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Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Applications for the
Study of Narrative Fiction.

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Abstract

This graduation project attempts to suggest the potential of implementing a perspective on literary criticism of narrative works that draws upon some notions from Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation and adopts some of its terminology. More particularly, the focus lies on the use of interrogative clauses in character dialogue and the importance of motivation itself in character construction and development. Illustrations from several canonical literary works will be provided so as to rehearse this mode of textual analysis, which we believe can provide a potentially useful framework to approach narrative fiction from the point of view of humanistic psychology.

Keywords: Motivation, Attachment, Striving, Comfort Zone. Trigger. Emotional Expression.

El presente TFG busca sugerir el potencial de implementar una modalidad de crítica literaria aplicada a obras narrativas que se basa en varias nociones de la teoría de la motivación humana formulada por Abraham Maslow, cuya terminología se adopta parcialmente. Concretamente, nos centraremos en el uso de oraciones interrogativas en los diálogos de los personajes y en la importancia de la motivación en sí misma para la configuración y el desarrollo de dichos personajes. Se proporcionarán ilustraciones extraídas de varias obras literarias canónicas para ensayar este modo de análisis textual, que creemos puede proporcionar un marco potencialmente útil en el abordaje de la ficción narrativa desde el punto de vista de la psicología humanista.

Palabras clave: Motivación, Apego, Anhelos, Zona de Confort, Provocación, Expresión emocional.

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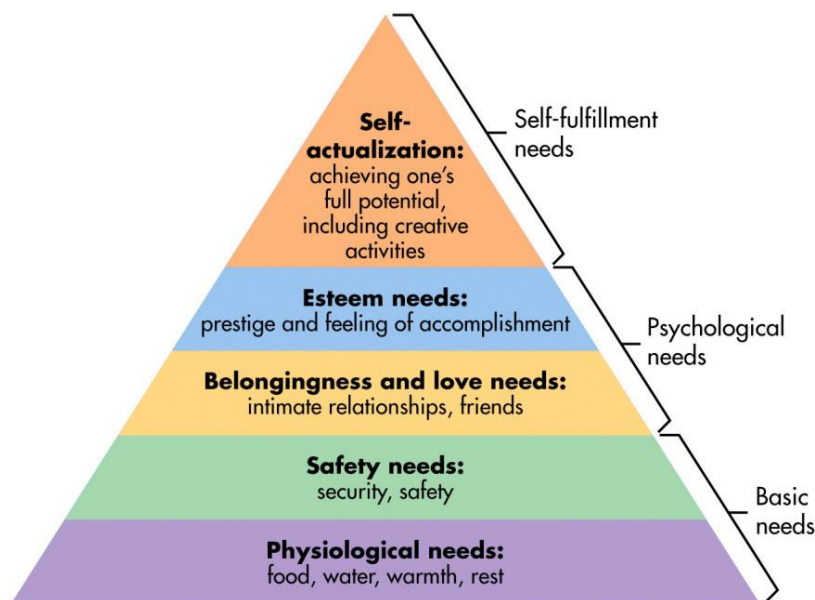
1. Introduction and theoretical framework

Literary analysis includes a very broad range of approaches. Scholars and students may use it to enhance a particular point of view, to find a relationship between ideas and disciplines; or they can exclusively focus on a specific school or method of literary criticism, like feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism or Marxist criticism. In this graduation thesis we are going to set the basis for a type of literary analysis which remains largely undeveloped. We will draw upon Abraham Maslow's work, and more specifically, his theory of the hierarchy of needs. The aim here is to create a critical framework that can provide even non-scholarly readers with the tools to identify the needs of the main characters and the motivations that drive their actions and thus gain humanistic insights that enrich them as readers and as persons.

I will argue that humanistic psychology, and more specifically, Abraham Maslow's views on what he termed hierarchy of needs can provide a new dimension to the study of narrative works as a result of its optimistic view on human development and activity. If we believe that literature as an art form can illuminate and enhance our comprehension of human nature through its cathartic power (particularly in the case of great works), a conceptual framework like Maslow's can provide literary analysis with a fresh and positive focus. As Maslow wrote: "It is as if Freud supplied us the sick half of psychology and now, we must fill it out with the healthy half." (Maslow 18). If transferred into the arena of literary theory and criticism, this claim would appear to challenge the psychoanalytic model of literary critique, which would thus miss out on that sound and wholesome, humanistic side of literature. In the following lines I will modestly elaborate on this healing and cathartic power of narratives (for example in making the reader realize his/her particular obsession or addiction over an unsatisfied need); and I will do so by relying on a set of notions by the American psychologist, an outstanding theorist of human motivation.

