

DR STRANGELOVE OR HOW I LEARNED TO READ KUBRICK'S CONCEPTUAL UNIVERSE

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Abstract

The present paper intends to explore Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* in light of his using a number of creative devices and some features, such as the use of symmetry and lightning together with the fascination with human psychology and its possibilities, which will be later explored and fully implemented in his more successful films, usually better considered by critics. Therefore, I will argue that some of the much-acclaimed features of his better-known productions, such as the quest for humanity that will be developed in *2001* or the preoccupation with double morals and human morality in general that will be put forward in *Eyes Wide Shut* are already present in *Dr Strangelove*, conforming what I will refer to as 'Kubrick's conceptual universe'.

Key Words: cinematic adaptation, satiric intention, filmic devices, politics and dangers of military power.

Resumen

Este trabajo pretende explorar la película de Kubrick *Dr Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, teniendo en cuenta una serie de convenciones creativas y formales, como el uso de la simetría o de la iluminación, así como la fascinación con la psicología humana y sus posibilidades. Dichas convenciones aparecerán de nuevo plenamente desarrolladas en sus películas más conocidas, mejor consideradas por la crítica. Por lo tanto, intentaré exponer cómo algunas características de esas producciones posteriores, tales como la búsqueda de la humanidad que se reflejará en *2001* o la preocupación que se mostrará en *Eyes Wide Shut* por la moralidad y la doble moral social están ya presentes en *Dr Strangelove*, empezando a configurar lo que he llamaré el 'universo conceptual' de Kubrick.

Palabras clave: adaptación cinematográfica, intención satírica, recursos fílmicos, política y los peligros del poder militar.

17	Tink 2wice b4 U reply, a bega as U know has no choice.	Think twice before you reply, a beggar as you know has no choice.
18	4give me sir. I know I'm nt wot dis concession.	Forgive me sir. I know I am not worth this concession.
19	U wil nt be allowed in wdt ur passport sir.	You will not be allowed in without your passport sir
20	Dose dt wounded ur driva hav run away.	Those that wounded your driver have run away.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please look into your inbox and write in the space provided each of the following words (in the column titled "respelling") the usual way such words are spelt by those communicating with you through SMS. Also indicate if the spellings of the letters in bold prints are representative of the 'correct' pronunciation.

S/N	Standard Spelling (structural words)	Respelling	Is the spelling the same with pronunciation of the word?
1	Through		
2	The		
3	without		
4	With		
5	Their		
6	This		
7	That		
8	Those		
9	Thanks		
10	Month		
11	Enter		
12	Never		
13	Later		
14	Forever		
15	Forward		
16	Service		
17	permit		
18	return		
19	better		
20	beggar		

APPENDIX A

A LIST OF TEXT MESSAGES WITH TH- AND -ER GRAPHEMES¹²⁷

S/N	TEXT MESSAGES	STANDARD ENGLISH SPELLINGS
1.	Gd wil C U 2ru dis chalengs sir.	God will see you through these challenges sir
2.	Tanks 4 ur intrest ma. Sm circumstances hav necessitated d postponement	Thanks for your interest Ma. Some circumstances have necessitated the postponement
3.	Widt dbt I shl arrive b4 2pm sir	Without doubt, I shall arrive before 2 P.M. sir.
4.	I appreciate all U hv gone tru & I promise 2 stand by U still. Wit lots of Luv frm me	I appreciate all you have gone through and I promise to stand by you still. With lots of love from me.
5.	Kd U pls come lata wt d mechanic?	Could you please come later with the Mechanic?
6.	Dis mont wil not be convenient 4 d meetg sir	This month will not be convenient for the meeting sir
7.	Thks for everything. We shl talk lata tnait. 4eva urs.	Thanks for everything. We shall talk later tonight. Forever yours.
8.	Dose dt hav not arrivd 4 d savis hd beta remain in dia halls. We shl 4wd d notice 2 dem later.	Those that have not arrived for the service had better remain in their halls. We shall forward the notice to them later.
9.	Pls enta tru d back gate or the one near d kiosk of d bega. D frnt gate wil nt be opn 2 studnts til 1.00p.m	Please enter through the back gate or the one near the beggar. The front gate wil not be open to students till 1.00 P.M.
10.	Neva giv ur notebk 2 him again. I wil pamit him to photocopy d pgs he left out in klas & 4eva kp my distans frm hm.	Never give your notebook to him again. I will permit him to photocopy the pages he left out in class and forever keep my distance from him.
11.	Bye 4 now & C U lata .	Bye for now and see you later .
12.	Enta d bus goin 2 Surulere nia d bridge. Refuse 2 be dauntd. Rememba our moto 4wod eva bkwod neva .	Enter the bus going to Surulere near the bridge. Refuse to be daunted. Remember our motto forward ever backward never .
13.	Widout U by me, dia treats wil bkm reality.	Without you by me their threats will become reality.
14.	Mama is getin beta and beta daily. I praise God	Mama is getting better and better daily. I praise God
15.	Tanx 4 ur e4ts. I shl nt 4get dis luv U hv shone 2 me	Thanks for your efforts. I shall not forget this love you have shown to me.
16.	I ritn 2 senda . I'm in no mood 4 kosli jks.	I return to sender . I am in no mood for costly jokes.

¹²⁷ The significant words and text forms are highlighted in both columns (emboldened by the author).

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- d) Holistically, it draws attention of English users to the all-important feature of English as a language which has spellings that learners cannot depend on for pronunciation.

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the pronunciation of speakers in words which are assumed to be homophonous, but which in practice are not. In table 1, number 14, the word *forever* is always written as “4ever” or “4eva”. The pronunciation of the word *four* is completely different from that of the initial syllable in *forever* which is *for*. While *four* is pronounced with a back vowel as in the word *ball*, *for* in *forever* is pronounced with a schwa. Even the /t/ in number two (2) /tu:/, which some use in representing the words *through and to* (Appendix A nos. 1, 8,10 and 12) does not have the same allophonic quality because the *t* in number two is released suddenly (plosion) due to the CV structure while the initial *t* in *through is* ‘unreleased and occurs in a CCV structure.

As long as these phoneme-to-grapheme assumptions exist in the minds of Nigerian English speakers, their pronunciation cannot be near native or of maximum intelligibility particularly to native speakers and may cause ambiguity even among the non-native speakers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

These common features in SMS text messages in Nigeria are capable of impeding phonological proficiency if not highlighted and constantly discussed as done in this paper by drawing a contrast between what exists and what the ideal is. Also, with the emergence of respelling, Nigerians must demarcate between the various contexts of SMS messaging and actual speech. Results from this study reveal that appreciable percentage of educated speakers/users of English in Nigeria fail to recognize the vast difference that exists between the representation of “th” and “er” digraphs in SMS texts and that of standard pronunciations. Nigeria has a lot to benefit from these emerging phenomena in SMS respelling, which is often sound-spelling compliant in the following respect:

- a) It makes the pronunciation pattern of Nigerian speakers of English clearer and codification of a pronouncing dictionary more realistic.
- b) It amplifies the areas of weaknesses where attention is needed to enhance Oral English acquisition proficiency.
- c) It creates an easy platform for a contrastive analytical teaching of phonographological features to learners of basic pronunciation.

numbers 4 and 8 (*with* and *those* respectively) were constantly spelt the same way the words *wit* and *dose* are spelled. The definite article “the” is consistently and indeed perennially represented as “d” by 90% of the respondents. Appendix A has all the frequently abbreviated words and simulation. Findings from this study reveal among others the following:

- a) the voiced dental fricative /ð/ orthographically represented with the TH digraph in word initial position of the words *the*, *them*, *that* and *there* is consistently written as the grapheme ‘d’ (see nos.2, 6 and 13 of appendix A for examples). These words are consequently pronounced as the voiced alveolar fricative /d/ instead of /ð/. This also is the case with the TH in medial position of the word *without* often written as *widout* or *wdt* (see nos. 3, 13 and 19 of Appendix A).
- b) the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ often spelled as TH has also been reduced in spelling to “t” and often articulated as a voiceless alveolar fricative /t/ in word initial and final positions. Examples of such words are *through*, *thanks*, *worth*, *with* and *month* written as *tru* or *2tru*, *tanx* or *tanks*, *wit*, *wot* and *mont* respectively (see Appendix A, nos. 2, 4, 7, 15 and 18).
- c) The schwa /ə/ which indicates that a syllable is unstressed in disyllabic or polysyllabic words has been reduced qualitatively to somewhat back full vowel /a/. Little wonder therefore that both the long and short schwa sounds are seldom found in the repertoire of even very educated Nigerians. Words like *later*, *better*, *sender*, *enter* and never belong to this category (see Appendix A, nos. 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 16 for details).

This phenomenon is corroborated by Chiluya (2008:12) when he describes SMS as having “new linguistic forms, coinages and spelling innovations that are situationally distinctive and context sensitive”. The same way it happens in Nigerian spoken English, where a native English speaker may have to depend on context to demarcate or recognize the word that is being referred to between *those* and *dose* or “*wit*” and *with*, so it is, even in SMS texts. It is important to note that only 40% of respondents were able to recognize that /θ/ and /ð/ are not synonymous with /t/ and /d/ respectively.

3.2.2 LETTER AND NUMBER HOMOPHONES

Another very important phenomenon in the SMS texts can be described as ‘letter and number homophones’. This assumption has the capacity to influence

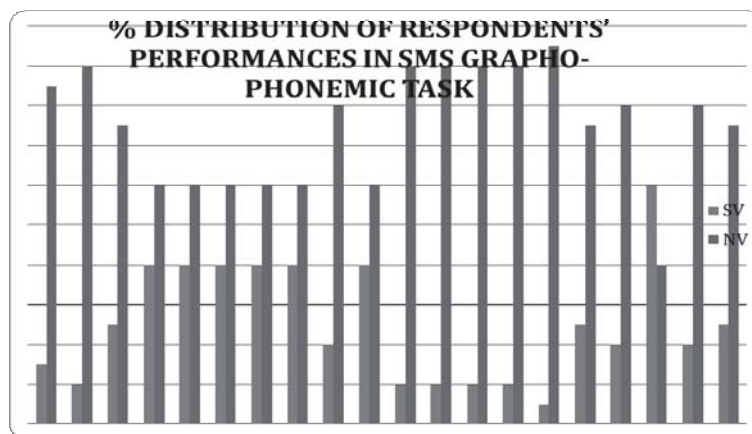


Fig. 1

3.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

SMS texts, as used among Educated Speakers of English in Nigeria are capable of revealing definite structure or patterns in Nigerian Spoken English, especially the phonemes. One striking feature of SMS messages is respelling or pronunciation spelling, in which letters are used to denote phonetic symbols or represent speech (pronunciation). The graphemes used as letters are based on the phonetic similarity of the spoken words. According to Awonusi (2004: 52) these phonetic spellings in SMS messages sent by or to Nigerians betray some of Nigerian English pronunciation. Table 1 reveals some of these striking features which will be discussed in various sub sections below.

