formadness of the story and agreeably head for a common goal, that is a successful completion of a communicative act.
In terms of Labovian model the presence of evaluation is vital as these clauses describe the consequences of the event. Here coda, which brings the listeners back from the story world to the world of actual events, is delivered by S.2. who is neither a narrator nor a story character, which is highly indicative of the relevance of the narrative in the immediate context. Moreover, the evaluative utterances are delivered by both the speakers, which highlights the interactional nature of the story. S1 is the participant who initiates as well as contributes most to the plot of the story. S2, however actively participates in storytelling supplying evaluation and coda and her telling role as an evaluator is ratified by S1.

Given the fact that the unmarked turn in a conversation is a single completed sentence, a narrative is marked by the fact that it is normally much longer than this. The speaker, who is delivering the story, therefore holds the floor, and occupies social space for a longer time than a conversational participant who is not telling a narrative. Usually, speakers bid for the floor to tell a story in order to ‘make a point’ (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997) and to ‘account’ for one’s own (and/or others’) social conduct as a matter of stake and interest (Potter, 1996), i.e., making past actions accountable from a particular (moral) perspective for particular situated purposes. As Sacks points out (1992: II, 3–5), other participants may take turns during the narrative, but the performance of the narrative is effectively a claim to return the assignment of speakership to the narrator until the narrative is completed. In this sense, the story under scrutiny satisfies the criteria of a conversational narrative since the participants collaboratively submit their contributions to the story.

The story is embedded in interaction. It is a part of an interactional activity and a locally accomplished project. The story is about very mundane things and everyday occurrences, even not particularly interesting or tellable. Hence, what matters is not the content of the story but rather its function in the conversation. The story is being told as evidence of certain line of reasoning, as justification of a line of argumentation. What matters is not the coherence of the narrative itself, rather the coherence of situational discourse becomes the situationally-shared concern. Therefore interactional narrative’s essential feature is its relevance in the conversation, whose recognition rests on the audience. In the interaction in which participants report their own or others’ conduct, their descriptions are accountable phenomena through which they recognize (im)propriety, (un)suitability, (dis)honesty and so forth. These descriptions are unavoidably incomplete and selective as they are designed for specific interactional processes. Hence they can be understood as a basis for moral evaluation of what is being reported.
Closing remarks

The present study is an attempt to demonstrate that Labovian categories are a useful starting point for defining what ‘stories’ are. Moreover, personal event narratives do operate powerfully in people’s talk as revisitations of certain key moments (Denzin, 1989), in which cognitive and emotional reliving is communicatively performed.

More generally, it could be helpful to view narratives as strategies for explaining events that are partially represented and bringing coherence to seemingly unorganized experience. Narratives are assumed to have cognitive universality, and this means the storyteller is always talking to a generalised attentive and comprehending other. Even when asking the simplest question, about what a story is, we can think of it as a replayed event, an expression of identity or a trace of something that is not there. What narrative says and does can be taken as cognitive or aesthetic re-enactment, an effort at personal understanding or social inscription, or emotional defense. A story can be read as addressed to its present audience or to a much broader audience of past, present and future figures, real and imagined.

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Is there a reader in this book? Twentieth century literary theory and the act of reading – a brief survey

The twentieth century has been an age which cast serious doubt on the universally acclaimed notion of objective scientific certainties. The crucial importance of frame of reference to the act of understanding and interpretation has been substantiated, among others, by Einstein’s theory of relativity and Gestalt psychology. Consequently, a number of scientific approaches have indicated that “the perceiver is active and not passive in the act of perception” (Selden 47). This view has also influenced modern literary theories, especially those originating in phenomenological and hermeneutical schools. Indeed, when twentieth century literary fiction underlined the disappearance of the fully controlling figure of the author, firmly established within the two previous centuries, it has automatically compelled the reader to participate actively not only in the interpretation and criticism, but also in the actual process of the creation of literary texts. In 1947 Jean-Paul Sartre acknowledged that “the writer appeals to the reader’s freedom to collaborate in the production of his work” (40). Imposing on the reader this creative critical task makes it clear that, even though most writers would presumably address their work to any potential audience, each text must presuppose, obviously to a largely varied extent, its conception of a reader possessing special values, sensitivities, or the knowledge of particular codes and conventions. As Saul Bellow remarks: “The writer cannot be sure that his million [readers] will view the matter as he does. He therefore tries to define an audience” (qtd. in Booth 118).

Nevertheless, New Criticism – arguably the first coherent twentieth century Anglo-American literary theory – appears to choose a defensive and depersonalised approach to reading. Even though I. A. Richards created his “protocols of reading,” he was focused on “objective poetics,” rather than on the creative readerly task. Marginalising the position of the author, New Criticism deifies impersonal and objectified texts of poetic endowment, asserting that their meaning and intention can be ascertained through the effort of critical explication and interpretation. New Critical formalists emphasise the significance of repetitive close rereading of literary texts, neglecting the validity of individual and temporal experience of reading. Thus “authors and
readers are sacrificed to the glory of the freestanding, monumentalised text” (Leitch 106).

New Critical approach has certainly evoked some criticism even among American theoreticians. For instance, a narrative model offered by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* puts more emphasis on personification in literature. Booth argues that fiction is a form of communication between the author and the reader; he postulates the recognition of a reader as a construct of an implied author of a literary text (even though he refrains from using a term “implied reader”):

The author creates ... an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement. (138)

A further effort undermining the New Critical approach directed against historical criticism has been made by E. D. Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation*. The meaning of a literary text, in Hirsch’s view, is produced by authorial intention, which is public, not private. The critic contends that the associations and interests of individual readers lead to establishing the significance, not the meaning of the text. He considers readers’ responses as subjective and variable, pointing to the fact that they deal with values, not facts; consequently, he defines such subjective effort as criticism. On the other hand, interpretation is considered by Hirsch objective and stable, it undertakes to reconstruct the authorial intention, which is the only way to extract the meaning of the text. It should therefore be clear that Hirsch sees the principal task of literary analysis in interpretation defined in his terms. Thus, all things considered, the critic’s stance limits the significance of the reader’s response just as New Critics did: promoting impersonal interpretation over individual judgement, he subordinates the reader – this time not to the text, but to the author.

Possibly the most severe attack on the very notion of authorship – which consecutively brought about strengthening of the position of the reader as the person who decides the meaning of the text – has been undertaken by Roland Barthes. In his essay “The Death of the Author” Barthes announces the demise of the possessive paternal Godlike authorial figure. It is not enough – claims the philosopher – to banish the author of the text, we have to accept the fact that he/she has always been absent: “As soon as a fact is narrated ... the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (“Death” 147). Barthes thoroughly undercut the significance of authorial intention in *S/Z*, the work which underscores the “readerly” modality of the text. Consequently, the task of the reader is accentuated: “writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself; in the text, only the reader speaks” (*S/Z* 51). Furthermore, Barthes observes that the question “who is the
“Is there a reader in this book?” may not be unequivocally answered, especially when literary theories have pinpointed numerous different roles and tasks of the reader. Barthes’s solution is to undermine the reader’s individuality:

This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already the plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost). ... The meanings I find are established not by ‘me’ or by others, but by their systematic mark: there is no other proof of a reading than the quality and endurance of its systematics; in other words: than its functioning. (S/Z 10–11)

Hence, Barthes stresses that the only factor that remains constant between readers is a set of reading habits and conventions which he labels codes (hermeneutic, semic, symbolic, proairetic and referential) and to which he ascribes primary importance in the act of reading.

The significance of readers’ systematic competence exercised in the reading process was also declared by post-Barthesian structuralist criticism in the 1970s. Structuralists emphasise that the mastery of reading practices is essential for total interpretation of literary texts. Jonathan Culler evokes the image of an ‘ideal reader’, equipped with the command of special reading regimens, which he describes in terms of isolating six rules, conventions and codes; making sense of a text is thus dependent on relating it to various models of coherence (Culler 115–116, 159).

Somehow related both to structuralist theories and to the thought of Barthes is the semiotic approach to reading offered by Umberto Eco. Eco performs an exceptionally broad, coherent and comprehensive investigation of the field and finalises it in his study *The Role of the Reader*. He opposes the early structuralist prejudice towards recognising the role of the audience on the grounds of its being a “disturbing intrusion”, declaring that “to postulate the cooperation of the reader does not mean to pollute the structural analysis with extratextual elements”, as the reader is granted an active interpretative part in the very generative process of the text (4). The semiologist avers that the image of the reader is a construct premeditated by the author of each text:

To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (7)

In Eco’s view, the author of a literary work selects a Model Reader for his/her text through the choice of a specific linguistic code, literary style and encyclopaedic competence it implicitly presupposes. A text not only presupposes a model of competence to be brought by its reader from the outside, but also develops a specific competence in the reader by purely textual means in the process of reading.
Nevertheless, the branch of literary theory which most attentively focuses on the role of the reader in determining the meaning of literary works is—as the very name plainly suggests—reader-response criticism. It can be generally assumed that all reader-oriented theories are rooted in Husserlian phenomenology—the study of objects appearing in our (readers’) consciousness. However, it was Husserl’s disciple, Roman Ingarden, who directed this phenomenological approach to the study of literature. Ingarden points out the specific structural feature of literary works: they contain what he calls “schematized aspects” which need to be specified by the audience. The reader’s active task consists in “filling in the gaps left by the text itself” (Iser, “Reading Process” 193) during the process of “concretization.” Obviously, the process is quite individual: no two concretizations performed by different readers will ever be the same.