Maslow's work on motivation and his pyramidal representation of the hierarchy of needs is not only widely known, but also a fundamental pillar of the humanistic conception of psychology. It was originally formulated in his 1943 paper "A theory of

Human Motivation". The Brooklyn-born psychologist believed that human beings are driven towards improvements, and the five stages in which he divides his famous pyramid are the needs that can check that improvement, and trap people into a comfort zone. Those five stages of the pyramid are divided into two groups. One comprises the basic needs, which make up the first stage (physiological needs like air, food, sleep...) and the second stage (safety and security needs). The other group are the psychological needs, which include the third stage (social needs like friendship, family...), the fourth stage (esteem-centered needs like recognition, confidence...) and the fifth stage (self-actualization needs like the sense of accomplishment). Diagrams representing this theorization are endlessly reproduced and updated in a variety of sources, although, interestingly enough, they never ever appeared in Maslow's published work and they do not necessarily look the same Here is but one example of these graphs:



Source: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Our inquiry can be framed within the distinct discipline of psychological criticism and, more particularly, the study of character motivation. Examples of this approach are general monographs (Paris, *Imagined*; Gurrie); or more specific studies on individual works or authors (Paris, *Character and Conflict*; Jarosz) or character types (Cámara). More particularly as regards the critical application of the hierarchy of needs, we have only been able to trace limited contributions to literary (and video game) analysis that

draw upon Maslow's theory, including four graduation theses (Galbreath, Muthmainah, Nurhajar et al., Imawahyu , a PhD dissertation (Brown) and several published articles (Bagheri, Rezaei & Seyyedrezaei, Lestari et al.).

Our analysis of individual literary instances in the light of the above ideas will follow a two-step procedure aimed at ultimately identifying and exposing the characters' core needs. We will first put the focus on the questions that the several voices in the narrative ask in order to then identify the emotional trigger, or in other words, the hidden need that is being revealed through an emotional expression of a character or the narrator in the story.

A. Focalizing questions

We have chosen to put the focus on interrogatives because of their potential in foregrounding desires of a character. The interrogatives constructions in this paper are interpreted from the point of view of pragmatics, and more specifically, by resorting to the imperative-epistemic approach. In their monograph *Studies on the Semantics of Questions and the Pragmatics of Answers*, Jeroen Antonius Gerardus Groenendijk, and Martin Johan Bastiaan Stokhof, provide an interesting theoretical framework. Their taxonomy of questions does not categorize them by their purely locutionary meaning, but instead provides us with a scale that ranges between the imperative and the epistemic attitude of the questioner:

As far as the content of interrogatives is concerned, the most important part of the paraphrase consists of the epistemic operator and its argument. Together they form what Hintikka calls, the desideratum expressed by the interrogative. I.e. they give a description of the epistemic state that the addressee is asked to bring about. (59)

Therefore interrogatives represent a request that can be project along the scale of the epistemic (imploring, begging...) and the imperative (direct, assertive...). Taking this into account, we can use this scale and interpret it from the point of view of Maslow's hierarchy so as to differentiate a character's needs by their level of

assertiveness. Given the scope of this thesis, we will limit ourselves to a simple typology of questions, but further development of this method can include all interrogatives.

In order to identify the particular need that is being manifested, mainly through the dialogue between different characters, we will first classify the questions we will use as clues into three classes. These three classes are going to represent three parts of Maslow's pyramid. The first type of questions is the **begging** kind, the questions that are basically petitions: these petitions are highly epistemic and are easily situated on the imperative- epistemic scale. They may be masked ways to ask for something that is desperately needed. They may represent a begging to satisfy a basic need in the first two stages in the pyramid.

Well, I have something here, and I wanted to ask you if you had any use for--something that was really in the way at home, you understand, no room for them, some buttons."

"What was that, what was that about buttons?" And he bent his head down nearly to my hand.

Could he give me a few řre for them? . . . As much as he thought right. .

. . He was the best judge of that. . . (Hamsun 85)

In this example we can see how the protagonist of Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* (1890) is masking his begging for money by saying that he wants to get rid of some useless stuff, thus trying to preserve his dignity, even though he is desperate to supply a basic need.

Begging questions can also indicate the fear or sense of failure to satisfy higher needs. When a person is losing an opportunity, or the expectations that they have created in their heads are not real, the begging is the last resort or a desperate try. In the next fragment we can observe how the protagonist of Hamsun's novel is begging for affection, or at least for an opportunity to satisfy his social need, from the girl that he has an attachment for.

I had no hope of ever getting to meet her again, I was almost longing for a sharp no which would stiffen me up and make me numb.

"You could."

"When?"

"I don't know."

Pause.

"Won't you be kind enough to lift your veil just for a single instant," I said, "so I can see whom I am talking with? Just one minute. I have to see whom I'm talking to."

Pause.

"You can meet me here Tuesday evening," she said. "Would you want to do that?"

"Lord yes, if you'll let me!" (Hamsun 106)

The second type of questions are the **social questions**. Their intent is not to ask for something, but to get the attention of others, to try to impress or to fit in a certain group. They represent the third and the fourth stages of the pyramid, because they require other people, or more specifically, social interaction to be fulfilled. Indeed, the need to belong is a powerful motivation underlying many of our questions in social encounters. Psychologists point out, for example, that shy people “smile more (even though they feel anxious rather than happy), nod their heads more in agreement, ask more questions, and use more verbal reinforcers when others are speaking” (Baumeister and Leary 57-89).