3.2.1. *SOUND-SPELLING CORRESPONDENCES AND ACCENT SIMULATION*

A pattern that features consistently in the SMS texts of Educated Speakers of English in Nigeria is what can be referred to as accent simulation. Simulation, simply put is the development of an altered form of a word by association with another word wrongly taken to be its source. In table 1,

3.1 ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

S/N	Standard Spelling	Respelling	¹²⁶ ENSE phonemic representation	Standard phoneme	% of Standard phoneme recognition	
					SV	NV
1	Through	Thru/ tru	/t/	/ θ/	15	85
2	The	D	/d/	/ð/	10	90
3	without	Widout/wdt	/d/	/ð/	25	75
4	with	Wit/ with	/t/	/ θ/	40	60
5	Their	Dia	/d/	/ð/	40	60
6	This	Dis	/d/	/ð/	40	60
7	That	Dat	/d/	/ð/	40	60
8	Those	Dose/those	/d/	/ð/	40	60
9	Thanks	Tanx	/t/	/ θ/	20	80
10	Month	Mnth/mnt	/t/	/ θ/	40	60
11	Enter	Enta	/a/	/ð/	10	90
12	Never	Neva	/a/	/ð/	10	90
13	Later	Lata	/a/	/ð/	10	90
14	Forever	4eva	/a/	/ð/	10	90
15	Forward	4wod/4wd	/ó/	/ð/	5	95
16	Service	Savis	/a/	/ð/	25	75
17	permit	Pamit	/a/	/ð/	20	80
18	return	Ritn	/ó/	/ð/	60	40
19	better	Beta	/a/	/ð/	20	80
20	begger	Bega	/ð/	/ð/	25	75

Table 1: Pattern of respelling for TH- and -ER digraphs in Nigerian English.

¹²⁶ Educated Nigerian Spoken English

SV= Standard Variant

NV= Nigerian Variant

2.0 METHOD AND PROCEDURE OF DATA GATHERING

The spelling pattern of a total of 120 SMS messages (written in English) sent into personal “inboxes” of lecturers by students and colleagues in a Nigerian Southwestern University were observed. Twenty of these messages were selected (see Appendix A); from which a questionnaire comprising relevant test items (words) was generated (see Appendix B for the questionnaire). Most of those that sent or were recipients of such messages are of the Yoruba ethnic origin, thus some of the phenomena or findings cannot be generalized to Igbo or Hausa indigenes. These other groups of Nigerians may form corpus of future studies. The present study takes cognizance of features pertaining to phonological processes such as elision or deletion, phonemic spelling, weakening, and phonological interference in the messages. Twenty students were required to fill-in words with TH” digraph either at word initial, medial or final positions such as *the, with, that, they, this* and *thanks* as they appear in their inboxes. They were also required to write out the spellings of words which have “er” at either medial or final positions in the spaces provided in the questionnaire. This process was undertaken to validate earlier general observations found in text messages sent to lecturers. The students were afterward required to pronounce the words to test for various ways the voiced dental fricative /r/, the voiceless dental fricatives /θ/ and the schwa /ə/ are being articulated.

3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The questions this study intends to examine are as follows;

- a) What are common Nigerian English sound-spelling compliant patterns in SMS of educated Nigerians of Yoruba origin?
- b) With the emergence of respelling, will Nigerians improve or worsen in their skill acquisition of the dental fricatives and the schwa sounds?
- c) Does Nigeria have anything to benefit in terms of Oral English acquisition proficiency in view of these emerging phenomena in SMS respelling?

either infiltrating into or dictating the pattern of students' phonological transcription exercises in class. Grinter and Eldridge (2001) discuss features of text messages such as shortenings (i.e. missing end letters), contractions (i.e. missing middle letters), clippings (i.e. dropping final letter), letter/number homophones and accent stylizations which are common in SMS texts. English spelling however, is often based on etymological and morphological motivation rather than on simple sound-spelling correspondences (Carney 1994). There are respellings where a phonologically unlikely spelling attracts regularization to phonetic correspondence such as the words *night* "nite", *what* "wot" and *phone* "fone". Awonusi (2004) describes some pertinent features of SMS text messages in Nigeria, among which are the construction of an informal telegraphic style with features such as phonetic spelling and a unique spelling convention occasioned by the influence of the mass media, computing and Americanisms. Others are some general abbreviations occasioned by space, time and money constraints. Examples are in the spelling convention of the following words:

To - 2
For - 4
At - @
Before - be4, b4
Tomorrow - 2morrow, 2mrw
Today - 2day, 2dy
Forever - 4ever, 4evr
Forget - 4get, 4gt
Tonight - 2night, 2nite

The present study digresses from the usual line of discourse in previous studies in two specific ways. First, this study seeks to examine the phonological features exhibited in text messages within Southern Nigeria (Yoruba ethnic group); rather than the pragmatic and syntactic orientations common in previous studies. Second, the work compares such text items with actual phonemic representations in English in order to ascertain whether respelling constitutes a plus or a minus to Oral English proficiency in Nigeria.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally, it appears that text messages do not have abundant linguistic literature, presumably due to the fact that text messages constitute a relatively recent communication medium. However, “a growing body of linguistic research” is beginning to emerge on language use in SMS (see Awonusi 2004, Chilwa 2008, and Taiwo 2008). On the whole, SMS language is still the subject of a few linguistic studies notably in Nigeria, some of which have been mentioned earlier; and of fewer in phonology, which makes the present study pertinent.

SMS messages are characterized by massive but systematic deviations from the orthographic norm and tilt more towards what Posteguillo, Esteve and Gea-Valor (2007) refer to as pronunciation spellings. This paper focuses on messages via the Short Messaging Systems (SMS) and their impacts on pronunciation proficiency of particularly the Educated English users in Nigeria. This is required because several studies (Bamgbose 1995, Soneye 2007) have confirmed through empirical analyses, phonological variations that exist between Nigerian Spoken English (NSE) and Standard English accents and the need for Nigeria to standardize its form of spoken English to enhance intelligibility. Achieving this goal may be difficult in view of emerging respelling phenomena in SMS text messaging.

Features recurring in SMS texts have been emphasized, prominent among which is the extraordinary orthographic variability of lexical forms (Carrington 2005). This variability is also the result of an informal style of communication, which licenses many deviations from the orthographic simplification of repeated consonants through deletion or elision as in actual speech. Kim, Kim, Park, & Rice, (2007) also confirm the existence of these features in various forms of electronic discourse. The usual alphabetic system competes with a more “phonemic” type of writing (e.g. “U” for *you* and “rite” for *right*), as well as with traces of a “consonantal” spelling wherein vowels are deleted, as in “Pls.” for *please* or “wdt” for *without*. Users take advantage of different phonetic spellings in order to create different types of verbal effects such as these in their messages. Written representations of the sounds and compressions are common phenomena in SMS language. Users may be thinking of utterances in their spoken forms, even though every other part of the text message may well be created within a written framework.

According to Grinter and Eldridge (2001:17) “if text messaging shares similar properties with e-mailing, we could expect these compressions to stabilize and become more widely known over a period of time.” Indeed, some SMS spelling forms are already stabilizing as we shall discover in this study and

pronunciation proficiency. The study concludes that Nigeria, as an example of English as a Second language environment does have a lot to benefit from SMS respelling pattern which is often sound-spelling compliant, if properly harnessed.

Key Words: Respelling, Short Messaging Systems, Oral English.

cuanto a su competencia en términos de pronunciación. El estudio determina que Nigeria, como ejemplo de un entorno de inglés como segunda lengua (L2) se beneficia en gran medida del patrón de grafía de SMS que a menudo coincide con su expresión oral, si se utiliza de forma correcta.

Palabras clave: grafía, sms, inglés oral.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid dissemination of electronic communication devices such as the Short Messaging Systems (SMS) has triggered the emergence of new forms of written texts, indirectly patterning the spoken form and charting a new path for especially learners of English as a Second Language (L2). According to Crystal (2006), 'new' linguistic phenomena found on the Internet very often escape traditional linguistic notions and categories. One prominent form of such phenomena or writings, which may be impacting oral proficiency skills of learners of English especially in Nigeria is called **Pronunciation respelling** (emphasis mine). Gupta (2006) confirms that although spelling in English is strict, respelling can be deliberate as in "leets speak" for let us speak and that it gets a lot of publicity on the web. Respelling is a type of notation system used to convey the pronunciation of words, in a language which does not have a phonemic orthography (such as English). According to Posteguillo, Esteve and Gea-Valor (2007) "Respelling" is a term used in the orthographic literature to refer to non-standard spellings: for example, "txt" for *text*. In this pattern, there is a non-conventional use of alphabetical symbols which exhibit interesting and pedagogically relevant phenomena that could be contributory to already existing knowledge on English language studies and this is the whole essence of this study. Specifically, this study examines phono-graphemic phenomena in the text messages of some Nigerian University students capable of either improving or weakening their oral proficiency skills.