Ingarden’s thought has formed a basis for Wolfgang Iser’s comprehensive account of the process of reading. For Iser, “reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character” and “the ‘unwritten’ part of a text stimulates the reader’s creative participation” (“Reading Process” 189–190). Recognising some assumptions of the narrative communication model introduced by Booth, Iser attests that the writer employs generally understood conventions so as to exert control over the way his readers perceive the text. The act of reading demands reader’s individuality, which is invoked by the author by providing the text with “blanks,” “vacancies” and “negations” (the idea rooted in Ingarden). Further, Iser explains that the reader’s task is “to occupy shifting vantage point” and “to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern.” Hence,

the reader’s role is prestructured by three basic components: the different perspectives represented by the text, the vantage point from which he joins them together, and the meeting place where they converge. (Act of Reading 35–36)

Ultimately, in Iser’s understanding, the reader is neither the fictitious figure addressed by the implied author, nor the flesh-and-blood person reading, nor even a combination of both; the reader is a transcendental possibility existing in the process of reading. At the same time, it is true that “a potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations” (“Reading process” 193).

A subjectivist theory of reader response has been introduced by David Bleich in his work Subjective Criticism. For Bleich, reading appears as “misreading,” and the critic does not see the need for the uniformity of response in different readers. On the contrary, he points to the necessity of various “distortions” in the process (associations, insertions, omissions, exaggerations, errors), perceiving them as evidence of readers’ engrossment in the text. However, this approach has been found ineffective by opponents, who point to the danger “of generating readings that are unconvincing, irrelevant, and uninteresting” (Coen 26).
A further elaboration on the reader response theory has been proposed by Stanley Fish and his concept of “interpretive communities”. Fish argues that the strategies of interpretation employed by readers depend on their attachment to a particular community, and such communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. (171)

The theorist declares that such communal readers are automatically predisposed to create particular meanings.

Even though reader response critics are accused of rendering the reader “an unspecific private disembodied consciousness”, the reception theory deserves credit for problematising the stability of texts and subjectivity of the reader. A significant disagreement between two major approaches to reading has been observed by Leitch:

Against the retrospective, objectified, and spatialised readings sought by formalists and structuralists, various phenomenologists, hermeneuticists, and reader-response critics advocate dialogical encounters with texts, focused on the unfolding process of reading as it happens. (114)

Bleich’s conception of “misreading” has been taken up by Paul de Man, who attests that interpretative competence of readers is frustrated by inevitable incoherence, discontinuity and ungrammaticality inherent in literary texts. De Man notes that “the specificity of literary language resides in the possibility of misreading and misinterpretation” (280) and that “far from constituting an objective base for literary study, rhetoric implies the persistent threat of misreading” (285). He further remarks that a text created in the act of misreading spawns another misreading in a critical representation of this text, which results from the fact that a transparent, non-rhetorical metalanguage of criticism does not exist.

Overall, it seems quite certain that the post-Barthesian, reader-response-aware world of literary theory and criticism would agree that “books only take on their full existence in the reader” (Poulet 54). Moreover, as some theorists observe, reading – in which we come into contact with the new, unknown world created by a literary text – becomes a kind of experience which demands the suspension of attitudes forming our personality. Thus, the far-reaching consequence of the phenomenological approach to reading seems to be voiced in Poulet’s conclusion:

Whatever I think is a part of my mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world, which is being thought in me just as though I did not exist. Already the notion is inconceivable
and seems even more so if I reflect that, since every thought must have a subject to think it, this thought which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have in me a subject which is alien to me. ... Whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an I, and yet the I which I pronounce is not myself. (56)

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Katarzyna Krakowian-Płoszka

Language for the Future

It is a commonplace to state that the knowledge of foreign languages is an important asset to every individual, especially now, when the world has become a ‘global village’. In Poland, after our entry to the European Union, this knowledge is badly needed both for the individual citizens and for the country as a whole. An article in one of our daily newspapers (Kumoch 2) shows that there is a positive relationship between the knowledge of English by the citizens of a country and its economic growth. The author of the article states that countries like Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and the new members of the EU like Slovenia and Estonia, where the level of knowledge of English is the highest in the Union, had also achieved the highest level of economic growth. The data comes from before the start of the global financial crisis but it does not invalidate the statement made in the article.

In Poland, after the Second World War, even in spite of the communists’ effort to enforce and spread the knowledge of Russian, English has always enjoyed the highest status as a foreign language. Now English is still the chief language which is taught and learned in our country. Teaching English has become one of the most profitable ‘industries’ in Poland.

The level of mastery of this language has risen tremendously and the quality of teaching has also significantly improved. The teachers and learners have access to a multitude of modern aids in the form of excellently written manuals, easy books for reading, CD-ROMs, the Internet etc., etc. Yet, in the opinion of the present author, this is not enough. What has to be achieved is the transformation of the population of the country into bilingual, and later, perhaps, into multilingual society.

The author’s observations and the opinions of some of her friends force her to conclude that teaching English, particularly in kindergartens and elementary schools leaves a lot to be desired. Two examples offered here illustrate the problems facing the parents who care for the overall development of their offspring, including mastering the English language. The examples to be quoted are two mothers, both English language teachers. One of them, the author herself, under the pressure exerted by her daughter (she did not want to be laughed at as the only person among the colleagues in her group
who did not attend English language classes) had to enroll the daughter in an English class run by a young girl who had had pedagogical training and, alas, a poor grasp of English. The result was that the daughter, and her friends, enjoyed the activities organized by the teacher but heard very little English. Fortunately, the daughter has managed to acquire quite a lot of English from her grandfather, who talks to her in English and engages her in play, also in English. Additionally, she watches English language films for children, listens to stories, rhymes etc., read from books or just told. At the age of five and a half years she understands most of what is said to her, and she also uses English in communication, sometimes in incorrect but intelligible speech. She is lucky, luckier that her friends learning English in the kindergarten.

A colleague of the author’s has a son who is taught English in an elementary school in Łódź. The teacher, a young girl with the licentiate certificate in English, over and over tries to teach her students the same elements of English, but without any positive results. In spite of her good intentions, and because of her poor mastery of the language which she teaches, her results in teaching are practically nil and her students get bored and lose motivation for learning. When the author’s colleague intervened with the school director, she was told that she could not find a substitute teacher and she could not do anything about this. Other parents do not object because, as they said, ‘nobody has yet managed to learn a foreign language at school’!

These two examples, obviously, cannot be treated as hard evidence, but the author has a natural feeling that the opinion expressed earlier stating that foreign language teaching in kindergartens and elementary schools is poor is true.

Recent research in linguistics, psychology and, particularly, in the area of first and second language acquisition has yielded a great amount of data concerning the ways (methods) of teaching foreign languages, including methods of teaching little children. A very important contribution in this area has been provided by Stephen Krashen (1982). The most important element of his Monitor Model Theory, relevant for the present discussion is the Input Hypothesis and, especially, the six qualities of optimal input which must be: (1) comprehensible, (2) relevant, (3) interesting, (4) roughly tuned, (5) not grammatically sequenced and (6) provided in sufficient amounts. The Input Hypothesis will be also referred to, further on in this article.

An interesting and highly advertised method of teaching children English, which appeared around 1985, is the so called Helen Doron method. Helen Doron, the ‘inventor’ of the method, was born in Great Britain. In 1977 she graduated from the Linguistics Department of Reading University. For some time she taught English and linguistics in France and then moved to Israel. Her

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1 The author has already taken some steps to verify this statement through checking the quality of teaching English in some, randomly selected kindergartens and elementary schools in Łódź.
scientific background helped her to experiment and refine teaching her own young children English and develop her own method of teaching children called Helen Doron Early English.

It is necessarily to point out that Helen Doron’s method of teaching is not her original discovery. She can only be praised for the business skill in using the available data concerning the ways in which the young children acquire the native and foreign tongues: their interests, the instinctive drive for play, their short attention span, etc., in turning the method into a successful business venture. Helen Doron received a patent for the method advertised in her firm – Helen Doron Ltd. Everyone who has to teach with her method has to buy a license and pay tax for using the method and for the use of the firm’s premises. The licensed teacher is also obliged to buy teaching materials produced by the firm and has to follow the teaching guidelines to the letter. The teachers are also obliged to sign a written pledge that they will not divulge the firm’s secrets. It is interesting that there are not any Helen Doron teaching manuals on sale in bookshops, which confirms the aura of secrecy practiced by the firm.

The firm sells the right to open a Helen Doron Centre in an area to where the method has yet not managed to reach (franchising). The owner of the centre (not necessary a teacher of a foreign language) also pays tax for the privilege of running such school. ² The owner buys teaching manuals from the firm, which he sells to students with profit.

The firm offers courses for children from 1 to 14 years of age. The interest of the present author is focused on infants between 1 to 4 years of age. These children learn action rhymes, chants, songs, play games and listen to music. Originally, the parents had been obliged to buy an audio cassette and play it when the child was busy around and could hear what was played. The expectation was that the infant’s brain would automatically record what he/she had heard and be ready for being taught. During a single lesson of thirty minutes per week the Helen Doron teacher, through play, action, mime, etc., tries to inject meaning to the language which the infants had heard and remembered. At present, the children also listen to recordings on the CDs. Additionally, children have picture books, an activity pad, a story book with four stories and a booklet with instructions for parents. It was not possible to find out the current fee the parents pay for every lesson.

The opinions the author has heard from parents concerning the Helen Doron teaching are mixed. Parents who are English teachers are fairly satisfied but complain that they have to do extra work – teaching their own children to be sure that they cope with the programme. The other parents have to rely on the method and do not complain.