In Jane Austen’s novel *Emma* (1815) the use of social questions to achieve respect by others is very common. The tone and the suggestive use of questions of the novel’s dialogues aptly portray the social class and environment in which Emma Woodehouse (the protagonist) seeks to satisfy her need for social integration, as we can observe in the next fragment:

But I am afraid, Mr. Elton, Harriet will not like to sit. She thinks so little of her own beauty. Did not you observe her manner of answering me? How completely it meant, 'why should my picture be drawn?' "

"Oh! yes, I observed it, I assure you. It was not lost on me. But still I cannot imagine she would not be persuaded. (Austen 43)

The so-called small talk, and the questions that are about a person that is not present, are a clear example of socialization. Here the character of Emma is not asking for information that is important for a specific activity or goal but putting the focus on another person as a means to share opinions and maybe even to get somebody on her side about a certain matter, without risking that person disliking her, by concentrating on a third character.

The third type of questions are the **genuine, information-seeking questions** that have a pragmatic effect. These questions are goal-oriented and represent the behavior of a person that is not concerned or restrained by social conventions in a particular moment. These are highly imperative in modality and can usually be substituted by an imperative sentence. Of course, these questions are very frequent in human communication, and an isolated example in a character's verbal exchanges may not mean anything, but if a character is consistently or exclusively asking this kind of questions, it is a good indicator that he or she is information-seeking, practically-oriented and not driven by social etiquette, but by a genuine interest; or at least that the author wants to represent that character as a doer, or an action-driven person.

In Charles Dickens classical Christmas story, *A Christmas Carol (1843)* the protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge meets the spirit of his dead business partner Jacob Marley. The spirit comes with the mission to judge and change Scrooge's life and has no personal interest in Scrooge's biases and objections. The aim of these questions is to settle the facts about Scrooge's life and confront the character with the latter:

What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?'

'I don't know,' said Scrooge.

'Why do you doubt your senses?'(Dickens 21)

The questions of the spirit have an imperative implicature, so that we could substitute imperative sentences for them: "Think of the evidence you have of your reality beyond your senses and tell me why you question your senses"

Another good indicator of this goal-oriented personality and striving for self-actualization is the lack of questions. Actions speak louder than words in most cases,

and we can see that in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Oval Portrait* (1842), where the focus of the character of the painter is in his passion over art and excellence. He dismisses his social needs completely and the goal-oriented obsessively focused personality that Poe tries to create with this character is reinforced by his silence.

Finally, a character's questions are not always addressed to another character; they may be used in a monologue or an internal dialogue, these questions are equally useful. These questions are often used when the character is unwilling to accept reality or is trying to cope with it as part of an adaptive process. Understanding the particular typology a question belongs to in a piece of narrative is critical in construing fictional characters. Questions can convey petitions, demands of affection, sympathy or pity, requests for information, and many other pragmatic effects, but they can also be a manipulative device, where the query itself is just masking the true intentions.

B. Focalizing emotional expressions and provocations

The other method that we are going to use puts the focus not on the questions embedded into narrative dialogue, but rather on the emotional behavior of the characters. We will, therefore, search for allusions to strong emotional expressions within our texts of choice, like, aggression, humiliation and self-humiliation, weeping, display of exultation... After identifying such strong expressions, we will establish the need that has triggered them and explain the psychological process that has led to such an outcome. These expressions will presumably uncover the characters' obsessions, comfort zone, striving for personal development, failure, and success.

At this point, it becomes necessary to further clarify the specific vocabulary that we are going to use. The terminology is intuitive and easy but if we are to apply it to the analysis of fiction it is important to be consistent so that the analysis and discussion of different literary works can be performed along comparable parameters that enable us to establish similarities and contrasts. Since Maslow's work undergoes an important evolution throughout his career, we have chosen to use as a terminological source his book, *Towards a Psychology of Being* (1968). All the references in this part have been taken from this book.

The term “striving” designates the character’s ambition to advance on the hierarchy of needs. For example: if a character is trying to fulfill an esteem-based need, we will say that he “strivings for” esteem. This is a term that we will use to encompass what Maslow calls in his work by many different names. We have chosen this term because throughout his work, Maslow explains on numerous occasions different aspects of his theory by repeatedly referring to the way humans strive towards growth: “It is true that human beings strive perpetually toward ultimate humanness, which itself may be anyway a different kind of Becoming and growing.” (Maslow 147) A character’s striving drives his/her development. If the character does not have a striving drive but instead tries to keep him/herself in a stage of the pyramid, we will call this “attachment”. As Maslow himself points out, attachments are rooted in humans and represent the needs they are used to having.