RESPELLING IN SHORT MESSAGING SYSTEMS (SMS): PATTERNS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Interest in the use of Short Messaging Systems (SMS) has been growing steadily during the last decade. However, less attention is given to the influence of respelling on phonological proficiency of its users, hence the need for this study. The paper examines respelling patterns in randomly selected text messages from mobile phones of students through a questionnaire method. The texts were analyzed to identify the patterns of SMS respelling within Nigerian socio-cultural environment and to assess possible implications of these patterns on the oral proficiency skill of English speakers in a Second Language (L2) environment as Nigeria. Findings reveal that about 60% of educated Speakers of English in Nigeria do not recognize the vast difference that exists between the representation of digraphs such as “th” and “er” in SMS texts and their standard pronunciation forms. The work further discovers the negative impact of respondents’ assumptions about homophones on

Resumen

El interés por el uso del servicio de mensajes cortos (SMS) ha crecido de forma progresiva en la última década. Sin embargo, no se ha prestado tanta atención a la influencia de la grafía en la competencia fonológica de sus usuarios, de aquí la necesidad de este estudio. El artículo analiza los patrones de grafía en mensajes de texto de teléfonos móviles de alumnos elegidos de forma aleatoria por medio de un cuestionario. Los textos se analizaron con el fin de identificar los patrones de grafía de SMS en el entorno socio-cultural de Nigeria y para valorar posibles implicaciones de estos patrones en la competencia oral de hablantes en un entorno de inglés como segunda lengua (L2) como es Nigeria. Nuestros resultados demuestran que alrededor de un 60% de hablantes de inglés cultos de Nigeria no reconocen la gran diferencia existente entre la representación de dígrafos como “th” y “er” en textos de SMS y sus formas de pronunciación estándar. El trabajo también concluye el impacto negativo de los supuestos de los encuestados sobre los homófonos en

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his own delusion are about to take him to an early death. Gemma, on the other hand, although she dies still immersed in her world of fantasy, has somehow planted the seed in her younger granddaughter which moves her to eventually find out the truth and work through her grandmother's trauma in her name. Although the memory transmitted to Becca is but a figment of reality, an illusion, that reality is still alive under its fairy tale disguise, and a number of clues have been dropped here and there alongside the story that serve as indicators and landmarks towards the recovery of the truth. Once this truth is unearthed and passed on by Becca to her boss and, presumably, the rest of her family, Gemma's death and suffering have not been in vain. Consequently, Becca's act of telling is a symbolic act of homage not only to her grandmother – who is no longer alive – but to the rest of the victims, both the survivors and the deceased.

Such a homage and possibility of working through can likewise be achieved by means of writing, as numerous scholars have pointed out. Inasmuch as “literature makes silence audible, and it verbalizes pain, bringing up its hidden causes” (Martínez Falquina 2009:514), the late proliferation of trauma narratives such as *Briar Rose* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* can be viewed as an attempt to “express repressed suffering” (Martínez Falquina 2009:514) and move towards a common understanding and collective homage to all the victims that were overwhelmed by those dramatic episodes. Giving voice to such atrocities not only prevents forgetting, but also attempts to right past wrongs and provide the attention that victims –both collective and individual– merit. Just as Judith Herman points out, “telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (2001:1). Therefore, books such as the here analysed pay homage to all those victims by giving voice to their suffering and bringing to the public eye the knowledge of the atrocities committed so that, hopefully, they will never be repeated. Just as is stated on an inscription at Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, “the Europe of the future cannot exist without commemorating all those, regardless of their nationality, who were killed at that time with complete contempt and hate, who were tortured to death, starved, gassed, incinerated and hanged [...]” (Andrzej Szczypiorski, *Prisoner of the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp*, 1995).

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ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa 32 (2011): 301-316

Gemma” but she immediately corrects herself by saying “For all of us” (Yolen 2002:104-105, italics in the original).

“Time may heal wounds, but it does not erase the scars” (Yolen 2002:81), says Stan, one of the survivors with which Becca eventually speaks, and they are precisely those scars that future generations should be reminded of in order for them to avoid repeating the past’s horrible mistakes. Gemma herself, although apparently unaware of the truth of her traumatic past, seems to warn her granddaughters about the importance of this preserving of the past, and even do it herself though disguised as a fairy tale: “*The future is when people talk about the past. So if the prince knows all their past lives and tells all the people who are still to come, then the princes live again and into the future*” (Yolen 2002:111, italics in the original). This use of the fairy tale in order to denounce the atrocities of history is something that, Jack Zipes argues, has been recurrent in literature after the Second World War:

Following World War II, the fairy tale set once again to combat terror, but this time the terror concerned not only the inhibitions of the civilizing process, rationalization and alienation, but the demented and perverse forms of civilization that had in part caused atrocities and threatened to bring the world to the brink of catastrophe. (1991:xxvii)

Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that both Jane Yolen and John Boyne resorted to this type of fiction-writing to narrate such harsh stories as these two books are. “For countless centuries,” Terry Windling states in the introduction to the 2002 edition of *Briar Rose*, “storytellers have used the richly symbolic language of fairy tales to explore all the dark, and bright, and shades of grey of the human experience” (2002:xiv), and consequently, Yolen, as a fairy tale author and scholar, knows it “better than most” (2002:xiv) Boyne, on the other hand, has stated several times that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is not only a work of fiction, but a *fable* which he defines as “a piece of fiction that contains a moral.” (www.teenreads.com) What the moral is seems clear enough, and it goes back to the issue of giving voice to the victims of atrocities, honouring their memory and preventing a repetition, as Boyne seems to ironically imply with the closing lines of the book: “And that’s the end of the story about Bruno and his family. Of course all this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. *Not in this day and age.*” (2007:215, our emphasis)

To finish, and according to the above said, although a certain degree of blockage and repression of traumatic experiences is understandable and almost unavoidable, the realization of and coming to terms with reality and painful recollections is tantamount in order to avoid further mental damage. For Bruno, however, this realization comes too late, and he becomes aware of the terrible situation around him only when the current of events and the force of

However, Holocaust survivors have not always been so keen on recuperating memory. In fact, as Edkins points out, the victim's first reaction was, in many cases, to leave it all behind; to forget the horror in order to continue with their lives. As Aharon Appelfeld claims, "anyone who underwent the Holocaust will be as wary of memory as of fire. It was impossible to live after the Holocaust except by silencing memory" (qtd. Edkins 2003:117). Such behaviour, though considered unethical by several scholars (Collado 2008:61), is understandable enough, since the instinct of self-preservation, the urge of protecting ourselves from any kind of pain is present, to a higher or lesser degree, in every human being. This is, basically, what Gemma does, and, according to Joseph –who has been tormented by years of constant remembering and reliving his trauma through dreams– it was "[j]ust as well" (Yolen 2002:231).

On the other hand, attempts at silencing the memory of these historical events were not only carried out by the victims themselves, but by the perpetrators as well. It is broadly known that, after World War II, certain spheres insisted on convincing the public opinion that stories about the Holocaust and what went on in concentration and death camps had been nothing but maliciously spread rumours in order to move people to support the war against the Nazis. Such ideas, incredible as they may seem, still circulate nowadays which make the unearthing of the truth about the Holocaust though memorials and books still a necessity.

And yet, in some cases, the recovery of traumatic history is not done by the direct survivors themselves, but by their descendants, as is, for example, the instance of the African-American Community, whose history of slavery and oppression is being vindicated now in contemporary novels such as those of Tony Morrison or David Bradley, among others. Even if those descendants were not touched by their predecessors' trauma, or if those experiences happened several centuries ago –as with the African-American history of slavery– they can sometimes be compelled to unearth the true story behind their forefathers' hidden suffering in an attempt to overcome in their names their unworked through traumas. Such task falls, as María Jesús Martínez Alfaro argues (2009:348), on the hands of Becca, Gemma's younger granddaughter, who travels to Poland after her grandmother's demise in order to put together the clues along Gemma's fairytale and discover the true story behind it. She is moved by the profound love she feels towards her grandmother, and it is through that love, as Gemma López Sánchez suggests, that the "purification of abject material" can be achieved. (2010:55) Becca knows this; she is conscious that her quest is not so much about recovering her grandmother's forgotten past, but to work through it and attest for the rest of victims who could not pass on their stories. "*Why am I doing this?*" she wonders, to which she answers, "[f]or

distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and relieving the past in its shattering intensity) but which may enable processes of judgement and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses. (2001:90)

And yet, as LaCapra highlights here, this remembering should be done with a degree of “conscious control,” that is, with coherence and rationality in a way that differs itself from the mere flashbacks and fragmentary revenants proper of an un-worked through trauma. Pierre Janet, as Van der Kolk and Van der Hart point out, already distinguished from these two types of memory as “narrative memory” and “traumatic memory.” The latter, they say, “has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity” (1995:163), whereas narrative memory “consists of mental constructs which people use to make sense out of experience” (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1995:160) In other words, while traumatic memory can recur without any significance other than a compulsive recollection that haunts the victim of the unresolved trauma as one more of its psychological consequences, putting those memories in a coherent narrative may serve the purpose to making sense of the trauma.

Furthermore, if recovering the memory of the past is crucial in the case of individual traumas, it is tantamount when dealing with collective historical traumas such as the Holocaust. When a whole community suffers from the same painful experience, a series of ties and affective links are developed within its inhabitants that may result in a bonding of the collective affected by it. According to Erikson, this kind of shared experience touches each and every one of the members of the community setting them apart from the rest of groups and becoming “almost like a common culture, a source of kinship.” (1995:190) In those cases, the trauma becomes a marker of identity, or what has been called “foundational trauma.” Such is the instance of the Jewish community; where the shared trauma of the Holocaust is still very much alive in their collective consciousness and is a current object of study and debate highly useful in the pursuit of social agency. The memory of the genocide is nowadays present through an increasing number of memorials, museums, monuments, books and films or even the very camps where such tragedy took place. Such memorial spaces keep the memory of such atrocity alive as a means of giving testimony for all those who perished during it. Besides, it is necessary to make people aware of the historical event not only to prevent a repetition, but also as homage to the victims.

following terms: “They are reflections of each other and as they sit, cross-legged in the dust, the fence that separates them acts as a kind of mirror image of the boy the other might have been.” (www.teenreads.com) The fence, therefore, can work as both a mirror and as a transparent glass. As a mirror, it would reflect the image and the world of the viewer back to him, without a glimpse of what lies beyond. This is what Bruno sees: a world behind the fence that must forcefully be a reflection of *his* world, while Shmuel is able to see the differences between the two sides and to tell them apart. And yet, at the same time, Shmuel realizes that the two boys *could* have been the same boy, as Boyne suggests. He is able to see the similarities between them much better than Bruno does:

If it wasn't for the fact that Bruno was nowhere near as skinny as the boys on his side of the fence, and not quite so pale either, it would have been difficult to tell them apart. It was almost (Shmuel thought) as if they were all exactly the same really. (Boyne 2007:203)

Indeed, both boys could be seen as the two faces of the same coin, and the identification that Shmuel makes is feasible enough. It is as if “they were all exactly the same really” and in fact, they suffer from the exact same fate. Once Bruno crosses the fence, the mirror no longer applies, and his world is left behind him. The differences that separated them remain at the other side of the fence, beyond the looking glass, in another world. Consequently, the connection is complete and the two boys merge in one. They were born the same day and—almost as if fate had touched them and predestined that they would meet—bond and die together. The identification serves another purpose here: just as Bruno and Shmuel finally come to see themselves in one another, the reader gets to see in them not only the fate of these two boys, but of thousand others that died similarly. In the words of John Boyne himself:

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS [sic] is *not* a novel about Auschwitz, it is about two boys on either side of a fence at a concentration camp during World War II. While it is clear that I am implying a specific camp, it was important to me to recognise that there were many more camps in operation at that time, and many millions of innocents who died in Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald, etc. and each of these should be remembered too. (www.teenreads.com, italics in the original)

We should indeed remember every victim, every camp, every story, all the trauma and the pain that this genocide caused and causes still, and it is books like these that keep the memory alive. As has already been mentioned, recovering and maintaining an active memory of one's traumatic past is essential for the individual's recovery. According to LaCapra:

When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when the language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical

trauma. Those memories, though painful as they may be, are an undeniable part of the person that experienced them and therefore, in order for him/her to recover the sense of wholeness lost as a consequence of the inflicted trauma, should form part of their accepted selves. This way, even if the victim does not fully recover, he/she can at least begin to overcome the situation. As Caroline Garland defends:

for traumatized individuals to get better, the knowledge and the memory of the events they have suffered may need to become part of, and integrated into, the individual's conscious existence, through being worked through instead of being walled-up in some avoided area of mental activity. (Garland 2007:5)

However, this is not by any means what Gemma does and, consequently, she suffers from her unresolved trauma until the moment of her death. It manifests itself not only through the aforementioned Freudian slips but also through perhaps the most indicative symptom of a traumatic neurosis: compulsive repetition. She not only identifies herself with the fairy tale character of Sleeping Beauty, but she unrelentingly retells her story in almost an unconscious way, specially when she is about to die. Actually, this story –her story– is the last “rational” thought that she has before her demise: “The old woman struggled against the restraints, trying to sit up. [...] ‘*I was the princess!*’ she cried again. ‘In the castle. The prince kissed me.’ [...] ‘I am Briar Rose,’ Gemma was repeating. ‘I am Briar Rose.’” (Yolen 2002:16-17)

And yet, Gemma does not have any rational reason for her instant identification with the character in Briar Rose; it is all, as has already been explained, part of her fictionalised self created in order to escape from the shattering force of the trauma. She believes she was born a princess, while there is no proof whatsoever to back up that affirmation; she claims she lived in a castle, while the only castle she ever inhabited was the *schloss* where the concentration camp of Dachau was situated; she thinks she was awoken by a prince's kiss after being put to sleep by an evil witch, while what saved her after being gassed and left in a common grave was Josef performing mouth to mouth resuscitation on her (or what is also called “kiss of life”).

On the other hand, Bruno *does* have plenty of reasons to identify himself with Shmuel, and yet he does not. He either actively refuses to do so in an attempt to hinder the penetration of the trauma surrounding him, or his infantile innocence and behaviour prevent him from making that connection. As has already been said, the two boys share a number of characteristics; from the date of their birth (same date and year for both) to their physical appearance, or even, to a certain extent, their current personal situation. In fact, it could be said that they are almost doppelgangers, or, as Bruno declares once, “like twins” (Boyne 2007:110). John Boyne himself refers to these coincidences in the

She shrugged. 'I do not know its name. But in it I am a princess in a castle and a great mist comes over us. Only I am kissed awake. I know now that there is a castle and it is called 'the *schloss*.' But I do not know for sure if that is *my* castle. I only remember the fairy tale and it seems, somehow, that it is my story as well.' (Yolen 2002:211)

And yet, as in the case of Bruno, there are certain instances in which Gemma seems to remember what she has supposedly forgotten, which makes the reader suspect that what was once repressed is struggling to arise, though Gemma tries hard to keep it buried. According to Freud, it may be possible that "certain parts of the repressed material have escaped this [repression] process, have remained accessible to memory and occasionally reappear in consciousness, but even then they are isolated, a foreign body without any connection with the rest of the mind" (1939:121). Even though Gemma tells the story of Briar Rose to her granddaughters as a fairy tale –although, as she says once with absent expression, for her it is "[n]ot a silly story at all." (Yolen 2002:151, italics in the original)– she intermingles certain images that do not originally pertain to the tale, and that are indicative of how Gemma's traumatic images and memories– the real events– are still very much present and not at all forgotten. She, for instance, explains the meaning of "mist" by using, of all the possible synonyms, the word "exhaust" (Yolen 2002:43), which acquires greater significance when we discover later that she was nearly gassed to death inside a van at Dachau. Besides, after the evil witch casts the spell, instead of thorns, as in the original tale, Briar Rose's castle is surrounded by barbed wire, whose meaning she refuses to explain arguing that it is better that the girls shouldn't know (Yolen 2002:59) . And yet, the most indicative sign that the tale is nothing but a fictive construction around a traumatic real event is the way in which Gemma describes the evil witch as "*the one in black with big black boots and silver eagles on her hat. [...] that angel of death*" (Yolen 2002:19, italics in the original).

Nowadays, those bits and pieces of information that arise despite the speaker's contrary preferences are called "Freudian slips" and, in fact, it was Freud who realized how certain events –traumatic and non-traumatic alike– repressed in the unconscious are bound to eventually arise one way or another:

either the instinct has kept its strength, or it will regain it, or it is reawakened by a new situation. It renews its claim and [...] it gains at some weak point new access to a so-called substitutive satisfaction which now appears as a symptom without the acquiescence and also without the comprehension of the Ego. (Freud 1939:163-164)

Insomuch as repression is the direct cause of those traumatic revenants that re-surface as symptoms, recuperating the hidden memories and acknowledging them is vital for the individual to finally work through the

life in Berlin— it could be concluded that not only his psyche, but also his conscious mind are going to great lengths to maintain his innocent purity and preserve Bruno from the trauma surrounding him. This process, despite the difference in age, is also evident in his mother, as Vera Farmiga —the actress portraying the part of the mother in the filmic version— suggests:

She is a bit oblivious to what unfolds around her. She chooses to be oblivious. Elsa's world structure is very small. She only concerns herself with what affects her family, the safety of her family, her and her position in society. [...] I think, on some levels, she must intuit it. She knows that people are being horribly mistreated, but I think she doesn't look. She doesn't want to see because seeing it would implicate her husband. (M. Herman 2008: min 8:46-9:55)

Therefore, both Bruno and his mother show signs that their blockages could be partially voluntary and conscious, although it could be argued that other factors contribute equally to their barring of trauma. However, the main difference between their cases and that of Gemma, Jane Yolen's protagonist, is that for her, we are not talking of a case of repression to impede the intrusion of a trauma that is occurring at the time of the blockage, but of the suppression of painful memories of the past. As has already been mentioned, this process can be accomplished by means of replacing those traumatic reminiscences with fictional memories or fantasies. Gemma, therefore, will repress the psychological trauma inflicted upon her as a result of her experience as a death camp survivor during World War II by identifying with the fictional character Briar Rose, the princess in an earlier version of *Sleeping Beauty*. Not only does she believe she *was* Briar Rose, an actual princess living in a castle, put to sleep by an evil witch and awakened by a prince, but also she keeps repeating the same fairy tale over and over until the time of her death to the point that her elder granddaughters believe she is demented. They are not far off mark, though, although they do not know it. Gemma, in fact, is *not* insane but clearly traumatized. Her case is that of an extensive repression under which she is—or she claims to be —completely unable to remember her past. When she is rescued by a group of partisans after being gassed and abandoned in an unmarked grave and they ask her about her story, her name, her origins, etc. she cannot answer any of those questions:

‘I do not know. I have no memories in my head but one.’

‘What one?’ Holz-Wadel asked.

‘A fairy tale.’

[...]

‘What fairy tale?’ Joseph asked.

was not a notion he had ever been forced to confront, and so the truth about the situation simply never crosses his mind:

the idea that Bruno, an innocent nine year old, would understand the events taking place around him implies the hindsight knowledge gained only by the passing of time and the study of history. [...] I stand by my believe that Bruno is an innocent child in a time and place that he does not understand; he has grown up with a father who has been in the Nazi party since he can remember --- why on earth would he question this when he has never known anything different? (www.teenreads.com)

When dealing with mental issues, and especially in the case of trauma, in which so many elements play an important role in the protection of the psyche, it is never easy to draw boundaries and to provide complete assertions. Just as Freud states, “[i]t is true that all repressed material is unconscious, but not true that everything belonging to the Ego is conscious.” (Freud 1939: 122) A person may willingly refuse to see what lies in front of him/her, but this voluntary action may be intermingled as well with unconscious mechanisms of defence. In the case of Bruno, it could be argued that all these are in fact combined and that the blocking of the truth is carried out by a mixture of ignorance, ingenuity and wilful negation. The last part is especially noticeable when we take into account his relationship with Shmuel, his Jewish alter-ego. Even though they are of the exact same age –being born on the same day– Shmuel is far less innocent than Bruno is and seems to realize the horror of his situation much better than Bruno does, who, in fairness, does not seem too keen to realize:

‘You don’t know what it’s like in here,’ said Shmuel eventually in a low voice, his words barely carrying across to Bruno.

‘You don’t have any sisters, do you?’ asked Bruno quickly, pretending he hadn’t heard that because then he wouldn’t have to answer. (Boyne 2007:140)

This is only one of the moments when Bruno clearly refuses to deal with something that could potentially shatter his barrier of innocence; an example in which we could talk about wilful repression, but not the only one. When, after being terrorized by Lieutenant Kotler he denies having met Shmuel and consequently brings the young officer’s terrible wrath upon his friend’s shoulders, he admits blocking that memory due to shame:

Bruno [...] wanted to pretend that the incident a few months earlier when he had denied his friendship with Shmuel had never taken place. It still preyed on his mind and made him feel bad about himself, although Shmuel, to his credit, seemed to have forgotten all about it. (Boyne 2007:178)

Insomuch as Bruno does consciously block certain memories that make him feel sad –such as the aforementioned, or the remembrance of his previous

‘I don’t think we would have been allowed,’ said Shmuel, shaking his head. ‘We weren’t able to get out of our carriage.’

‘The doors are at the end,’ explained Bruno.

‘There weren’t any doors,’ said Shmuel.

‘Of course there were doors,’ said Bruno with a sigh. ‘They’re at the end,’ he repeated. ‘Just past the buffet section.’