² The author is aware that some items of the information about the firm may be dated and, therefore, not accurate.
From the scientific view, the method is sound, although outsiders are not allowed to know all the method’s secrets. Science and scientific theories and discoveries are available to anyone who is interested, for inspection. The theories and discoveries are constantly verified and, apart from military and business secrets, they are open for verification by anybody. From the available information, one may judge that the Helen Doron method has not added anything new and original to what has been found to work in teaching foreign languages to children. Every interested teacher has known that little children love play: singing, dancing, chanting, stories, rhymes, colour pictures, riddles etc. Psycholinguists, long ago, had found that rhythm and songs are very important in the process of learning vocabulary, especially by little children. It has also been known for quite a long time that infants have a special ability allowing them to learn new vocabulary very quickly. The use of the audio cassettes (and now CDs) has been taken from doctor Suzuki who had taught infants to play a violin and told the parents to play the cassettes and help the children in mastering the skill of playing an instrument. Teaching very young children, sometimes very young babies younger than one year of age, may be frowned on by some specialists as harmful but, in bilingual societies, learning two languages is a norm. There are also reports about experiments with children who had been exposed to input from two languages by parents who knew foreign languages, like the experiment conducted by Leopold (Hatch 1–18) on his own daughter.

The only innovation introduced by Doron in teaching babies is the logical requirement that the babies should be brought to school and looked after by their parent(s).

However, in spite of the positive evaluation of the method’s techniques of teaching, and apart from the fact that the method is not scientifically open, one may level serious criticism, namely the problem concerning the scarcity of input. In the kind of teaching described earlier one has a feeling that children do not have enough exposure to input from English. Very young children have some faculty which is sometimes called language instinct (Pinker 1995), which allows them to master the native language very quickly. This instinct also enables such children to master two (or more) languages equally quickly (Brzeziński 24). It has long been recognized that the most important prerequisite for success in learning a foreign language is the provision of plenty of input for the learners to acquire the language from.

Bilingualism is a must for contemporary societies because of easy travel, migrations, quick communication and other features of the world turned into a global village. In other words, something must be done, so that people all over the world could successfully communicate.

The necessity of developing a ‘lingua franca’ for free communication with other people in the world, in order to achieve international understanding
of other peoples’ views and, therefore, maintaining peace (most probably an illusion) among peoples and states had been recognized in the 19th century, when there had been a drive to develop an easy, artificial language for global communication. As we know, the most successful artificial language, out of several hundreds of others, was Esperanto. Fortunately or unfortunately, the ‘lingua franca’ of the world now is English.

After the Second World War, an American linguist, Mario Pei (1968) proposed a very interesting strategy for the spread of bilingualism all over the world. The strategy relied on the cooperation of all the countries of the world and it had several stages. The first one was to obtain the agreement of all countries represented in the United States on the language which would become the universal language on the planet. Pei was of the opinion that any language – natural or artificial – could be fit for the international language. When that step was successfully made, the second one was to organize, on the global scale, the training of teachers who would start teaching it to children in the first class of the kindergarten. The estimated time for the training of the first batch of teachers was five years. After that, at the beginning of every school year, a new generation of first class kindergarten children would start learning the international language, and all the older students would progress and continue learning through the kindergarten, elementary school and upwards – until the university level. After about thirty years, every country would have about half of its citizens who were fully bilingual individuals. That was the reason that Pei called this enterprise a language for the future. The title of this article, naturally, comes from him because the author wishes to propose an improved version of Pei’s idea.

As it could be predicted, Pei’s proposal fell through – the selfish, national interests of every country blocked any serious discussion of this idea. Fortunately, it seems to the author that the proper time has come to dust off Pei’s idea and introduce it into practice. The world has changed and the first and the most crucial hurdle to overcome in his scheme has now disappeared – without any haggling the English language has established itself as the ‘lingua franca’ of the world. The only one important issue to be solved now is turning monolingual individuals into bilingual people knowing their native language and English. The author’s ambition is not to do something on the global scale, but only to improve the acquisition of the English language by all Polish little children, not only those whose parents are rich enough to pay the fee in a Doron or another private school.

Young children may easily acquire English if in their environment there is enough input from this language. This input for learning a foreign language may be easily accessed mostly from television programmes – films designed originally for the native language speaking children, in this case, English children. These films, for younger children (three to about six years of age),
are now shown on the Mini Mini and JimJam channels in the version translated into Polish. One cannot see any difficulty and extra cost in broadcasting them in both Polish and original, English versions. Children love to watch the same films over and over again. If they could have a choice in selecting the language, they could listen to both and familiarize themselves with the contents of the story through the native language. In this way the English input would be comprehensible (see Krashen’s features of optimal input). What is more, television can provide enough input; much more interesting and relevant input that any other environment. In addition, the language of the films is not directed at teaching particular grammar structures of English, but on communication. This means that the input is not grammatically sequenced. And, it is quite obvious, that the language present in the films directed to a heterogeneous audience cannot be finely tuned to every individual. As we may see, the above arguments concerning English input available for little children from television satisfy the requirements constituting optimal input, as defined by Krashen.

Television also caters for older children with programmes relevant for their age. The films are also, unfortunately, broadcast only in Polish. For example, one such channel which had been excellent in the early nineties of the previous century was, Cartoon Network, but now it is full of violence, hate and other negative elements. A good channel for older children is Jetix which could excellently do the job of a medium facilitating the acquisition of English for the older group of children, providing that it also had two language options – Polish and English versions of the text. It is not necessary to repeat the same arguments (see the paragraph above) showing that television programmes in English can provide optimal input for successful acquisition of it, as stated in the requirements listed by Krashen.

Many parents are against allowing their children to watch television because they are afraid that the programmes broadcast may psychologically and socially harm their proper growth. This is a very serious problem; it is true that the TV programmes may negatively influence their children, but only when the parents do not monitor and control what the children are watching. Television, like any other inventions or discoveries, may be used for good and for bad. A knife may be used to stab and kill someone, but it may also be used for slicing bread, or (like a scalpel) for operating a patient. The point is that the positive potential of television should and may be used properly for good, like, for example, acquiring a foreign language.

Apart from television viewing, parents may buy lots of different kinds of aids for learning English, for example, CDs accompanying English textbooks destined for teaching that language in schools. Also, it seems that now there is not much trouble in trying to buy original English films for children through the Internet. There also are some CD discs in Polish with films for children.
which have the English language option as well. One can also find (or buy through the Internet) audio CDs with stories like the Little Red Riding Hood, a story known to all young children all around the world. Children should be exposed to these and other aids to complement the input available from television.

Some people may not believe that it is possible for a child to learn English from television alone, notwithstanding Krashen's claim that providing learners with optimal input is a sufficient condition for success in mastering a foreign language.

The author can support the statement that listening to English language films on TV may lead to acquisition of that language with some data of her own (Krakowian-Płoszka 2000 in print). She once was asked by a neighbour to check her ten-year-old son's level of English proficiency. She spent about an hour talking with the boy and was satisfied that he understood everything which was said to him, and he could easily communicate in English, although, from time to time, with some departures from the grammatical norms. The inaccuracies however, did not disrupt the communication. After the interview, she asked the boy's mother where he had learnt English so well. The mother answered: from television.

While preparing this article, the author learned from some of her acquaintances that they, too, had had learned English from television on Cartoon Network at the time that the programmes had not been scrambled.

One can conclude that the exposure to the English language described here and, presumably, some help from kindergarten and elementary school teaching has a great chance to increase the level, both of teaching and, primarily, learning of English in our country.

On the basis of the arguments put forward in this article the author is convinced that the implementation of the suggestion discussed in the article will be a positive step forward in teaching practice and on the grounds for the need of social equality: all children should have equal access to language resources needed for their success in acquiring the English language. This initiative can lead to a gradual process of changing our monolingual society into a bilingual one and can also result in a substantial growth of our economy.

The author believes that The Ministry of Education will be interested in the proposal discussed in this article.

Bibliography


The effectiveness of a teacher made placement test at the First Certificate level

Introduction

Being able to converse effectively in English is viewed as an extremely important advantage in our modern world. Language courses at various levels are run to satisfy different needs of the participants. Some learners need the language for their professional career or academic purposes, others plan to go abroad, some students want to become more proficient in the language. In order to assign candidates to classes appropriate to their level a placement test is necessary. Such a test is intended to provide information about candidates’ abilities and knowledge of the language. Placement tests are designed to identify candidates who meet the requirements of a particular course. The purpose of such tests is to place new students at the stage most appropriate to their knowledge of language and abilities.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the effectiveness of a teacher made placement test at the First Certificate level. In order to do this, the results of the placement test to the First Certificate course will be compared and contrasted with the results of the First Certificate exam test administered at the beginning of a course.

1. Basic consideration in testing

1.1. The need for testing

Testing is an integral part of every teaching and learning experience. Properly designed tests of appropriate difficulty can provide a useful feedback on both teaching and learning.

Tests are conventionally used to define the level of knowledge of the testee. Information about learners’ language ability is often very useful, for example to decide whether a particular candidate has passed a course, can enter a certain class or is suitable for a given job or admission to university. Heaton mentions the following reasons for testing:
— finding out about progress
— encouraging students
— finding out about learning difficulties
— finding out about achievement
— placing students
— selecting students
— finding out about proficiency (Heaton 1990 27)

For the purpose of this paper the last three reasons are of major importance.