We have, each one of us, an essential inner nature which is instinctoid, intrinsic, given, “natural,” i.e., with an appreciable hereditary determinant, and which tends strongly to persist (97, Chapter 7). It makes sense to speak here of the hereditary, constitutional and very early acquired roots of the *individual* self, even though this biological determination of self is only partial, and far too complex to describe simply. (Maslow 117)

After introducing this phenomenon, he proceeds to explain in greater depth how it is developed and explains that our raw inner nature shapes itself quickly after interacting with the world.

This inner core shows itself as natural inclinations, propensities or inner bent. Whether defense and coping mechanisms, “style of life,” and other characterological traits, all shaped in the first few years of life, should be included is still a matter for discussion. This raw material very quickly starts growing into a self as it meets the world outside and begins to have transaction with it. (...) Very early in life these goalless urges and tendencies become attached to objects (“sentiments”) by canalization but also by arbitrarily learned associations. (Maslow 117)

The “trigger”, on the other hand, signifies the reason for the emotional expression that we are looking for. We may distinguish two kinds of triggers: negative triggers caused by the failure to satisfy a need, and positive ones resulting from the success in satisfying a need. Positive and negative triggers can be subdivided into two

further groups, depending on whether they fail or succeed in satisfying a striving or an attachment. The following table will provide a visual classification of the terms:

Motivations:	Striving: motivation to advance in the hierarchy of needs.	Attachment: motivation to maintain the current or past position in the hierarchy of needs
Triggers:	Positive trigger: success in achieving the striving.	Positive trigger: success in satisfying the attachment.
	Negative trigger: failure to achieve the striving	Negative trigger: failure to satisfy the attachment.

Strivings can be caused by external factors and internal factors. If a striving is caused by something external and there is no indicator that the character is going to strive for a higher need without that external cause, we can say that s/he stays in a comfort zone and the external factor is motivating him or her to get out of it. A comfort zone is different from an attachment because the attachment is hard to satisfy and there are problems that prevent success, while the comfort zone presents no difficulty and is used to avoid difficulty, but more importantly, a comfort zone is a stage from which the character has not advanced. If the character is in a higher stage in the hierarchy of needs and is trying to come back up, that is an attachment. This term is not taken directly from Maslow’s work but from later interpretations like Sarah Viana’s her paper “Stretching Beyond your comfort Zone”:

Embracing seeking personal growth and reaching your potential can be obtained by departing from your habits of order and predictability. Since the 1940s and over the decades to follow Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has become familiar to us all. It is in stretching our comfort zone that we experience the highest level of this hierarchy: self-actualization. At this level, an individual achieves their full potential and self-fulfillment. (Viana)

The last term that will recur in our analysis is obsession, which is used to refer to a very intense striving that provokes strange or abnormal behavior. In the words of Maslow himself:

By protecting himself against the hell within himself, he also cuts himself off from the heaven within. In the extreme instance, we have the obsessional person, flat, tight, rigid, frozen, controlled, cautious, who can't laugh or play or love, or be silly or trusting or childish. (Maslow 140)

The above terminology is inspired by Maslow's work but it is not directly reproduced from it. The terms striving and attachment, for example, subdivide what Maslow originally calls drives. "The needs that are usually taken as the starting point for motivation theory are the so-called physiological drives" (Maslow 35). Triggers, on the other hand, are simply reasons behind emotional reactions, but we have divided them into positive and negative in order specify the upwards or downwards direction that a given character moves in across Maslow's pyramid.

By adapting the original nomenclature to the purpose of character analysis, we expect to account for the kind of psychological processes that underpin the motivational drives and evolution of fictional creatures —the satisfaction or failure to satisfy a need, for example.

2. Theory application and examples

In the following section we are going to put into practice this new framework for narrative analysis by using as examples several famous and representative literary works. The structure of the particular analyses will consist of an introduction, where we will provide the overall dynamic of the literary work under examination and name the essential motivation that drives the main character's actions. Next we will proceed to the analysis of questions and then to the analysis of emotional expressions. Finally, we will provide an overall conclusion and explain the fundamental conflict and the stages of the pyramid where the characters are positioned.

A. Physiological needs, and how they prevail over one's pride in Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* (1890).

The first literary work that we are going to discuss is Knut Hamsun's "Hunger" (1890), which is here quoted in its English translation from Norwegian. The novel, possesses a great psychological density that makes it particularly suitable for our purposes:

What Hamsun describes in *Hunger* is the phenomenology of consciousness, [...] a minute, moment-by-moment evocation of the hero's stream of thought, at times with near-hallucinatory effect. [...] [T]he flux of thought, feeling and fantasy in a person whose sensibilities have been brought to a supernormal pitch by virtual physical collapse. (Lyngstad 18)

The novel is divided into four parts, and the unnamed protagonist is also the first-person narrator. Each part has a similar structure. According to Per Thomas Andersen, "[r]ight from the beginning the epic plot appears as a series of mood changes in the main character's mind, initiated by small trivial stimuli" (137). More specifically, the motivation that drives the actions of the protagonist here is attachment. The novel presents a protagonist who is trying to become a writer but must deal with his situation of poverty and hunger. He constantly dribbles between the need to provide himself with food and shelter and his failure to preserve his dignity. He is pushed to act as a homeless beggar on many occasions, by selling his clothes or stealing. At the end he gives up his ambition to become a writer in order to take any job and be able to fulfill his basic needs. Each part of the book starts with the protagonist in a stable position, or at least having managed to survive the previous part, and showing that he has ambitions and self-esteem, as we can see, for example in the beginning of part three:

A week went by in joy and gladness.