‘There weren’t any doors,’ insisted Shmuel. ‘If there had been, we would all have got off.’

Bruno mumbled something under his breath along the lines of ‘Of course there were’, but he didn’t say it very loud so Shmuel didn’t hear. (Boyne 2007:129-130)

In spite of Shmuel’s firmness in several cases such as this, his repeating over and over again that it is not the same on his side of the fence, and Bruno’s sister’s perseverance in teaching him the proper names for both his house and the Führer, it is only when he crawls under the barbed wire that his fantasy finally collapses:

Bruno opened his eyes in wonder at the things he saw. In his imagination he had thought that all the huts were full of happy families, some of whom sat outside in rocking chairs in the evening and told stories about how things were so much better when they were children and they’d had respect for their elders, not like the children nowadays. He thought that all the boys and girls who lived here would be in different groups, playing tennis or football, skipping and drawing out squares for hopscotch on the ground.

He had thought that there would be a shop in the centre, and maybe a small café like the ones he had known in Berlin; he had wondered whether there would be a fruit and vegetable stall.

As it turned out, all the things that he thought might be there –weren’t. (Boyne 2007:205-206)

And yet, the truth is so self-evident, that there are times when the reader cannot help but wonder if the innocence that Bruno so hard-headedly wants to maintain is real or feigned. The question is, therefore, if in Bruno’s case repression is fully voluntary or not. To the present day reader, some of the clues in front of Bruno’s eyes seem so evident that at times it is difficult to believe that Bruno truthfully does not know how to interpret them. Children’s ingenuousness could very well be a factor here, but in truth, towards the end of the story, Bruno is nearly ten years old, an age at which innocence –especially under harsh circumstances– already starts fading. However, as the author himself claims, there is a feasible explanation to all this; Bruno had never known or even imagined that anything like the Holocaust could ever happen. It

(1997) Guido creates a whole story in order to protect his son from the ugly truth during their stay in a Nazi concentration camp.

Both instances are samples in which the individuals consciously –perhaps more clearly so in Guido’s case– build up those fantastic realities in order to block painful experiences, only, for Billy’s part those are *past* memories and in *Life is Beautiful*, the disguised truth is happening at the time of the blockage. In John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Bruno, its protagonist, also feels the necessity to escape from a current painful situation surrounding him. Just as Guido tries to protect his son’s innocence, Bruno would stubbornly deny the reality in front of him in order to prolong his stay in the land of childhood naiveté. When Bruno first spots the camp and its interns from his bedroom window, the view suddenly makes him feel “very cold and unsafe” (Boyne 2007:20), and yet, after some time and a discussion with his sister, what they first termed as a “nasty-looking place” (Boyne 2007:32) ends up being some kind of farm; a much more comforting mental image. This becomes for Bruno the *only* truth he wants to believe, and, although his sister grows out of this idea, he is completely convinced that what lies beyond the fence is some kind of resort full of happy families and children to play with, as he once tells Shmuel, his Jewish friend:

‘It’s so unfair,’ said Bruno. ‘I don’t see why I have to be stuck over here on this side of the fence where there’s no one to talk to and no one to play with and you get to have dozens of friends and are probably playing for hours every day. I’ll have to speak to Father about it.’ (Boyne 2007:111)

This delusion goes on for the rest of his stay at the camp, and we can find several examples of it. Names, for instance, are a clear indicator of this consistent denial of reality; the softening that goes on in Bruno’s mind. He persistently calls his new bearings “Out-With” instead of Auschwitz, despite seeing the correct name written down on a bench and the fact that his sister had repeatedly told him to pronounce it properly. This is exactly the same approach that Bruno takes towards Hitler’s name, changed for “The Fury” throughout the whole book. Bruno is fully convinced that Shmuel’s situation is exactly the same as his (or even better, since he has friends to play with) and that any drawbacks are just attributable to misunderstandings from his part:

‘The train was horrible,’ said Shmuel. ‘There were too many of us in the carriages for one thing. And there was no air to breathe. And it smelled awful.’

‘That’s because you all crowded onto one train,’ said Bruno, remembering the two trains he had seen at the station when he left Berlin. ‘When we came here, there was another one on the other side of the platform but no one seemed to see it. That was the one we got. You should have got on it too.’

construct an alternative –fictional– world that would replace the actual –real– experience rather than facing the consequences of the trauma, which is what, as the following article proposes, both Gemma and Bruno achieve in, respectively, Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose* and John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

Before being applied to mental illnesses, the word trauma, deriving from the Greek word *traumatizo*, was firstly used to refer to a “bodily injury caused by an external agent” (Luckhurst 2008:1). Centuries later, Freud extended this definition to cover also those wounds inflicted upon an individual’s mind, or, to quote his own words, “[s]uch external excitations as are strong enough to break against the barrier against stimuli” that protects the mind (Freud 1922:34). The pleasure principle, Freud continues, is in charge of keeping the amount of those excitations to a minimum (1922:81), and, although checked by the reality principle in normal circumstances, (1922:5) it can, at times, become dominant and completely block out pain. As a consequence, when those external excitations become too strong for the psyche to bear them without producing immense pain, a series of mechanisms will be immediately put in action in order to protect it, including that of repression. However, although blocking the painful event does momentarily soothe the mind, those forgotten memories are bound to reappear in a series of symptomatic manifestations that would haunt the victim and keep the trauma alive until it is properly worked through. Freud called these symptoms “the return of the repressed” (1939:164). As a consequence of this, it could be argued that trauma is not –or at least not exclusively– the blow inflicted to the mind, but also, and most importantly, the subsequent symptoms derived from it.

The majority of those –namely nightmares, repetitive compulsions, melancholia, sense of fragmentation, etc.– are a direct result of these blocking processes. As has already been said, repression cannot only be this automatic psychic defence, but also a wilful process carried out by the affected individual him/herself which, understandable as it may be, hinders nonetheless the necessary path to recovery. Victims may, therefore, either completely block the painful memories, choosing to turn a blind eye to their traumatic experiences, or mask them under a layer or fictional substitutive remembrances built around a fantasy. Reality, in many cases, can be far too painful to bear, and individuals may therefore prefer to invent parallel narratives in order to soften its dramatic impact. Of late, this particular characteristic of the workings of trauma has been used in an array of different written and filmic plots. Kurt Vonnegut, for example, would present Billy Pilgrim, the main character in *Slaughterhouse 5*, as a “peculiar” character that constructs his post-traumatic self around the delusional idea that he is able to travel back and forth in time as well as to the distant planet of Tralfamadore. Similarly, in Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful*

or stubbornly refuse to see the painful reality in front of their eyes choosing over it a less harsh fictional alternative. Through the analysis of these two books, this article will compare and contrast these two different ways to deny a traumatic reality and will highlight the necessity to recover those repressed memories not only to work through past traumas, but to give voice and pay homage to those overcome by them.

Key Words: Trauma, Holocaust fiction, Work through, Repression, Memory, Jane Yolen, John Boyne.

ver la dolorosa realidad, optando por otra imaginaria y menos dura. A través del análisis de estos dos libros, el presente artículo comparará y contrastará estas dos formas diferentes de negar una realidad traumática y enfatizará la necesidad de recuperar la memoria reprimida, no sólo para superar traumas del pasado, sino para dar voz y homenajear a aquellos que fueron devastados por ellos.

Palabras clave: Trauma, Ficción sobre el Holocausto, Proceso de superación del trauma, Represión, Memoria, Jane Yolen, John Boyne.

Stories, as the above quotation suggests, constitute a fundamental part of human beings, their evolution and their conception of the self. It is for this reason that men have always made use of them in all aspects of their lives, either positive or negative. Therefore, fiction –even lies– and fairy tales have always accompanied men and helped them hide (from) the most unpleasant parts of their surrounding environment or even themselves. Mythologies, for instance, were born in antiquity in order to fill in the void of a given cultural emptiness; be it the lack of certainty about the origin of man or the order of the universe. Just as Jack Zipes points out in his book *Spells of Enchantment*,

both the oral and the literary forms of the fairy tale are grounded in history: they emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors. (1991:xi)

Similarly, victims of acute trauma often tend to mask the underlying effects of their terrorizing experiences in order to escape the suffering that those entail. Or, as Jeffrey Alexander argues, “[w]hen bad things happen to good people, [...] they can become so frightened that they can actually repress the experience of trauma itself” (2004:5). Such repression can occur in two different ways; it can be automatically exerted by the psyche itself as a mechanism of defence, as Freud maintains, or it can be a conscious and wilful process. This way, trauma can be voluntarily blocked by the individual in question as an attempt to either avoid remembering a series of painful past recollections or to evade himself from a traumatic present. In some cases, the trauma victim may even choose to

**ESCAPING TRAUMA
THROUGH A
DREAMWORLD:
FANTASY AND THE
EVASION OF PAIN IN
JANE YOLEN'S *BRIAR
ROSE* AND JOHN
BOYNE'S *THE BOY IN
THE STRIPED PYJAMAS***

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“[W]e are made up of stories. And even the ones that seem the most like lies can be our deepest hidden truths.”

Jane Yolen, *Briar Rose*.

Abstract

Fiction has always been part of human beings, accompanying them even in the most difficult situations of life. In fact, certain victims of acute trauma may tend to mask and evade the pain they suffer by creating their own fictional world as a means of escaping from reality. This has become a recurrent theme in contemporary literature, as in the cases of Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, whose characters would respectively block a traumatic memory by replacing it with a fantasy

Resumen

La ficción siempre ha formado parte del ser humano, acompañándole en las situaciones más difíciles de la vida. De hecho, algunas víctimas de grave trauma psicológico pueden enmascarar y evadir el dolor que sufren creando su propio mundo de ficción para escapar de la realidad. Esto se ha convertido en un tema recurrente en la literatura contemporánea, como en *Briar Rose*, de Jane Yolen y *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* de John Boyne, cuyos protagonistas, respectivamente, bloquearán una memoria traumática sustituyéndola por una fantasía o se negarán obstinadamente a

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control its development and its integration into existing social structures” (Fabre 1983:15). I now wonder if we are facing a new kind of racism which relies more heavily on the manipulation of ideas within mass media. As Collins puts it, “these new techniques present hegemonic ideologies that claim that racism is over. They work to obscure the racism that does exist, and they undercut antiracist protest. Globalization, transnationalism, and the growth of hegemonic ideologies within mass media provide the context for a new racism that has catalyzed changes within African, Black American, and African-Diasporic societies (2006:49). Nobody should be asked to deny his/her self in order to become a proper member of a society.