1.2. Major test attributes

Every test should have a precisely defined purpose which can be achieved only when the test is properly designed and complies with certain requirements. Most language researchers name essentially the same qualities that a good test should have. According to Harris these are validity, reliability and practicality (Harris 1969 8-29). Phillner mentions discrimination besides reliability and validity (Phillner 1968 85). Similar features of a good test are proposed by Lado, who also distinguishes elements of practicality: scorability, economy and administrability (Lado 1961 32).

For the purpose of this paper the following test properties will be discussed: validity, reliability, discrimination and practicality.

Validity of a test is the extent to which it measures accurately what it is supposed to measure and nothing else. However, the concept of validity has a number of aspects:
— Content validity refers to the adequacy of content sampling. It demands a careful analysis of the language being tested and particular course objectives.
— Criterion related validity is applied to see how far the results of the test agree with those provided by some independent assessment of the candidate’s ability.
— Construct validity assumes the existence of certain learning theories or constructs underlying the acquisition of language skills.
— Face validity refers to the way the test looks to the candidates, teachers, educational authorities.

The next property that should be possessed by a good test is reliability. Brown explains that “a reliable test is a test that is consistent and dependable” (Brown 1980 211). Reliability means the stability of test scores. In fact, a test cannot be valid unless it is reliable. A test does not measure anything accurately unless it measures consistently. There are several factors which affect test reliability. The adequacy and quantity of the sampling of tasks belongs to the most important of them. The more samples of the students’ performance we gather the more reliable the assessment will be. Another factor is scorer reliability, which concerns the stability of test evaluation. The reliability of
the scoring is high if the same scorer gives the same or nearly the same score repeatedly for the same test or when two scores give equivalent scores for the same test performance.

Test reliability can be estimated in a number of ways. One technique is to retest the same respondents with the same test. A second method is to use alternate or parallel forms of the same test which are equivalent in length, difficulty, time limit and format. A third technique is a split-half procedure, when one test is administered and the items are divided into halves. Once two sets of score for comparison are obtained a reliability coefficient can be found. A reliability quotient of 1.00 would indicate that a test is perfectly reliable, it would give precisely the same results for a particular set of candidates regardless of when it was administered. A test with reliability coefficient of zero would give sets of results quite unconnected with each other. In practice the reliability coefficient falls somewhere between these two extremes and varies for different types of language tests. Grammar and vocabulary tests are expected to have higher reliability quotient than oral production tests.

The idea of discrimination is another important aspect of testing. If a test is to tell us something about an individual, it is necessary for it to discriminate among members of the group. The extent of the need to discriminate will obviously vary depending on the purpose of the test. In progress or achievement tests the concept of discrimination may be of little of even no importance, however in a placement test it plays the major role.

The final characteristic of a good test is practicality – the extent to which the test is readily usable by teachers. Tests should be as economical as possible both in cost (materials, number of scorers) and time (preparation, setting, marking).

To sum up, any good language test demands the above mentioned features. It is not possible to construct a test and select an adequate testing format without proper understanding what these concepts mean and how to apply them.

1.3. Types of tests

Tests are used to obtain different types of information. It is possible to categorize tests according to the information being sought. Such categorization can prove very useful in deciding whether a given test is suitable for a particular purpose. Four types of tests can be distinguished:
- proficiency tests designed to measure students’ ability in a language regardless of any training they may have had in that language
- achievement tests used to measure how successful a student has been in achieving objectives
- diagnostic tests used to define students’ strengths and weaknesses
- placement tests used to assign students to classes at different levels or place them in or out of a program

For the purpose of this study a placement test is of primary importance and it will be discussed in detail.
1.4. Functions of a placement test

Placement tests are designed to identify candidates who meet the requirements of a particular group or class. The purpose of such tests is to place new students at the stage most appropriate to their knowledge of languages and abilities.

Placement tests are used for two purposes:

1. to place individuals in appropriate language classes.

Candidates are assigned into groups according to their language ability. In most institutions classes are conducted at five levels: elementary, lower intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced. Course objectives at all levels are expressed in rather general terms, as candidates come from various schools and have attended various courses as well as used a number of books. Such a test should be as general as possible and should concentrate on testing a wide and representative range of language ability. Sufficient accuracy is required to limit the need for changes of class once teaching is under way. Such a test should be brief, easy to administer, score and interpret as there are usually hundreds of new students who enroll within a matter of days. A placement test of this type does not make pass – fail distinction, since some kind of teaching is offered to everyone.

2. to place candidates in or out of a program.

Such tests are used to separate those candidates who are prepared for a certain teaching program from those who are not. Objectives for such a test depend on the degree of proficiency candidates are expected to achieve. A placement test to the First Certificate group will obviously differ from an entrance exam to University. Such tests have a single cut off point: examinees either pass or fail the test. The cut off point is usually determined for each test individually, the minimum being 50-60%. A very high degree of accuracy is required. The length depends on the degree of difficulty and language proficiency. Placement tests of this type can take the form of selection tests, especially if there are more candidates than places available. The purpose of such a test is to compare the performance of all candidates and select only the best ones. Selection tests are norm-referenced tests, while placement test are criterion-referenced.

The purpose of the placement test discussed here is to place candidates in or out of a program, however for those who fail teaching at a lower level is offered.

1.5. Backwash effect

Backwash effect can be defined as either direct or indirect effect of testing on the process of teaching and learning. If a test is regarded important, then preparation for it may dominate all teaching and learning activities, e.g.
entrance exams to universities or other institutions of higher education. Hughes advises how to obtain a beneficial backwash effect and suggests to:
- test the abilities whose development you want to encourage
- sample widely and unpredictably
- use direct testing
- make testing criterion-referenced
- base achievement tests on objectives (Hughes 1989 54)

2. Description of the project

2.1. Test specifications

All teachers have to undertake the preparation of their own tests. The essential step in testing is to make oneself perfectly clear about what it is one wants to know and for what purpose.

Therefore, the first stage in any test construction should always be preparing a set of specifications for the test. Test’s specifications provide information about what the test is supposes to test and how it does it. According to Hughes, this ought to include information on: content, format and timing, criterial levels of performance and scoring procedures. (Hughes 1989 58-75)

Alderson proposed a list of specifications in a form of questions which need to be answered by test writers:

1. What is the purpose of the test?
   The purpose of this teacher-made placement test is to assess students’ level of language ability so that they can be placed in the group preparing for the First Certificate exam in English. For candidates who fail this test teaching at a lower level will be offered. This test is not based on any particular syllabus, as students have previously studied English at various institutions.

2. What sort of learner will be taking the test?
   It can be assumed that all candidates have the same cultural background. The age of students vary, however most are between 18 and 26 years of age. As far as the level of proficiency is concerned, candidates are expected to master the grammatical structures, vocabulary areas and language functions at intermediate level. The reason for taking this test is to enroll at the First Certificate course and later at the end of the course to take and pass successfully the First Certificate exam in English.

3. How many sections/papers should the test have, how long should they be and how will they be differentiated?
   The test cannot be too long for reasons of practicality and the scoring must be easy and quick. The test consists of five parts: multiple choice questions, key word transformations, gap filling, word formation and reading comprehension.

4. What target language situation is envisaged for the test?
Candidates are expected to show a certain level of language proficiency, that is why the test as well as all the instructions are in English.

5. What test type should be chosen – written and/or spoken?
Due to reasons of practicality, candidates take a written test only. However, in doubtful cases, an oral interview can be conducted.

6. What language skills should be tested?
An ideal placement test to the First Certificate group should test the five language skills tested during the exam. However, due to the time limit and the reasons of practicality that is hardly possible. The teacher made test discussed here concentrates on testing two skills: use of English and reading comprehension.

7. What language elements should be tested?
The placement test is not based on any particular syllabus, that is why the language elements tested are defined in very broad terms. The grammatical structures, vocabulary areas and language functions included are those covered at intermediate level of teaching.

8. What sorts of tasks are required?
The tasks are both discrete point, when one element is tested at the time, and integrative, where candidates are required to combine many language elements. All of the tasks are objectively assessable.

9. How many items are required for each section?
The test consists of five sections, two sections have 15 items each, two others 10 items each and one section has 5 items only. Not all the items have the same weight..

10. What test methods are to be used?
The tests methods used are: multiple choice questions, gap filling, key word transformations and word formations.

11. What rubrics are to be used as instructions for candidates?
The instructions will be given in English and an example will be presented before each task to help candidates know what is expected of them. The criteria of assessment will not be included in the rubrics, only the number of points for each task.

12. What criteria for assessment will be used by markers?
Items have different weights and candidates get points only for correct answers, no partially correct answers are to be accepted. Multiple choice questions, gap filling and key word transformations items score one point for each correct answer, while in sentence transformations and reading comprehension tasks two points are given for each correct answer. The scoring system is based on the scoring system used at the First Certificate exam, where items have different weight. Accuracy and spelling are considered important for key word transformations, and gap filling while spelling for word formation task. (Alderson 1995 9–40)
The placement test to the First Certificate group
The test battery
The test consists of five parts:
  - Multiple choice questions – 15 items
  - Key word transformations – 10 items
  - Gap filling – 15 items
  - Word formation – 10 items
  - Reading comprehension – 5 items
Total number of items – 55 items.
Total number of points – 70 points.
One score is reported for the whole test.
Time allowed for completing the test is 45 minutes

The First Certificate exam test
Test battery.
The test consists of five papers:
  - Multiple choice cloze – 15 items
  - Open cloze – 15 items
  - Key word transformations – 10 items
  - Word formation – 10 items
  - Reading comprehension – 7 items
Total number of items – 57 items.
Total number of points – 74 points.
One score is reported for the whole test.
Time allowed for completing the test is 1 hour.