I was over the worst this time again, I had food every day, my spirits rose, and I pushed one iron after the other into the fire. I had three or four essays in the works, which plundered my poor brain of every spark, every idea that occurred to it; my writing seemed to me better than it had ever been. (Hamsun 87)

This stability soon begins to tremble because the protagonist is unable to provide himself with food. Throughout the development of each part, his moral values are challenged to the point that he does things that he is deeply ashamed of, and this triggers many negative emotions and puts him into situations he had never expected to experience. After this brief introduction of the overall dynamics of this literary work we will proceed to analyze it in greater depth by using the two methods previously described.

i. Question analysis in *Hunger*

The protagonist here is the only character in the novel that is developed enough and suitable for a deeper, psychologically-driven analysis. The whole novel revolves around him as he is also the narrator, and all the other characters are secondary and have a very limited role. There are two types of questions that are predominant in *Hunger*, and through them we can clearly create an image of the personality of the main character-narrator. Of course, in a book called *Hunger* and where hunger is the main problem, there are going to be begging questions. The interesting thing here is that those beggings are the last resort of this starving man who is nearly homeless on many occasions. We already used examples of this typology of questions in *Hunger* in the theoretical section of this essay (see above, p.X). Social questions on the other hand, can show us the denial of the protagonist's lost dignity, and the internal struggle to preserve it. The perfect example of that is at the end of part three, where he has a long conversation with a girl he likes and is judged by her and after that he is rejected, making him look like an unwanted molester. He asks questions to himself to try to justify his social behavior and failure in this case.

Why hadn't she just told me simply and clearly to leave? I asked. Well, well, why not? There was no reason to be so polite. Instead of reminding me that the girl would soon be coming back, she could simply have said this: You must leave now, because I must go over and fetch my mother, and I'd rather not have you escort me down the street. Now, wasn't that what she was thinking? (Hamsun 132)

The denial of his desperate situation and the unwillingness to see why this girl has rejected him shows how he cannot accept his social situation and keeps refusing to accept that other people see him as a beggar.

ii. Emotional analysis of *Hunger*

There are five important emotional moments in this novel. One of them is in part one and the other four are in part three. As we explained earlier, at the end of every part, the protagonist is able somehow to satisfy his basic need for food and get rid of the attachment that drives his motivations and internal conflict. The role of food in driving the conduct of the protagonist and triggering his emotions is overriding in this novel. In the words of Per Thomas Andersen, “[i]t happens time after time in the course of the narrative that the bodily reactions to lack of food places the *Hunger* hero into peculiar affective, physical and sensory states” (137). The first time that the protagonist succeeds in satisfying his hunger, there is a big emotional response to this happening. Here we have a positive trigger, produced by success in satisfying an attachment. The same dynamic repeats itself in all the parts but does not always have the same emotional response. In the end of part two and part four, the satisfaction of hunger is seen as a relief and does not have the same emotional power, because the character has already been in the same situation before. Part three lends itself particularly well to this type of analysis. The protagonist is forced to steal food, which creates a big moral conflict within him. Even after managing to get something to eat, he vomits it because of his poor health, and this creates a strong feeling of failure that has a negative trigger as we can observe in the following fragment:

all in vain! I ran at last into a doorway, doubled over, blinded from the tears that sprang from my eyes, and vomited everything.

Now I was bitter; I walked along the street, sobbing. I cursed the cruel gods, whoever they were, who were persecuting me so, sentenced them to hell and eternal damnation and pain for their infamy. There was very little chivalry among the gods, very little chivalry at all, I could tell you that! . . . (Hamsun 99)

After satisfying his basic need, he automatically begins to worry about needs that are on a higher stage on the hierarchy. He remembers that he has broken his moral code by stealing and starts to experience guilt, makes a sudden act of charity and then goes to confess his crime to the person who he has stolen from. The awkward situation and the lack of understanding by the other person, makes him feel judged and attacked, which creates another negative trigger, but this time it is because of the failure to satisfy a higher stage of the pyramid, the social stage.