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emerging African nations. In the play, these figures constantly clash. Thus, Sarah's identity crisis is at once a crisis with political and social resonance- a legacy of the historical confrontation between whites and non-whites, and between men and women, who have always been denied a social context and a place in history. Sarah's lack of grounding with either of her parents, and her inability to define or identify herself positively, sets the stage for her suicide. Her rejection of African American heritage and womanness lead her to despise her own identity in a failed attempt to "fit in."

The history of the United States is overwhelmingly a history of racial mixing and Adrienne Kennedy's play is a painful reminder of a society's collective denial of this fact. As Homi Bhabha (1994:126) shows, there is a connection between cultural assimilation and falsehood, as he identifies that "mimicry" as a postcolonial device. According to him, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." In doing so, Anlin Cheng (1997:56) points out, the person trying to "fit in" finds him/herself in the position of melancholy echoing the master, incorporating both the master and his own denigration. Each of the conflicting sides of Kennedy's main character were potential saviors, but her rejection of her identity in a desperate attempt to feel integrated in white society made her fail utterly both as an African American and as a woman. In Étienne Balibar's words, when they call "into question [his/her] personal and social identity, they necessarily call into question the integrity of the body and of the mind, as well as the mutual link of belonging between subjects and their historical and geographical environment [thus crumbling down] one's own identity" (2009:10-11). According to him, the domestic slavery of women as well as the habitual dominations which are part of the very foundations of society or culture are nothing but examples of extreme violence (2009:11). A clear example of extreme psychological violence, Adrienne Kennedy's play exposes the same conflicts African American women were/ are faced with every day. For Sarah, a "living dead" in Balibar's words, life becomes "worse than death or more difficult to live than death itself" (2009:14). *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, although written in 1969, is still a valid reminder of how much we still need to achieve in terms of truly appreciating racial and gender diversity among us.

If we still get to play the "race card", we should then ask ourselves, as Patricia Collins does, if "The Past is Ever Present". Adrienne Kennedy's play may have been a response to those plays which, as Fabre points out, were promoted by the dominant society out of a desire to control its development and its integration in the Marcusian sense of the term, "The entire movement in theatre from 1965 to 1975 must be understood in light of this contradiction: the dominant society helped to promote black theatre mainly out of a desire to

neither the individual alter egos nor their collective ritual can save Sarah from her nightmare. The Jungle scene is the last-ditch effort to keep dreaming. It was Freud who pointed out that the ultimate motive of any dream is to allow the dreamer to dream- in other words, to “resolve” the crisis that would otherwise require that the dreamer wake and deal consciously with the pressures generating the dream (Scanlan 1991:106-7). Symbolically then the appropriate place for Sarah’s final disintegration is the jungle, which “has overgrown all the other chambers and all the other places with a violence and a dark brightness, a grim yellowness” (Kennedy 1969:22). Her inability to resist the pressures of society and to resolve the conflicts which raged within her is a vivid reminder of the fragile nature of all psychic balance. Her death also emphasizes the perils of evasion and escape as methods of alleviating anguish. By this time the color white has come to be associated, in the masks of the characters and in the lightning, with a deathly pallor and fixation. This deathly white is reinforced by the huge plaster statue of Queen Victoria which looms over the scenes that take place in her room. All of Sarah’s selves appear and they wander about repeating each other’s words, chanting motifs connected with Sarah’s suffering, until the tension reaches fever pitch. After an intense silence, a re-enactment of her father’s murder occurs. At this point the selves suddenly run about, madly laughing and shouting, creating a terrifying image of her complete collapse.

Sarah’s inability to exist at the intersection of resisting realities and images, to unravel their meaning within an African American context, marks her as a person without reality (or within madness). As she had said at the beginning, “everything is a lie” (Kennedy 1969:10). When Raymond and the landlady found her dead we find out that her father may not be dead after all,

Raymond. (Observing her hanging figure.) She was a funny little liar.

Landlady. (Informing him) Her father hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba died.

Raymond. Her father never hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered, I know the man. He is a doctor, married to a white whore. He lives in the city in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books and oriental carpets. Her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table. (Kennedy 1969:24)

In doing so, her father may be living just the way she wanted her life and her friends to be. As a result of all these conflicting external forces, a battle is waged in Sarah between projected image(s) of self/selves and a real self. These characters are archetypes of oppressors of African American women. The Duchess of Hapsburg and Queen Victoria represent the royal line beginning with the Holy Roman Empire. Jesus Christ suggests the religion that became the rationale for conquest. Patrice Lumumba, the martyred leader, represents the

investigation of the events. Curiously enough, her name, Mrs. Conrad, reminds us of Joseph Conrad who in his *Heart of Darkness* narrates the inaccuracy of a white man to understand the African world.

Not all of Sarah's selves are white. One of them is Patrice Lumumba, the assassinated quintessential African hero. However, the fact that this is a male figure despises her womanness. The persona of Patrice Lumumba, whom Sarah both adopts and associates with her father, acts as a bridge between Sarah and her father, since "her father hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered" (Kennedy 1969:10). However, when he represents the African man's noble efforts to save his race we witness the disintegration of Sarah's personal histories and consequently the destruction of her universe of European antiques as well. Patrice Lumumba repeats Sarah's words but in a despising way, always adding the adjective "vile" to her utterances, "It is my vile dream to live in rooms with European antiques [...]. They are necessary for me to maintain recognition against myself" (Kennedy 1969:15). Lumumba repudiates Sarah's rejection of her African American heritage.

Sarah's own spiritual link with God is Jesus Christ, yet another male. But Jesus is a yellow-skinned hunchback dwarf dressed in white rags and sandals. This self is also linked with her father, who wanted to be Jesus, "to walk in Genesis and save the race [...] and heal the pain of the race, heal the misery of the black man" (Kennedy 1969:20). Like her father, this Jesus made no good either. In their last scene together, Sarah, as Jesus, admits to attempting to escape being non-white, and she vows to go to Africa to kill Patrice Lumumba because she recognizes that her father was an African American man and identifies him with her/his African American father. He literally embodies that blackness that so torments her. It is he who separates Sarah from her white ancestry and the white European royalty she so admires. The Jesus character's response to discovering the hanged Duchess is a fascinating climax in the play:

I am going to Africa and kill this black man named Patrice Lumumba. Why? Because all my life I believed my Holy Father to be God, but now I know that my father is a black man. I have no fear, for whatever I do, I will do in the name of God. I will do in the name of Albert Saxe Coburg, in the name of Victoria, Queen Victoria Regina, the monarch of England, I will. (Kennedy 1969:19-20)

Not even this Jesus can save Sarah's identity. God is not his father any more and he wants to kill a noble black man in the name of the white world.

The selves are all potential saviors, but they are destined to fail, for they are strategies of escape; each is a possibility of being other than Negro-Sarah. "As they each successively appear they all too have nimbuses atop their heads in a manner to suggest that they are saviours" (Kennedy 1969:22). In the end,

Sarah's rejection of her identity is evident throughout the play, yet she is cognizant of the selves she becomes. Victoria and the Duchess were both powerful European women and symbolize the dominant culture in America that teaches a distorted view of history. This is a point of view which propagandizes the European patriarchal system. Queen Victoria, despite her power, kept her sex powerless. Sarah's identification with Victoria not only shows identification with the oppressor but symbolizes a complete repudiation of her African American female identity.

Hair takes on importance throughout the piece, its progressive loss equated with the loss of African-American identity. In folklore hair often symbolizes fertility or power over the person whose enemy might shear it. In this play, which begins with Sarah's mother passing before the closed curtain carrying before her a bald head, various characters lose their hair, which slowly and nightmarishly falls around them. 'Kinky black' hair sticks out from "from beneath both [the Duchess and the Queen] their headpieces spring a handful of wild kinky hair" Kenney 1969: (2-3), while the long, straight black hair that continually falls out is associated with the Sarah of mixed blood who tries to be as white as possible.

Duchess and Jesus (Their hair is falling more now, they are both hideous.)
My father isn't going to let us alone. (Knocking) Our father isn't going to let us alone, our father is the darkest of us all, my mother was the fairest, I am in between, but my father is the darkest of them all. Ha is a black man. Our father is the darkest of them all. He is a black man. My father is a dead man.

(Then they suddenly look at each other and scream, the Lights go to their heads and we see that they are totally bald). (Kennedy 1969:19)

Throughout the play, the farther away one gets from 'blackness', the more hair falls out –the whiter the character, the balder. As her female selves lose their hair, the threat of her father's return, of a confrontation with her irreconcilable blackness, grows imminent.

Sarah's search for love and acceptance in the white world offers her no solace or comfort. She admits she doesn't love the Jewish poet, though she responds wildly to Raymond's embrace, even though he is unmoved by her fears and torments. Disarmed and unprotected, an archetypal fallen woman, she begs for love. In spite of this, Raymond watches her suffering and when he discovers her death his only remark is, "She was a funny liar". To him she is an oddity to be observed from a distance (Barnett 1995:146).

The white landlady's scenes (there are three in the play) mark important structural divisions of the plot. She appears toward the beginning and at the end, and she appears at the precise moment the play reaches its climax. She behaves as a corroborating witness, like an innocent bystander responding to an official

She attempts to efface her African American heritage by injecting herself into white society. Sarah's identification and empathy with the literary and historical traditions of England leads her to choose Victoria and the Duchess to escape the sense of powerlessness and the implications of depreciated sexuality attached to an African American girl, "Victoria always wants me tell her of whiteness. She wants me to tell her of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones" (Kennedy 1969:8). Thus, when associated with Victoria, Sarah momentarily rejects all 'blackness'.

Sarah's identification with these figures of white and female power would be complete were it not for her African American hair, which gives away her negritude. The choice of words she uses to describe herself is poignantly negative: "no glaring Negroid features, medium nose, medium mouth and pale yellow skin. My defect is that I have a head of frizzy hair, unmistakably Negro kinky hair" (Kennedy 1969:6).