2.2. Pretesting and item moderation

More items were constructed then were finally used. The test was first pretested on two teachers of English, one Polish and one native speaker and then on two groups, each of 10 students who have just completed courses at intermediate level. Some items turned out to be ambiguous or confusing, even the best students could not come up with the correct answer, few others either too difficult or too easy. All of these items were removed. Also the instructions had to be made more explicit, especially in the open cloze, where some students tried to write two or three words instead of one only, and in the sentence transformation task, where some students changed the word given.

The pretesting turned out to be very useful both in items moderation and in improving the instructions.

2.3. Test administration

Candidates enroll on the First Certificate course over the span of about one month, that is why the tests are taken individually. In order to assure reliability
of the test the same conditions have to be provided for each candidate. Candidates write the placement test in the same room and have 45 minutes to complete all the tasks. There is always one teacher present in this room to make sure that nobody tries to cheat. All the instructions are given in English and an example is presented before each task. Once the test is completed another teacher, a scorer, marks the test, and the candidate is told the results. All the tests are put into school files.

The second test was administered after one month of teaching. Students were told that they were going to take a sample First Certificate test. This time students took the test as a group and the time limit was extended to one hour because the reading text was longer.

3. Result analysis

3.1. Data collection

The placement test was administered over the span of one month prior to the beginning of an academic year. Twenty six candidates took the test, fifteen passed the test successfully and were accepted on the course. Teaching at a lower level was offered to candidates to failed the test.

The purpose of the experiment described in this paper is to find correspondence between the results of the placement test and the First Certificate test. Out of nine students who didn’t meet the requirements of the placement test only three enrolled on a course at intermediate level. That’s why only the results of eighteen candidates will be compared, fifteen who passed the placement test and three who failed but enrolled on a course at a lower level. The placement test’s results of the other six candidates cannot be taken into consideration as they didn’t take the second test.

3.2. Setting a pass mark

In a placement test a cut off point has to be set before the test is administered as comparing candidates’ performance is simply impossible. Candidates take tests at different times and want to know whether they meet the requirements of a given course or not. After pretesting the cut off point was set to 60%. The first question which arises is what to do with candidates who score 59% or 58%. Should they be accepted as well or not? It is a very serious problem as the placement test was to be implemented in a private institution where students pay for the course and obviously the school would like to accept as many candidates as possible. The procedure used in such doubtful cases is usually to conduct an oral interview with the candidate.

3.3. Test results and descriptive statistics

The most important statistics to be reported once the tests are scored are the mean, the mode and the median. They show how the scores cluster together.
Other important characteristics are range and standard deviation, which show how widely the scores are spread out.

The placement test consisted of 55 items and the total score was 70 points. The pass mark was 60% which is 42 points. 18 students took the test, 15 passed and 3 failed. The best score was 61 points (87%), while the worst score was 32 point (45%). The lowest score among the students who passed the test was 43 points (61%). The scores for students who failed fell below 55%.

The First Certificate test consisted of 57 items and the total score was 74 points. The same group of 18 students took the test, however no pass-fail distinction was set. The best score was 58 points (78%), while the worst 25 points (38%). Students who failed the placement test obtained the three lowest scores on the second test.

The mean for the first test is 50,11 and 43,72 for the second one. The score gained by the largest number of students, mode, is 54 for a placement test and 46 for the First Certificate test. The score obtained by the student in the middle of the student ranking, median, is 52,5 for the first test and 46 for the second one. Once these measures of central tendency are reported, a conclusion can be drawn that the scores cluster together for both tests and in the case of the First Certificate test the mode and the median are the same.

None of these measures discussed above accounts for the differences in the spread of scores. The simplest way to report the difference is to report the range of each distribution, the difference between the top and the bottom scores. In the placement test the range is 29, while in the First Certificate test the range is 33. Both tests have a wide spread of scores, however the scores are spread wider in the second test.

The range is a very useful measure but it does not take account of any gaps in the distribution, i.e. scores that were not achieved by anyone. The measure of dispersion that takes account of every single score is the standard deviation, which reports the average amount by which all the scores differ from the mean. The S.D. for the placement test is 8.5 and 8.85 for the First Certificate exam test. The numbers show once more that both tests have a wide spread of scores and the First Certificate test demonstrates a wider spread than the placement test.
3.4. Correlation

The concept of correlation means the extent to which two sets of results agree with each other. Correlation of +1.0 is a perfect positive correlation. In such a case all the ranks are identical for both tests. When the two sets of ranks instead of being identical are just quite the opposite, i.e. the student who came first in one test came last in the second one, we talk about perfect negative correlation, or a correlation of –1.0. It is not very common to find either a perfect positive correlation or a perfect negative correlation between two sets of results of language tests. In real word the correlation usually falls between these two extremes.

The correlation between the placement test and the First Certificate test this time is +71, which means that there is quite a strong agreement between the two sets of scores. What is very interesting is the fact that the ranks of the students who failed the placement test hardly changed. All of these students came bottom three in both tests.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to investigate the effectiveness of a teacher made placement test. The results of the placement test were compared with the results of the First Certificate test taken by the same group of students after one month. The statistical analysis shows that there is quite a strong correlation between the two sets of scores. The students who passed the placement test performed much better on the First Certificate test than the students who failed the first test. The scores on the second test were lower than the scores on the first one, but it is hardly surprising as the First Certificate test was a lot more difficult than the placement test. The students who did not meet the requirements of the course obtained the lowest scores on the First Certificate test. Based on the data presented above it can be assumed that the placement test has criterion-related validity, as the candidates were assigned to appropriate language classes.

All the steps were taken to assure the reliability of the test. The placement test consists of independent and varied tasks and is long enough to take a sufficient sample of candidates’ performance. All the instructions are explicit and the layout is clear and legible with enough spaces to write in answers. All the tasks are objectively assessable. The test is criterion-referenced, which is very important for achieving beneficial backwash.
The effectiveness of a teacher…

Bibliography


The following article discusses back vowel incidence and the phonetic realization in major varieties of English.

1.1 RP

The first observation relating to RP is that the old-fashioned type of this accent may have [ɔː] rather than the usual [ʊ] in cloth words. In RP generally there is also a systemic variability which can be found in back vowel area. Systemic differences would affect only two vowels: [ɔː] and [uə]. Due to various processes, words from the lexical sets thought and north developed the same vowel both in quantity and quality – [ɔː]. On the operation of the First force Merger also words from the lexical set force joined the group of words having the [ɔː] vowel. This merger may be considered completed in current mainstream RP. Some older speakers of RP, however, are likely to have contrastive /ɔə/ in at least some words from the force set. This results in minimal pairs such as sore /sɔə/ vs. saw /sɔː/. This, in turn, may be taken as a sound reason for postulating the existence of an additional phoneme in this type of RP - /ɔə/. This vowel, however, is not used consistently in all force words nor is it used in any phonetically definable subset. Some words presumably fort and fought are homophones in all varieties of RP without exception. Thus what we have is not a continuation of two traditional phonemic entities but it seems to be lexical diffusion of the merger. As was stated above in contemporary RP this merger may be regarded as complete, so that sore-soar-saw are all homophones. The standard work on modern RP, Gimson’s “An introduction to the pronunciation of English”, does not have any /ɔə/ in the vowel system.

There is a process still in progress in RP whereby the /ʊə/ diphthong is lowered to /ɔː/ by sometimes intermediate stage /ɔə/. This process may reasonably be labeled the Second force Merger as it further extends the group of words having the /ɔː/ vowel (as the First force Merger meant adding force words to this category). This process being still in progress, there is a great deal of variation in the lexical incidence of /ʊə/ and /ɔː/, so that it is hardly possible to say of any particular word that it always has /ʊə/ in RP. Words where /ʊə/
is preceded by the sequence /Cj/ are relatively resistant to the shift from /ua/ to /a/. This means that there is a certain tendency to make /ua/ a positional allophone of /a/ restricted to the environment /Cj/. Whatever the final outcome of this process will be, it is rather certain that the result is in any case to tend to preserve /ua/ as a phonetic option in RP even though its phonemic status is beginning to become dubious.

1.2 Cockney and London popular

As may have been discerned RP shows rather mild extent of variability in back vowel area, more popular accents, however, show relaxed attitude toward the back vowels. One of such accents is certainly London popular accent, which at its acrolect end of the speech continuum may be counted in Southern British and at its basilect end is known as Cockney. The mesolect of the London popular accent is a middle of the road one straddling between RP and broad Cockney. This type of accent seems to be the most influential of all SB accents, extending its pressure overseas as well (Australian accents). It should, therefore, be worthwhile to take a closer look at the way London popular accents deal with back vowels.

In popular London speech and even more so in Cockney, long close vowels and the diphthongs having as their off-glide /a/ or /u/ are subject to the Diphthong Shift. The process is very similar to the Late Middle English Great Vowel Shift. The Diphthong Shift means that the vowel of the goat lexical set (in particular the starting point of the diphthong) shifts downward, thus from [əu] in RP to [ʌu] in popular London speech down to [au] in Cockney. This is nothing but a typical realizational change affecting the /əu/ diphthong.