"All right, listen now," I said, arrogantly. "I didn't want to bring any unpleasantness on you, I wanted to spare you. But that is the thanks one gets for being generous. I've been standing here explaining the whole thing to you, and you feel no more shame than a dog, and don't make a single move to settle what is between us. Therefore I am washing my hands of you. You can go to hell. Goodbye!" (Hamsun 114)

After that the protagonist experiences a fortunate event, like the others that happen at the end of each part. Focusing on part three as the most imposing one, we would have to remark that there is an emotional reaction, unlike in part two and four, probably because the novel is near its climax and this part was filled with important events that increase the significance of good fortune and external help for the character's perception.

The final episode of relevance that we are going to discuss is his meeting with the girl he likes. This is the most impactful moment because it makes the protagonist realize his situation of need. He loses the sense of dignity that he possessed and assumes his final failure. He enters a roller coaster of emotions when one moment he thinks he is going to be with a lovely girl, and the next he undergoes a sudden feeling of shame and humiliation, after the girl rejects him.

I felt humbled and bewildered and looked at her without saying anything. God, what I had destroyed! It didn't seem to bother her that I was ready to go; she was lost to me once and for all, and I searched for some way to tell her goodbye, some deep, heavy words that would get through to her and maybe impress her a little. Then I behaved exactly

opposite to the way I had intended: I acted wounded instead of being proud and cold; disturbed and insulted, I started to chatter on about trivialities. The telling words refused to come, I was carrying on like a numbskull. (Hamsun 131)

The protagonist is in a situation where he feels is depicted like a brute or even a rapist, in the eyes of a woman. Clearly this is the worst blow for his moral and self-esteem throughout the entire novel.

In summary, Hamsun's novel provides relevant instances of two types of questions, one is the begging, which we can find on many instances in the novel, and the other one is the social question. Social questions here help the protagonist understand the situation himself and overcome denial. From the point of view of the emotional analysis, we have found two positive triggers, that are produced by the satisfaction of a basic need, and three negative triggers, which are produced by the failure to satisfy a social need. The character fails to overcome the stage of the social need and concludes by realizing that the self-esteem stage in which he believed he was before, is unattainable now. This realization makes him abandon his dream and ambition of becoming a writer and concludes the novel with him starting a totally different job that can meet his needs better at this stage of his life.

B. Social needs, and Gulliver's desire to be accepted into the Houyhnhnms' society in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

The second literary work that we are going to discuss is Jonathan Swift's iconic satire novel, *Gulliver's Travels*. This novel is also divided into four parts, the last of which will this time furnish our analysis with specific illustrations. Here the protagonist, Lemuel Gulliver, is left by his mutinous crew in another piece of foreign and unexplored land. This land is inhabited by two strange types of creatures. One is the Yahoos, humanoids that are savage, violent and provoke disgust in Gulliver. The other is the Houyhnhnms, highly rational beings that look like horses and are depicted by Gulliver as morally superior and better than humans. We have chosen this novel (and this particular segment in the narrative) because of the social motivations of the protagonist, who is trying to be accepted into a society of creatures that are not like him but which he idealizes. During his stay in the Land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver

develops a disregard and disgust for his own kind and his previous way of life, to the point of developing an unhealthy image of himself because of his compelling need to be accepted by the society he admires.

i. **Question analysis in *Gulliver's Travels*.**

There are two main aspects worth analyzing from the point of view of question types; the first one deals with Gulliver, and the second one with the Houyhnhnm society as a whole. When referring to the latter, we will regard it as a single collective entity, because no individual personality traits stand out from among the Houyhnhnm nation, but they operate as a homogeneous group, with an almost identical way of thinking.

As mentioned earlier, the image of the Houyhnhnms in Swift's satirical narrative conveys Lemuel Gulliver's idealization of these creatures as perfect rational beings. They do not lie or pretend and see communication as a tool used to exchange knowledge and achieve practical and judicious ends. In the following fragment the Houyhnhnms ask Gulliver questions that represent their rational and direct personality, they do not need to know what he thinks about them but are highly interested in obtaining practical knowledge, in this case about the "great hollow vessel" in which he has travelled, and in the pragmatic use of information concerning a world that is unknown to them: i.e., the human world. "He asked me, Who made the Ship, and how it was possible that the Houyhnhnms of my Country would leave it to the Management of Brutes?" (Swift 222). The question possesses a pressing, almost imperative sense: the result of the Houyhnhnms's genuine curiosity and rational mind.

Gulliver on the other hand asks no questions to the Houyhnhnms, probably because as a narrator he assumes a descriptive stance and avoids meandering, yet interesting he does ask himself one rhetorical question which signals his arrival at conclusions after trying to realize his circumstances. "For, who can read of the Virtues I have mentioned in the glorious Houyhnhnms, without being ashamed of his own Vices, when he considers himself as the reasoning, governing Animal of his Country?" (Swift 273) The question in this case conveys the author's satirical intent and his characteristic misanthropic indignation. It is a rhetorical question whereby the character acts as both

the questioner and the questionee and indirectly formulates a conclusion: Gulliver is expressing what he has learned; in other words, the question expresses the realization of what he has learned as a result of his psychological process.

ii. Emotional analysis of *Gulliver's Travels*.