Though Sarah lives in a brownstone apartment with her Jewish boyfriend, she mentally inhabits the expressionistic settings suggested by her selves. Sarah is disconnected from the world and cannot find a place for herself. On the one hand she has assimilated herself into the dominant culture; she majored in English; she writes poetry in imitation of a white woman (Sitwell); she longs for middle class materialism; she seeks to neutralize her African American heritage by living with her white boyfriend whom she unsuccessfully wishes she could love in an apartment run by an also white landlady. Despite this, her African American identity haunts her because, in a patriarchy, the father's self-identification determines the social identification of the child. Sarah's inability to identify with her father, where her social identification should take place, sets her adrift (Lee 1992:62). Within her violent universe, Sarah is haunted by her selves, all of whom represent archetypes within her collective unconscious. These cathected figures reject Sarah's ego and, at the same time, she identifies with them completely.

When I am the Duchess of Hapsburg I sit opposite Victoria in my headpiece and we talk. The other time I wear the dress of a student, dark clothes and dark stockings. Victoria always wants me to tell her of whiteness. She wants me to tell her of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones. For as we of royal blood know, black is evil and has been from the beginning. Even before my mother's hair started to fall out. Before she was raped by a wild black beast. Black is evil. As for my self I long to become a more pallid Negro than I am now; pallid like Negroes on the covers of African Negro magazines, soulless, educated and irreligious. I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity. (Kennedy 1969:5-6)

should have let a black man put his hands on me. The wild black beast raped me and now my skull is shining” (Kennedy 1969:7).

The play is dominated by a threat of rape by her father who, she believes, continues to come to her room, knocking loudly throughout the play in an unending ritual suggesting incest and violence,

Victoria. (Listening to the knocking) It is my father. He is arriving again for the night. *(The Duchess makes no reply)* He comes through the jungle to find me. He never tires of his journey.

Duchess. How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest of them all, the darkest one? My mother looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's. And at least I am yellow, but he is black, the blackest of them all. I hoped he was dead. Yet he still comes through the jungle to find me. (Kennedy 1969:6)

The father is associated with bestiality, inscribed with white culture's imagery of African American men as rapists, always referring to him as “a wild black beast” (Kennedy 1969:5), although he also represents Africa and Blackness. Sarah's father is a highly complex border character. Though he has been entrusted with enacting the redemption story of white Christianity for his ‘black’ people in Africa, another part of his image stands for the evil Christianity attempts to purge. Connected to abjection and pollution, the coding of blackness has been fundamental to the symbolic privileging of whiteness. The irony is that the parent Sarah identifies so strongly with, her nearly white mother, rejects her while the parent she rejects, her very ‘black’ father, reaches out for her wanting her love and approval, “I wanted to be a Christian. Now I am Judas. I betrayed my mother. I sent your mother to the asylum. I created a yellow child who hates me. And he tried to hang himself in a Harlem hotel” (Kennedy 1969:17). The generational transference of the rape from mother to daughter symbolizes the rape of the African American, generation after generation, by the dominant Euro-American culture. Additionally, the rape also symbolizes the social, political and often physical rape of the black woman by everybody.

When she identifies herself with her mother's world, she isolates herself, and hides in her room where she dreams of living in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, and oriental carpets. She spends her days longing for living in a white, European culture, and that's why

It is my dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my Queen Victoria, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, piano, oriental carpets and to eat my meals on a white glass table. I will visit my friend's apartments which will contain books, photographs of Roman ruins, pianos and oriental carpets. My friends will be white. (Kennedy 1969:9)

The rooms are my rooms; a Hapsburg chamber, a chamber in a Victorian castle, the hotel where I killed my father, the jungle. These are the places my selves exist in. I know no places. To believe in places is to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world. I find there are no places only in my funnyhouse.
(7)

Each room represents not only her melancholic search for the perfect identity, the white one, and her rejection of her African heritage but also, her oppression within their walls. As Janice Richardson (2010:57) contends, "Feminists have pointed out the way in which the definition of 'private' as non-political sphere marginalised women's oppression within the home." The only two characters outside her mind- Raymond, her Jewish lover, and her landlady- contribute to her anguish through mockery, making her oppression even more acute. Sarah's struggle is the struggle of all women in a world which not only mocks and rejects Blackness but femaleness as well.

Probably the most powerless group, biracial women, are usually rejected by both races by virtue of their sex and mixed blood; an already subaltern condition aggravated by racial animosity. They are often a source of embarrassment to both sides of their family, because on their white relations side they are a physical statement which lowers the class status of the family. To her black relations she is a tangible embodiment of consorting with the "enemy" (Lee 1992:55). The word miscegenation can be traced to the Latin words *miscere*, meaning "to mix" and *genus* meaning "race". Miscegenation describes the cohabitation or marriage between persons of different races. As with most African Americans, Jill Nelson reminds us, "light skin is the result of rape and sexual exploitation during slavery" (2006:139), and *Funny house's* Sarah is obsessed with her "light" colored female identity. Her inability to reconcile her divided self is seen in the play through the multiple characters or personas that are all parts of Sarah's selfhood. Lee suggests that Kennedy created Sarah as a mulatto rather than a 'black' girl to emphasize Otherness by taking marginality in Euro-American culture to its extreme (1999:57). Sarah's desire to be assimilated by the dominant culture seems a natural rejection of being stigmatized by society's definition of Otherness.

Central in her struggle are her parental figures, which psychically haunt her. Although Sarah's mother looked white, "My mother was the light. She was the lightest one. She looked like a white woman" (Kennedy 1969:7), she was in fact biracial, and Sarah's father was 'black'. This is psychically most disturbing to Sarah, who identifies so strongly with her mother that she cannot resolve the racial conflict of her birth. Her mother, who is dressed in a white nightgown carrying a bald head, continuously mutters "Black man, black, man, I never

In Freud's account, it would seem that all subjects, in the process of identification, are constituted by the psychical history of the cathected objects that have transformed them. Adrienne Kennedy's text provides access to such multiple identifications and in endless search for the perfect identity, the white one, in a way that echoes in the words of Kate Bornstein over thirty years later.

There are so many ways to classify people, but the top of this pyramid just might remain the same: the Perfect Identity. At the top we'd have the Perfect Gender and the Perfect Race and the Perfect Class. So the culturally agreed-upon standards of perception just might all converge into one identity that's got the bulk of the power in the world, and *that* identity relies on its granted perfection from each of the classifications that support it.

The posited "perfect identity", this powerful oppressive force made up of the composite perfections of all systems of classifications, has a lot of names today. Feminists call it a MAN. Jews have called it GENTILE. African-American activists call it WHITE. [...] In this binary-slanted world, we keep naming our oppressor [...] in terms of some convenient opposite (27-8).

Far from feeling at the top of this social pyramid, the main character in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is constantly faced by her conflicting sides, all of them wishing to become a part of that pyramid top. Following Anlin Cheng, the character's "melancholic" construction of her ego "provides a provocative metaphor for how race in America, or more specifically how the act of racialization, works. While the formation of the American culture may be said to be a history of legalized exclusions (Native Americans, African-Americans, Jews, Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans...) it is, however, also a history of misremembering those denials" (51). Hers is a struggle to find her place in society by means of denying her own history.

In the opening scene we see a grotesque imagery that is nightmarish. The play opens with a woman wandering across the stage as if in a trance, carrying a bald skull. The play's structure then begins to unfold, not only as a growth of images but also as collections of events. The main character, Sarah, is played simultaneously by different characters who represent various sides of herself, sometimes saying the same lines, but never in unison, and never in dialogue where each might hear or understand the other. Sarah's efforts to achieve wholeness and identity, and her simultaneous conflict with paranoia, and the will to self-destruction, ultimately result in a disintegration of her personality. Her loyalty to her European heritage, represented by Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg, forces her to hate and deny her African heritage, forces her to murder her father, much as the Europeans murdered Patrice Lumumba because he threatened European dominance. All of these conflicts rage inside Sarah's mind, which is the funnyhouse, the madhouse, from which she cannot escape the deadly psychic and physical space of its rooms:

that contribute to the conflict in *Funnyhouse*; a conflict of rejection of her blackness and of yearning for assimilation in Eurocentric tradition, as shown in her reverence for European antiques, books and photographs, among other symbols.

Although Kennedy's characters tell stories, their narratives are not the focus of her plays, and the purpose of the play is not to recreate past occurrences. Overt action in Kennedy's plays is not an end in itself. She is more interested in the intimacies and anguish of the psyche. She focuses on states of mind and of being-womanhood, fragmentation, longing, the tensions that African American women suffer. *Funnyhouse* highlights the struggle of a central female character whose black skin evinces a lack of identity and, therefore, a lack of social placement in the dominant white society. The play deals with a split main subject which indicates the multiple marginalizations she endures. It projects a world where Blackness, femaleness and education are equally important isolating factors. The action takes the form of separate scenes made up of monologues, dialogues, or pantomimes, and grotesque figures. These multiple associations come clear of themselves when the plot structure is read as action segments. Sarah, the central character, longs for social placement by attempting to annihilate her loathsome parentage. This miscegenation, coupled with society's oppression of women, yields her a liminal place in society.

In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Sarah is inhabited by various selves who punish and betray her even as they speak her history. She identifies herself, projects her self, as Freud would say it, onto those other selves; rejecting her own identity. Following Elin Diamond, the play follows the form of a classical Freudian dream. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud states that identification resembles the conditions of hysterics, enabling patients to suffer on behalf of a whole crowd of people and to act all the parts in a play singlehanded. This tendency to play all parts produces an obvious threat to identity, creating an indistinction of the "I" and the "s/he". He goes further in his subsequent studies stating that the loss of a loved object provokes identification with the abandoned object, setting itself inside the ego. However, and this is the cruelty of melancholia, the object, now set up, acts as a critical agency that reproaches the ego, becoming constitutive of psychic development. As Anlin Cheng (1997:50) contends, this melancholic condition produces:

a peculiarly ghostly form of ego formation. Moreover, that incorporation of loss still retains the status of the original lost object as loss; consequently, as Freud reminds us, by incorporating and identifying with the ghost of the lost one, the melancholic takes on the emptiness of that ghostly presence and in this way participates in his/her own self-denigration.

consciousness. She tries to capture in dramatic form the theme closest to her heart, the individual at war with inner forces and struggling with conflicting sides of the personality. She also admitted to using the works of playwrights Tennessee Williams and García Lorca as models,

I admire Tennessee Williams and García Lorca, and I struggled for a long time to write plays- as typified by *Funny House*- in which the person is in conflict with their inner forces, with the conflicting sides to their personality, which I found to be my own particular greatest conflict. (Kennedy 1977:47)

She thus combined those conflicting sides with memories from her own life. We can see that in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*'s Raymond and the landlady; two characters who are modelled after the looming clown-like figures that guard an amusement park in Kennedy's hometown, Cleveland (Kennedy 1987:10). She had also seen, for example, the mammoth statue of Queen Victoria in front of Buckingham Palace in London, and later used it in this play.