The next process is, however, both phonetic and phonological in its effect. It creates many examples of minimal pairs, constituting separate phonemic entities. The process in question is termed the thought Split. The vowel of the thought lexical set (merged with north and force) has become closer in London speech than in perhaps any other accent of English. Presumably it is London speech having qualities of this vowel around [ə] which is responsible for the drift of RP thought vowel to a closer quality. In broader popular London speech, however, the thought vowel is not merely rather close, it is also diphthongal. The direction of the diphthongal glide depends on the phonological environment. In a checked syllable the diphthong is closing [oʊ], in a free syllable it is centering [ɔ]. Those diphthongs represent rather broad Cockney realizations, popular London speech does not usually have the qualitative difference so transparently manifested, though, it is usually present in some degree perhaps as [ɔ] versus [ə]. We have seen that words having a free syllable are pronounced with a variant of [ɔ], [ə] type. This is retained when
an inflectional ending is added. Thus for example *bored* is [bɔːd], while *board* is [bɔːd] and this clearly constitutes a minimal-pair ground for recognizing two different phonemes and a phonemic split. This indeed is true for rather broad types of London accents (including Cockney). In middle class speech this opposition typically remains at least potentially distinctive. The minimal pair [bɔːd] vs. [bɔːd] may be seen as diagnostic for modified London accents as against non-regional RP having the same [ɔː] (or perhaps a vowel being slightly closer because of the omnipresent influential status of contemporary London speech) in both words. Thus the opposition may be regarded as firmly established in London accents and /ɔː/ and /əː/ may be recognized as distinct phonemic entities. The process leading to the creation of the two phonemes may thus reasonably be termed the thought Split.

When we compare the thought Split of popular London accents with the force lexical diffusion found in the old-fashioned RP, we observe rather different spreads of lexical incidence of particular phonemes. Thus older RP has basically /ɔː/ as a reflex of the post-GVS sequence /əː/ in force words consistently in a free syllable and a somewhat inconsistent distribution in force words with a checked syllable where many words appear with the ordinary /əː/. This may be put in a tabular form as below:

**Tab. 1. Realizations of the force vowel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>Older RP</th>
<th>London popular</th>
<th>GA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>force (checked syllable)</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ɔː]–[ɔː]</td>
<td>[əː]</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>force (free syllable)</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>north and thought (checked syllable)</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[əː]</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>north and thought (free syllable)</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ɔː]</td>
<td>[ə]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In popular London accents also the vowel of the goat lexical set is subject to a phonemic split. The variability of this vowel has two basic directions as far as its starting point is concerned:

a) [ə] – [ʌ] the vertical dimension has social class connotations, RP vs. London popular,
b) [ə] – [ə] the horizontal dimension has age connotations, older RP vs. mainstream RP.

In popular London accents the variability of the starting point of the goat diphthong was until recently purely allophonic. The diphthong in the shape of [ʌ[ʊ] type appeared in the environment of a following [ɪ] and the [ʌ[ʊ] type diphthong appeared in all other environments. This was a clear case of complementary distribution, it was, however, upset by morphologic
regularization. A word like *rolling* pronounced according to the allophonic rule with [au] began to be perceived as awkward, since no words in English having the *ing* suffix change their root vowels. Thus this word starts to be regularly pronounced with the [ɔu] diphthong. The whole process soon leads to the existence of newly constituted minimal pairs like *wholly* [ʰɔʊli] vs. *holy* [ʰɑli]. Therefore in London accents we are compelled to recognize that the phonemic split has occurred and we are dealing with two phonemic units [ɔu] and [au]. This again is a powerful touchstone for distinguishing pukka RP from adoptive or near-RP. RP has only one type of diphthong used in *goat* words where more popular accents have two.

The next process still on its way to completion is the L Vocalization by which dark [t] is changed into a close back vocoid of the [o] type. It is carried out in its most extensive form in Cockney but it has by now made its inroads in popular London accents as well. In broad Cockney the L Vocalization may mean a complete restructuring of the phonemic distribution. Thus for example we may find only one vowel [o] in Cockney where RP has [ɔ] in *pause*, [ɔt] in *bald*, [ɔf] in *full*, [ɔt] in *fool* and [ɔt] in *apple*. The merged vowel thus appears in the word-final position, being a potentially attractive environment for intrusive r. This side of the L Vocalization has not, however, been properly investigated as yet. It seems on the whole that [ɔ:] resulting from the L Vocalization is unlikely to be affected by r-insertion, since [ɔ:] resulting from the Thought Split (with which the vocalized [ɔ] is merged) appears only in a checked syllable being clearly excluded from the environments of the r-insertion application. Also the vowels [au] from the *goat* lexical set and [o] from *lot* set enter the L Vocalization and become merged. So that many speakers hesitate as to what vowel should be used in words like *old*, *bolt*, *solve*. Popular London speech has one merged [ɔʊ] diphthong in all those words. Where the [t] is morpheme-final (*doll*) the underlying vowel is recoverable, so that speakers know which vowel to use, where the [t] is followed by a consonant within the same morpheme it is not, and a Cockney speaker cannot predict from his own speech whether the RP vowel in words like *old*, etc., is that of *goat* or that of *lot*. This gives rise to many hypercorrect forms, where [au] is used instead of still more usual and traditional [o] in words like *solve*, *involve*, *revolving*. Thus in sequences [ɔtC] the pronunciation [ɔʊtC] is becoming more common, especially when [v] is the final consonant. This may be partly due to the fact that [ɔt] sequence (roll, bowl, soul, mole, etc.) are considerably more frequent than [ɔt] (doll, loll, col), and that [ɔtC] sequences themselves are rare, e.g. golf, solve. In addition, as was stated above, the replacement of traditional [o] by [au] before [t] may be due in the London region to the hypercorrection of the popular allophone [ʊ] for [au] before [t]. Thus all instances of [ʊʊ] are shifted to RP [au], when trying to sound more standard, including the instances of underlying /ɒt/ which are also caught in this leveling process.
The L Vocalization is by no means a completed process, speakers often fluctuate between using a consonant and a vocoid, they also fluctuate in using a rounded or an unrounded vocoid, there is also immense fluctuation in environments for the L Vocalization to apply. The L Vocalization as a whole is overtly stigmatized but it certainly made some changes even in more standard-oriented accents. [ɨ] is very easily and readily vocalized in the environment of [θ]. Also a vocalized [ɨ] is entirely absorbed by a preceding [ə] thus fault-fought-fort are very easily made homophones not only in broad Cockney but also in general popular London speech. Summing up, we can isolate two cases where the L Vocalization is fully at home in popular accents, with further developments being restricted to Cockney mesolect and basilect. The first case would be the vocalization of [ɨ] in the environments where [ə] or [æ] precedes, changing the vowels into [o] thus merging them with the [ə] from the thought Split. The second case is the merger of [o] and [θ] in the environment of a following [ɨ] into [oo].

Therefore, although more advanced types of developments are restricted to broader types of accents (like Cockney), certain features were transported into more popular accents. These are the following:

a) the presence of an additional phoneme /ɔ/ as a consequence of the thought Split;
b) the presence of an additional phoneme /oʊ/ resulting from the goat Split;
c) various pre-[ɨ] vowel neutralizations together with frequent [ɨ] vocalization;
d) the existence of the closer vowel [o] in the lexical sets thought, north, force and cloth;
e) Second force Merger applying in some accents, this means that poor, pore, pour and paw all rhyme.

1.3 Scottish and Irish accents

The remaining accents of England, be it southern or northern, show no processes operating in back vowel area similar to those of London popular accents. Qualities of vowels in those accents display no remarkable differences either. There are, however, a few exceptions. Some northern accents like most traditional dialects, have in their phonemic inventory a diphthong [au], which contrasts with the [u] of words like jaw, law, etc. It tends to be used in thought words which historically contained a velar fricative such as daughter, bought and thought itself. In northern accents the velar fricative even though it disappeared a long time ago, exerted a very perceptible influence on a preceding vowel. In accents placed far away from the center one may come by the opposition which is very likely to be strongly maintained, namely [o] of force versus [ɔ]
of **north**. This opposition although lost in more standard varieties seems to remain unaffected.

In many accents of Scotland and Ireland we find one vowel [ɔ] used in both lexical sets **thought** and **lot**. In Scottish accents one vowel [ɔ] is used in **thought**, **lot**, **cloth** and also with a following [r] in **north**. Force words, on the other hand, have consistently the vowel [o], the same as in the **goat** lexical set. Thus a Scotsman, for instance, trying to acquire RP, may well not be aware that in RP [au] cannot occur before [r] within the same morpheme. The adaptation rule turning Scottish [o] into RP [au] works satisfactorily in words like **boat**, **no**, etc., but it falls down in words such as **wore**, **sport** or **story**. These in a Scottish accent are [wor], [sport], [ˈstɔːrɪ]. The rule just mentioned will change them into [wɔːr], [spɔːt] and [ˈstɔːrɪ], other adaptation rules then apply to give the Scottish pseudo-RP pronunciations [wɔː], [spɔːt], [ˈstɔːrɪ]. The long-short opposition of **lot** vs. **thought** (if we discount the quality differences) found in most accents of English does not exist in Scottish accents. Vowel duration tends to vary sharply according to the phonetic environment. The general rule (known as the Aitken’s law) is that a vowel is phonetically short unless it is followed by a voiced fricative or /r/. Thus we may have the following opposition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scottish accents</th>
<th>thought [θɔt] vs. lorry [ˈlɔːri]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>thought [θɔt] vs. lorry [ˈlɔːri]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some speakers use the [ɒ] quality of the vowel in **lot** and **cloth** words where according to the Aitken’s law the environment determines a short vowel. Those who have this contrastive [ɒ], commonly use it, not [ɔ], in **north** words, thus rendering the distinction between **north** and **force** even more striking - **horse** [hɔːs] vs. **hoarse** [hɔːs]. In general Scottish accents have not undergone the First **force** Merger, in some cases, though, the influence from Scots (traditional dialect) may cause the usage by some speakers of [ɔ] not [o] after labials, thus **pork** [pɔrk]. In Irish accents one vowel may also be used in **thought**, **lot** and **cloth** words, its quality is, however, very frequently unrounded.