If we apply an emotional perspective to the book's twelfth chapter, it all comes to a head when Gulliver is rejected by the Houyhnhnm society and has only two options, either to leave or to become a servant, like the rest of the humanoid Yahoos he dislikes so much. Everything up to this moment has been a buildup to his emotional response, which reaches its climax in this scene: "I was struck with the utmost Grief and Despair at my Master's Discourse; and being unable to support the Agonies I was under, I fell into a Swoon at his Feet: When I came to myself, he told me, that he concluded I had been dead." (Swift 262). Everything after this turning point leads to the story's denouement: his disastrous voyage back to England where he will lead a solitary, nearly eremitic life. Before that, however, this particular moment in the narrative reveals Gulliver's social need and the attachment that motivates him. This emotion results from a negative trigger because it is caused by failure, and the peculiarity of this case is that Gulliver will not accept to live as an active and proud member of any other society after that. He cannot satisfy his need anymore. We can clearly say that this was his obsession. After his failure there is no other motivation or drive, there is only resentment.

To sum up we can say that human society is the big issue in this work, the one that underlies Gulliver's whole unlikely adventure. In this sense, we are aware that our focus on a psychological reading of this work is at odds with the bulk of Swifitean criticism, which often relies on notions of political philosophy. An interesting instance is Mary P. Nichols' discussion of the relation of this novel with Platonic philosophy:

Gulliver's Travels is Jonathan Swift's answer to the political proposals that Socrates made in Plato's Republic. In the city Socrates describes, philosophers enforce both communism of property and communism of women and children. Reason rules the passions, and individuality is

suppressed. By presenting the land of the Houyhnhnms as a caricature of the Republic's best city, Swift shows the harsh, tyrannic elements in the rule of reason or philosophy (Nicholas 2)

It is worth pointing out that despite the primary satirical intent of *Gulliver's Travels*, there are published commentaries of this work on such topics as its psychological dynamics (Khattak), its psychoanalytic interpretation (Melamed) or its applicability to the portrayal of autistic disorders (Badcock). On the other hand, we would like to argue that Swift's tale can be related to as a universal story, and that as such the benefits of reading literary works against the backdrop of humanistic psychology that we advocated in our theoretical framework can fully apply in this case: if we show how Gulliver's attachment to a society makes him an obsessive person and stops him from advancing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, readers can more easily identify with his predicament and compare their own attitude to Gulliver's.

C. The self-actualization need and how the pursuit of success can make us commit atrocities in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait"

Edgar Allan Poe's short narrative piece *The Oval Portrait* (1842) tells the story of a talented painter bent on creating an extremely life-like portrait of his bride. The painter becomes so intensely focused on his work that he fails to realize that the portrait is sucking his bride's life away. She remains uncomplaining until she dies and the painter realizes, when it is too late, what he has done.

There is not much to analyze in this short horror story, because the characters hardly experience any development and, in this case, there is no conversation between them. There is only one highly emotional moment within a rich narrative framework including techniques like the story-within-a-story structure, the backstory and the flashforward, or the unreliable narrator who has not personally witnessed the story. The way Poe creates a mysterious atmosphere, and his use of detail could be the subject of a complete graduation thesis, but, as with our previous illustrations, we will put the focus on psychological motivation, which is particularly strong and distinct in the case of the story's protagonist. There is no dialogue, and therefore, no questions, simply because there is no need for them. The Painter is goal-oriented and highly obsessed, and the full consequence of this is dramatically revealed in the story's ending, when he realizes the

atrocities he has committed. The climactic moment, when the painting is finally completed, shows how even in the highest part of Maslow's pyramid, when driven by a powerful purpose-gear'd striving for excellence, people can still be caught in obsessive behavior.

To sum up the character of the painter is striving for self-actualization through his art, but at the end he realizes that he has neglected to the point of fatal abandonment, something which is much more important, his loving bride. There is a negative trigger that motivates his negative reaction to failure and leaves the reader with a strong, inspiring lesson which many people can comprehend and identify with, even if they have not had a similar experience.

D. The comfort zone in literature for children and teenagers.

In this section we will illustrate what it is like for a character to stay in his/her a comfort zone and what typical behavior we can expect from such a situation. To this purpose, we will pay attention to the baseline situation in stories of heroes from adventure books for children and teenagers, in whose initial pages the young hero's circumstances are often outlined. Stories about young heroes are seen by many as stories about initiation, transitions and changes: about "the teen-aged hero undergoing that metamorphosis which we have learned to call "adolescence" (Johnson 2) The scope of our discussion is limited to exemplifying this particular notion in the realm of literature and in a separate section, which in no way means that it cannot concur with the other categories in our model. As we did before, we isolate these categories for the purpose of clarity.