Other overseas accents like Australian, New Zealand and South African accents are generally isophonemic with RP. The only process operating in the vowel area in question in those accents is the Second **force** Merger whereby **poor** comes to be pronounced with [ʌ] rather than [uɑ].

### 1.4 American accents

It is American accents that we find about the greatest variability in the mid and open back vowel region. We will start with **GA** and then discuss other accents which may be found in America. In a conservative type of **GA** (now perhaps totally old-fashioned) we encounter a fairly wide range of back vowels: [ɑ], [ɔ], [ɔ], [o] and [ʊʊ]. The first vowel - [ɑ] is used in **lot** words, excluding, however,
a couple of words having the sequence [prV] in RP like: forest, Oregon, etc. They are usually pronounced with [ə]. Words like borrow, tomorrow, sorry and sorrow, on the other hand, are almost everywhere in the US (except thus Canada) pronounced with an unrounded vowel. It is only eastern accents where all words with the RP sequence [prV] are pronounced with [ə]. The majority of words which have [o] in RP, have [a] in GA (with the exception of words from the cloth lexical set). There is, however, a handful of words to show marked variability concerning their phonemic incidence. This variability is usually dependent upon the location of speakers. Thus the quality of the vowel [ɔ] or [a] used in such words depends on the type of accent. And so: on, fog, log, hog, frog, cog, gong, long, ma, pa belong to the lot set in northern accents (having [a]) and to thought or perhaps cloth in southern accents (having [o]), while dog, long, strong, water, wash belong to the thought set in the north and to lot in the south. The quality of the lot vowel is usually [a], a rounded variant being basically restricted to New England (with the merger of thought/cloth and lot). Turning back to the environment of [rV] we can say that where lot and thought/cloth are not merged, the vowel used in this environment may be:

a) [ɔ] in western New England, where it is qualitatively different from [ə] used in other lot words and [a] used in thought words.
b) [a] in eastern New England, where lot is merged with thought/cloth and has [ɔ] or [a] quality.
c) [a] along the Atlantic coast (New York and New York influenced accents), following thus the same path as in RP, except that this American equivalent of RP [ɔ] (from ME /o/) was unrounded in all environments, including [rV].
d) for the majority of American accents, there is a more or less regular vowel incidence in those words with: [a] in tomorrow, borrow, sorrow and sorry, and [ɔ] used elsewhere. In many accents of western America and Canada, where lot-thought/cloth merger is completed, only [ɔ] may be found in the environment of a following [r]. Other accents generally use the pattern as in d).

The vowel [ɔ] in a conservative GA accent is said to occur in words of the thought lexical set and in words which may informally be termed “on” words (on, long, gong, etc.), in those accents which do not have [a] in such words. This also is the vowel which occurs in the cloth set and in the word gone, but it would be a conservative and old-fashioned type of accent to have [ɔ] in all those words. More contemporary GA accents will have a vowel which is closer - [ɔ], which is, nevertheless, more open than its SB equivalent. Thus it is usual for GA to have the vowel of the same quality ([ɔ]) in thought/cloth and north lexical sets. The conservative type of GA would have [ɔ] only in north words.

Quite recently the vowel of thought/cloth/north as used by more advanced types of GA has been subject to a new change called the lot-thought Merger,
whereby [ɔ] becomes unrounded. We will discuss the process in greater detail on the subsequent pages. Turning to the quality of the /ɔ/ vowel, we observe that it may span from [ʊ], particularly away from the Atlantic coast, through an intermediate [ɔ], found in the majority of American accents (including GA), up to [o] which raised quality may frequently be encountered in New York. This /ɔ/ vowel, as was stated above, is used in THOUGHT, CLOTH and also in NORTH. It may contrast with /o/ of FORCE or may be merged with it. If the vowels of FORCE and NORTH are merged, the quality of this merged vowel is usually slightly closer than the /ɔ/ of THOUGHT and CLOTH, though the merger THOUGHT-CLOTH-NORTH-FORCE may be complete in some accents, all sets of words having /ɔ/.

The vowel of the lexical set FORCE may be of a closish quality [ɔ] (this may be considered to be a monophthongal variant of /oʊ/ of GOAT). This type of vowel is found where FORCE contrasts with THOUGHT/NORTH, where it does not, this vowel may, nevertheless, be distinct from THOUGHT as [ɔ] (being merged with NORTH exclusively) or may have the same quality as the vowel of THOUGHT/NORTH - [ɔ].

The last vowel /oʊ/ of GOAT may be a very narrow diphthong or monophthong (particularly in pretonic positions). Whatever the width of the diphthong, its starting point is always fairly back.

Thus we can distinguish several types of GA in relation to the vowel incidence in THOUGHT, NORTH, FORCE and GOAT lexical sets (it needs to be borne in mind that GA cannot be perceived as a homogeneous accent in the way RP can, as the term GA encompasses a rather wide range of accents). We tabulate the variability in GA as below:

Tab. 2. Variability in GA back vowel incidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>GA 1</th>
<th>GA 2</th>
<th>GA 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>thought</td>
<td>/ɔ:/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>north</td>
<td>/ɔ:/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>force</td>
<td>/ɔ:/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goat</td>
<td>/ɔu/</td>
<td>/oʊ/</td>
<td>/oʊ/</td>
<td>/oʊ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lot</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloth</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition some speakers distinguish FORCE from NORTH not by the vowel quality but by its duration thus: horse [hɔːrs] vs. horse [hɔːs]. Words having [drV] in RP are also involved in this variation. Where it is said that such words have /ɔ/ not /ɑ/, it should be equated with the vowel of NORTH, thus where NORTH is merged with FORCE, this /ɔ/ stands for ɔ], where FORCE vowel remains distinct,
/ɔ/ stands for plain [ɔ] of thought/cloth. Generally in force words there is a reasonably clear geographical variation in the Atlantic states. Force is merged with north in the north midland area (Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey and New York City), but the distinction is maintained, though sometimes variably, in the Atlantic states to the north and south. In the mid west and far west, survey fieldworkers almost everywhere report that some speakers do merge pairs such as mourning and morning, while others keep them distinct. It seems that it is not unusual for speakers to be able to perceive the distinction and know which words belong in which lexical set, while not actually producing it themselves or producing it only in case of threatening ambiguity.

Thus the phonemic analysis of GA force, north and thought/cloth vowels is not always clear-cut; it depends on whether north and force are merged. Therefore: a) if thought, north and force are merged then thought has /ɔ/ and north and force have this vowel plus /t/; b) if north and force are merged and differ from thought, then again it is useful to regard all three sets to have the same phoneme /ɔ/, in thought phonetically [ɔ], and /ɔ+/t/ in north and force, phonetically [ɔ], thus a raised allophone is used in the environment of a following /t/; c) if thought and north are merged with force being different, we have to distinguish two phonemes /ɔ/ in thought and north, phonetically [ɔ], and /o/ in force, phonetically [o] or [o'].

Having briefly described the lexical incidence of back vowels in GA, we will dwell upon one powerful process which has affected or is currently affecting back vowel area in GA. The lot-thought Merger influences the vowel system of GA bereaving it of any opposition between /ɔ/ and /a/. The merger seems to have originated in two areas: eastern New England and western Pennsylvania. In New England the merged vowel has [ɔ] quality, elsewhere it is rather unrounded [a]. This should suggest rather lowering than unrounding, if obliged to choose, as the best term for the merger. Since traditional /ɔ/ is lowered to /o/ and it remains as such in New England, because lot quality is [ɔ] there, but it becomes unrounded in other accents as they have lot quality unrounded. The lot-thought Merger may be perceived as a part of the drag-chain, which is usually referred to as the Northern Cities Shift, where /æ/ is raised by the bath raising (the bath raising seems to be the oldest process, there is a reference to this process in New York City speech as far back as 1896; therefore the raising of /æ/ is considered to be the starter of the whole shift and the process viewed as a whole is reasonably labeled the drag-chain), allowing /a/ of lot to become advanced, which in turn facilitates lowering of /ɔ/ of thought/cloth to /o/ or /o/. It seems, therefore, sensible enough to perceive the lot-thought Merger as a lowering process, as in figure 1.
The absence of an /ɔ/ vs. /ɑ/ distinction might be traced back to the Scotch-Irish. Thus the usage of one phoneme for the lexical sets LOT/THOUGHT might have been an importation from Scottish and/or Irish accents as used by the original settlers from Ulster and Scotland.

Attempting to specify the geographical spread of the merger, Hockett (1958:345-6) attributes it to “the northernmost Middle West (northern Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota), Canada, and an indeterminately large region of the American northwest stretching into Utah”. In the Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest, Allen finds (1976:24) that the informants almost all preserve the opposition. But he continues,

actually, the limitation of Atlas data to the midcentury and to older speakers ignores an apparently rather rapid and highly noticeable development in the Upper Midwest since the time of the field investigation. During the past 30 years I have observed in my classes at the University of Minnesota a steadily increasing proportion of students who have no lowback rounded vowel except before /r/. Annually, more and more students have only [a] or even [ɑ] [sc. an open back or central unrounded vowel, my [ɑ] or [ɑ] - PO] in law, jaw, fall, and the like, and hence lack any distinction between, for example caller and collar, tot and taught, and don and dawn. The rapid extension of this development among younger speakers for whom it is not an inherited pattern clearly calls for rather intensive research.

Describing the merger as a sound change in progress, Bailey (1973:19) claims that the shift from /ɔ/ to /ɑ/ first affects the environment [tV], e.g. naughty, which thereby comes to sound identical to knotty; then other environments involving a following alveolar, e.g. caught and dawn (making them sound like cot and don) and lastly those involving a following velar, e.g. hawk (making it like hock). In any community undergoing the change, there will be a time (he claims) when the oldest speakers have /ɑ/ in naughty, formal /ɑ/ but allegro-speech /ɑ/ in caught and consistent /ɔ/ in hawk; while the youngest speakers have only /ɑ/ in naughty and caught, but fluctuate between formal /ɔ/ and allegro /ɑ/ in hawk.
The above environmental specification would suggest that cloth words remain unaffected by the merger, it is without question, though, that the cloth lexical set has also this merged vowel in Canadian accents. This clearly suggests the overwhelming power of the merger extending to other environments than those mentioned by Bailey as well.

On describing variability within GA we will venture to create a typology of GA accents, which will be a bit more specific than the previous one. We will investigate the vowel incidence first in RP and then in several types of GA in:

a) words which had ME /o/ - lot set
b) words which had ME /o/, which was subsequently lengthened in the ancestors of RP and GA before fricatives (with the later restoration of the short vowel in RP). This ME /o/ was also lengthened in GA in the environment /rV/, but somehow variably so that today /a/ (historically short vowel) is frequently found in borrow, sorrow, sorry and tomorrow, while /ɔ/ (historically long vowel) is encountered elsewhere. Accordingly the lexical set cloth is divided into three parts: the so-called “borrow” set comprising words with the environment ME /o+/rV/ where /a/ is frequent, the rest of words with the environment ME /o+/rV/, the core of the cloth set with words having had ME /o/ before a fricative, to this subset we also include many words with variable lengthening like on, wash, water and words with ME /o/ followed by a velar
c) words which had ME /aʊ/ and /ɑʊ/ - thought set
d) words which had ME /o/ in the environment /rC/ or /r#, which was then lengthened in these environments - north set
e) words which had pre-GVS /ɔ:, /ɔ:/ or /u/, these three vowels after the operation of the Pre-force Merger came to have one common vowel /o:/, which in turn in many accents was merged with the vowel of north through the First force Merger - force set

We tabulate the vowel incidence in various accents as below:

Tab. 3. Variability in GA back vowel incidence (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>Central East (New York)</th>
<th>The South</th>
<th>Eastern New England</th>
<th>GA 1 western Ohio</th>
<th>GA 2 northern Illinois</th>
<th>GA 3 southern Illinois</th>
<th>GA 4 west</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lot</td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloth:</td>
<td></td>
<td>“borrow” set</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/a/</td>
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<td>/orV/</td>
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<td>/o/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>force</td>
<td>/ɔ:/</td>
<td>/ɔ/</td>
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<td>/ɔ/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>/o/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It needs to be noted that the phonemic symbols used for American accents stand for:

/ə/ — [a] open central or somewhat backer than central for the majority of accents and [ə] or even [a] open front, approximating to Cv.4 for the accents from the north central area

/o/ — [ɔ]-[ɒ] lightly rounded open-mid back for many American accents, [ɔ] for the accents of eastern New England and [o] slightly closer than [ɔ] of mainstream GA and well rounded for New York speech. For some accents which preserve the lot vs. thought distinction, the actual phonetic difference may, nevertheless, be very small so that /o/ of thought may phonetically be [a] /o/ — a) for accents GA 1 and GA 4, some speakers may well preserve the distinction between force and north words so for them /o/ represents [ə] (a monophthongal variant of the goat vowel), [ɔ] or just [ɔ]; many speakers, though, as was stated above, merge force and north, for them thus /o/ stands for plain [ɔ] of north; b) for accents GA 2, GA 3 and those of Canada and eastern central, the lexical sets force and north are merged, the merged vowel having [ɔ]’ quality; c) for accents of the south and eastern New England, where the distinction between force and north is well preserved /o/ stands clearly for [o]; it is also worth noting that the difference between force and north words is most distinctively marked in the accents of eastern New England: [o] vs. [ɔ].

Thus for American accents we obtain a rule: if thought = north, then force= north/thought as [ɔ], or force ≠ north/thought and has /o/, [ɔ] or [ɔ’]. Thus we arrive at the notations:

if thought = north then thought/north have /ɔ/ [ɔ] and force has /o/ [o], [ɔ], [ɔ’] or thought/north/force have /o/ [ɔ].

and if thought ≠ north then thought has /o/ [ɔ] and north/force have /o/ [ɔ’], [ɔ’].

These rules describe the vowel incidence for the accents which have not undergone the lot-thought Merger (thus lot ≠ thought), for accents where lot/thought have one phonemic entity /a/ we obtain:

if lot = thought then north ≠ thought and north=force or north ≠ force, thus:

if north = force then north/force have /o/ [ɔ’], [ɔ].

and if north ≠ force then north has /o/ [ɔ] and force /o/ [o], [ɔ’].

Thus there is an interesting situation for any speakers who keep start, north and force distinct yet merge thought and lot. If they have /a/ in start/thought/lot, /o/ in force and goat, north must be regarded as /ɔ/, and their /ɔ/ is then restricted to the environment /ət/: fork /fɔrk/ rhymes with neither park /pɔrk/ nor pork /pɔrk/.

And so it may be observed that there is great variability in GA in the back vowel area indeed, even if we try to do the basic thing as establishing the phonemic inventory. The phonemic notations for all American accents should be taken as probable descriptions, especially for words which display immense variability (mock, fog, dog, long, etc.). These words clearly fluctuate between two
phonemes and it is impossible to include them into one lexical set. As can be deduced from this typology of American accents, there is not one variety of GA agreed to be the standard just as there is in England. The term General American, thus, covers quite a range of various accents, at least as far as the back vowel area is concerned. It is important to notice that a GA accent may display great variability in the vowel area in question without being labeled as substandard or nonstandard. Further developments concerning back vowels in American accents are found mainly in those accents which show clear regional characteristics falling thus outside the mainstream GA.

In New York we find [ɔa] or [ə] pronunciation of the merged sets CLOTH, THOUGHT, NORTH and FORCE. This is the usual quality used by New York upper-middle class. Often, though, a closer quality is used, together with a more prominent centering diphthong glide - [o:ə]. This is common in the style of speech of the middle class and is also found even in the careful reading style of the lower class and it is not perceived as socially significant by the general New York public. Some speakers use a closer vowel still, with more intense rounding - [u:ə]. This leads to a potential loss of the phonemic opposition between /o/ and /ou/ with sure and shore merging. Also in the speech of New York City there has evidently been a historical sound change which might be called the LOT Lengthening. This meant lengthening and diphthonging of earlier /a/ (from ME /o/) in the environment of a following word-final voiced stop /b/, /d/, /g/ and /dʒ/. This LOT Lengthening also applied before /m/, but not before other sonorants. Exceptionally on, John and doll may have /əʊ/; there are also sporadic instances of the LOT Lengthening before /ʃ/ and voiced fricatives, as in wash /wəʃ/ and bother /bədər/.

In eastern New England as was mentioned before, LOT is commonly merged with THOUGHT/CLOTH as [ɔ] or [ʊ]. The same vowel is also used in NORTH, with FORCE words having [o] or [ɔ]. In the environment /RV/ eastern New England has [ɑ], while western New England with the opposition LOT vs. THOUGHT preserved has [ɔ], except where New York City influence has displaced it by [ə].

Southern accents are similar to for example Cockney in that it is often very hard to find a true monophthong in both of them. This general tendency also applies to the THOUGHT vowel in southern accents (and with some reservation to Cockney as well). The most characteristic southern realization of this vowel is a closing diphthong of the [ɔʊ] type. One can hear this diphthongal variant in both checked and free position. Southern accents characteristically keep FORCE distinct from NORTH, while merging FORCE and CURE. The merged vowel is a centering diphthong [əʊ] or [ou].

1.5 RP and GA compared

As might have been discerned, back vowels in English still undergo many changes in present times. Various accents show different developments in the
back vowel area. We can, however, ignore minor changes which are peculiar only to a very limited number of accents and focus on only the most extensive changes in the most influential (standard) accents. There seem to be two most powerful varieties influencing all other accents of English. London influenced accent based on RP lexical incidence and generally on its phonemic inventory as well, with vowel realizations of Cockney provenance; and General American. The first type of accent exerts very perceptible influence on all accents of England, Australia and New Zealand, while GA is a norm for the USA and Canada.

London based accents show many ongoing trends in the back vowel area, with the most important being:

a) **THOUGHT-NORTH-FORCE Split**, which creates a new opposition /ou/ vs. /ɔː/;

b) **THOUGHT-NORTH-FORCE-CURE Merger**, whereby /ɔː/ merges with /ʌ/;

c) **The goat Split**, which creates a new opposition /ɒθ/ vs. /ʌ/.

GA on the other hand shows only one trend (with all its variability in the lexical incidence). This is the **LOT-THOUGHT Merger** whereby there comes to exist only one open back vowel - /ɒ/, with /ɔ/ being perhaps reserved for the environment /_ɪ/.

**Bibliography**