Comfort zones are a concept that is fairly open to interpretation but here we are going to use the definition provided by Alasdair White in his book *From comfort zone to performance management* (2009). "The comfort zone is a behavioural state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviours to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk." (White 2). There are two important concepts in White's description of the comfort zone that we find particularly relevant to our purpose: "nording", which is the unwillingness

to find solutions and lack of self-confidence, and motivation, seen as a management style to get out of one's comfort zone.

Comfort zones are a quite common state in which the protagonists of many novels targeted at younger audiences seem to be. The model of behavior that the heroes of many famous stories for kids and teens exhibit is very similar to the point of being archetypal. Typically, there is a young boy or girl who is very polite and well-mannered, kind and obedient and represents the behavior of the perfect child for the parents of the story's potential readers. The circumstances, however, which surround the hero are not particularly favorable, but that does not turn him into a disobedient or aggressive child or makes him try to get out of his situation in an immoral way. According to educational psychologist Trudy Mothus, it was Romanticism that produced a new type of youth hero/ines which, at least in part, match the profile that we have just outlined: "natural, uncorrupt, innocent, helpless, abused, honest, (...), mature, and stable"(par. 7), by contrast with more rebellious, aggressive, thoughtless, passionate, uncontrolled, etc, prototypes of youth heroes in the previous tradition.

In Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) the protagonist (Charlie) fits the description of the obedient loving boy that has no major aspirations. His dreams are not to become a powerful successful man or anything of the sort, probably because of his still too young age. Another reason could be the negative way in which people may interpret his ambition. Children often have remarkable dreams not only about things that may just occur to them but of what they want to become. An example of a more ambitious hero would be Atreyu from Michael Ende's *Never Ending Story* (1979) who has the level of self-esteem that it takes to engage in a dangerous mission. Charlie is not like that. He lives in a very poor family and one day has the incredible luck to find a golden ticket in a chocolate bar. This is of course an emotional moment involving a positive trigger that gives him the possibility to advance in the hierarchy of needs and go from the stage of social belonging stage to the stage of self-esteem stage in a single moment, but without making him egocentric or narcissist. Now even though Charlie is not in a perfect comfort zone, because he does not have much comfort in his poor family, we cannot say that he has any strivings and the motivations

he gets to pursue anything he does, are external. Therefore, if he is not guided by strivings, and the motivations of his actions are external, he must be in a comfort zone.

A better example of this model would be the other hero in Michael Ende's *Never Ending Story*, (Bastian). He is basically the counterpart of Atreyu. He is an agreeable child who gets bullied and reads a lot of books. He does not experience any strivings until a secret book is revealed to him and he does something unexpected: he steals it. Once again, we have a lack of drives and external motivations which is reversed by an unexpected occurrence. Another example would of course be Harry Potter in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) who gets a letter from a school of magic.

To sum up, the comfort zone is a stage in which a character is not striving for anything and has no motivation to reach a higher attachment which, otherwise s/he has never experienced before. There must be an external motivation to drive the character towards a higher stage in the hierarchy of needs. Or, in the words of Luckner and Nadler, "through involvement in experiences that are beyond one's comfort zone, individuals are forced to move into an area that feels uncomfortable and unfamiliar - the groan zone. By overcoming these anxious feelings and thoughts of self-doubt while simultaneously sampling success, individuals move from the groan zone to the growth zone." (qtd in Brown 4,)

Conclusion

In this graduation project we have argued that the kind of perspective on literary analysis, more particularly fiction, that we engaged in the previous pages can provide literary theory with a more humanist and positive approach. The grand theoretical models like the Marxist literary critique or psychoanalytic criticism dissect the social and personal problems that are expressed in literature. Humanistic psychology, on the other hand, affords a path or course of action that guides us towards self-improvement. Against this background, we have sketched out two different procedures that will help us identify the stage on Maslow's hierarchy of needs where the characters are situated. The first one is question analysis, for which we drew upon an imperative-epistemic scale that accounts for the semantics and pragmatics of questions and answers. The

second one is an analysis of human emotions that we traced in the expressions of fictional characters and whose relevance and meaning we tried to identify and interpret by using and adapting the nomenclature of Abraham Maslow's work.

The several literary illustrations that we have examined against this background show that by focusing on the most striking landmarks in the characters' trajectory, we can easily identify their central needs and the reasons for their choices and main personal issues. We can determine why a character gets angry, sad, excited or produces any other emotional response. Additionally, this kind of reading of fictional character development correlates to our own human experience as readers in a simple, natural way: by identifying with a character and assigning a reason or a motivation to their accomplishments or mistakes, we draw the moral lesson of stories and embrace the human benefits of literature.

The kind of critical exercise that we have tried to advance can be further extended, as the branch of psychology termed humanistic can provide a wealth of concepts applicable to the study of literary works, either on its own or in combination with other disciplines like the semantics and pragmatics of discourse, e.g., the analysis of imperatives or the use of certain categories of verbs or speech styles by characters situated in specific stages of the hierarchy of needs. Needless to say, this is not a closed set of notions, but rather a tentative outline of a mode of analysis that we believe can be enriching.

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