It is not by chance that Adrienne Kennedy's autobiographical writing, particularly *People Who Led to My Plays*, is essentially a theatrical act of self-ascription. When it is used as an access to Kennedy's "resisting images", many possible interpretations of Kennedy's dramaturgy are opened. For example, Kennedy speaks of her trip to Ghana in terms of a personal renaissance. During the several stages of this trip she started to think of the powerful images she would use in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* "I remember [...] I had seen Jesus as sweet, docile. I had believed "what a friend we have in Jesus." But that spring, sitting in the Pensione Sabrina, I went on creating a cruel Jesus Christ" (Kennedy 1987:123). Thus we can find a yellow Jesus Christ who wanted to kill Patrice Lumumba in order to reject Blackness. This rejection led the main character, Sarah, to seek her placement in the white English world, which also has its origin in her travel,

I was always interested in English literature and in England. There's always been a fascination with Queen Victoria. It always seemed to amaze me that one person could have a whole era named after them. I find the obsession with royalty fascinating. Not only Queen Victoria, but other great historical literary figures such as Patrice Lumumba and, it's obvious, Jesus Christ. Well, I took these people [...] and then used them to represent different points of view –metaphors really. (Kennedy 1987:123)

Likewise, some time before writing this play Kennedy visited Chapultepec Palace in Mexico City and bought postcards of the Duchess of Hapsburg. "At that time in Mexico there seemed something amiss about European royalty living amid the Aztec culture, European royalty in an alien landscape. Soon my duchess of Hapsburg would exist in an alien persona, that of the character of the Negro writer" (qtd. in Kintz 1992:157). Thus the images exhibit African-American, Aframerican, African, European, and European-American features

forces” (1985:99). Storytelling becomes a deliberate, conscious illocution performed in diverse spans of time by different storytelling voices. At times, we have a Faulknerian type of narration with different characters narrating their stories. All these experiences are fragments and it is their sum total that makes up the memory of a whole people. Focusing on these fragments is a way of highlighting the state of absence, the presence of a partial memory that needs to be completed by multiple pieces.

Adrienne Kennedy’s style is short and intense, with the dense language of symbolic poetry. Working in a surrealistic theatrical style, Kennedy acknowledges the violence that is beneath the surface in most human beings. By conveying Sarah’s internal struggle through traces of different selves, Kennedy portrays the mixture of racial hatred and fear that has long characterized American society. Her play addresses the cultural and political fragmentation suffered by African Americans when they were beginning to join efforts to construct an Afro-American community. The use of this damaged social identity in her play is a symptom of the deeper psychological fragmentation suffered by African American women. Her characters walk the fine thin line between dream and consciousness, between reality and the surreal fantasies. Kennedy achieves her greatest impact in the arresting though critically resisting images that surround her major protagonist. In order to achieve a better comprehension of them it is useful to point out that her plays are also an expression of herself. She views writing as an outlet for inner, psychological confusion and questions stemming from childhood and a creative way to figure out the why of things,

I think about things for many years and keep loads of notebooks, with images, dreams, ideas I’ve jotted down. I see my writing as a growth of images. I think all my plays come out of dreams I had two or three years before; I played around with the images for a long period of time to try to get to the most powerful dreams. (Kennedy 1977:43)

Kennedy sees herself as a collage of language, drawings and photographs, making no distinction between things and humans that lead her to the writing of her plays.

Her works are autobiographical and project onto the stage an interior reality by means of letting “the material come out and not be frightened about it and not censor it. Just trust yourself and do not have an opinion of your previous work” (Kennedy 1977:42). The shocking nature of her images emanates from her insistence on honestly portraying material from the subconscious, “your intellect is always working against you to censor...One must always fight against that limitation of oneself” (Kennedy 1987:42). Thus her play is controversial, intense, and forces unrelenting encounters with myriad selves. She will create a character who is confused with multiple levels of

several social and racial achievements have been made; however, as Evelyn Barbee and Marilyn Little (2006:561) point out, despite all that,

African-American women occupy a structural position in which they are viewed as subordinate to all other women and men in society. Beliefs, myths and stereotypes about African-American women have served to intensify their status as “other” [...] No other woman has suffered physical and mental abuse, degradation, and exploitation on North American shores comparable to that experienced by the Black female.

As late as the 1990s, Anli Cheng (1997:49) shows, the “race card” gets still played even in a worldwide televised event as the O. J. Simpson trial, and “its accompanying rhetoric suggest, racial rivalry is hardly over. Indeed, it has acquired the peculiar status of a game where what constitutes a winning hand has become identical with the handicap” and things get worse when the race and the gender cards get combined. Even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, we can still observe the unavoidable interaction among racism, sexism and often classism in a large part of society. For all this, literary pieces from the 1960s and 1970s written to expose the fragmentation and the search for the Perfect Identity are still valid. As Philip Kolin points out, a study of playwright Adrienne Kennedy is always timeless, for she, like many others, is a woman caught up in a world of seeming endless conflicts in human nature and efforts to solve them it.

Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was written and produced before the African American feminist approach to criticism gained ground. This play, her first produced work, earned an Obie Award in 1964 and established hers as a unique voice in the avant-gardetheater of the 1960s, while almost every African American playwright was fundamentally concerned with realism. The play, in its new polished form, appears in an anthology for the first time in *The Best Short Plays 1970*. Despite the fact that her play has never enjoyed wide spread popularity since, as she admits at her interview with Elin Diamond, “My plays make people uncomfortable so I’ve never had a play done in Cleveland [her hometown]” (1993:157), over time *Funnyhouse* has gained respect and admiration, especially from feminist critics.

In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, as with much of her work, Miss Kennedy is concerned with the problems of identity and self-knowledge and her writing is pervaded by powerful imagery and intense desire to unite a self fragmented by opposing forces, the racial and gender tensions which plague African American women. Most of her characters, thus, symbolize the history of race and oppression, representing the battle between blackness and whiteness and the struggles of African Americans against oppression. As Bider claims, “These dramas are to some degree exorcising personal and collective racial traumas and have anger, the urge to communicate and (attempted) liberation as motivating

American woman writer the same exclusive practices they so vehemently censured in white male scholars.

African American women writers have also been frequently expunged from those on the Afro-American literary tradition by Black male scholars. Their first efforts were to orient Afro-American art toward white opinion and to acquaint whites with the existence of respectable African Americans. Calvin C. Hernton observed that except for Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks no, Afro-American female writer or protagonist was given worthy recognition in Afro-American literature before the 1970s, not even Lorraine Hansberry, the first African American to have a play on Broadway (qtd. in Hodges 1997:110). Academia generally dismissed writing by women of color. Washington (1990:34) points out that without exception Afro-American women writers have been dismissed by Afro-American literary critics until they were rediscovered and reevaluated by feminist scholars.

The recognition among African American female critics and writers that African American women's experiences are considered as deviant by white women, white men, and even African American men has given rise to African American feminist criticism. Unfortunately, while Virginia Woolf argues in *A Room of One's Own* that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction and see the male-dominated cultural system as an obstacle to the equality between men and women, many African American feminists attack not only the male (black and white) supremacists but also middle-class white women even as recently as the late twentieth century. Alice Walker, for instance, claims that they are "incapable as white and black men of comprehending blackness and feminism in the same body, not to mention within the same imagination" (qtd. in Hodges 1997:110). She specifically attacks white women feminists who misperceive their African American counterparts as absent, non-existent. Notwithstanding, Hodges points out that a rigorous textual analysis must also involve those aspects of white feminist criticism that can be useful for their African American counterparts. They should not be dismissed altogether because merely they are Western.

Most of the male Afro-American academic world was outraged, claiming that African American feminist critics were planted by Caucasian racists. Lee believes the disapprobation resulted because Afro-American women speak from the most marginal position in society and, therefore, undermine the self-image of African American males (Lee 1992:48). Many Caucasian males in academia were outraged because their elitism, racism and obvious desire to maintain the Euro-American patriarchal status quo were exposed. Finally, Eurocentric feminists were also outraged because the African American feminists were exposing the racism in the woman's movement. Following the 70s and the 80s,

Key Words: Fragmentation, Racism, the Perfect Identity, Feminist writing, African American, “Living dead”, the Other.

Palabras clave: Fragmentación, racismo, la identidad perfecta, escritura feminista, afroamerican@, “muerto viviente”, el otro.

For most women, [...] they would not be so much guilty as ill. Mutilated, wounded, humiliated, and overwhelmed by a feeling of inferiority that can never be cured. [...] Women do not make laws, even for themselves; that is not in accordance with their nature. (Irigaray 1985:88)

Contemporary efforts to explain the position of African-American women in the USA were built upon the notion of “double jeopardy” (Beale, 1970). Beale’s idea recognized that African-American women faced double discrimination because of their race and sex. [...] they lack access to authority and resources in society and are in structural opposition with the dominant racial/ethnic group (Euro-American) and the dominant sexual group (male) (Lewis, 1977) (Barbee & Little 2004:559)

Women’s writing has been usually patronized and misunderstood by a cultural establishment operating according to male norms out of male perceptions; mostly considered as singular and anomalous, not as universal and representative. Both literary history’s sins of omissions and literary criticism’s inaccurate and biased judgments of women writers have come under attack since the early 1970s by feminist critics. Luce Irigaray points out that women’s “prehistory”, their history prior to the feminist movement, “implies such a misprision, such a negation, such a curb on her instincts and primary instinctual representatives, and therefore such an inhibition, [...] as to bode ill for the history that follows” (111). Consequently, women will remain:

in a state of childish dependence upon a phallic super-ego that looks sternly and disdainfully on her castrated sex/organ(s). In its cruelty, woman’s super-ego will favor the proliferation of masochistic fantasies and activities, rather than help build up “cultural” values -which are masculine in any case. (Irigaray 1985:124)

Women’s writing therefore highlights this dependent reality and their struggle to overcome it. Despite their efforts to place Western women at the same level with men, these early theorists and practitioners of feminist literary criticism were largely white females who carried out against the African

***FUNNYHOUSE OF A
NEGRO: REJECTION OF
WOMANNESS AND
BLACKNESS AS A
“MELANCHOLIC” CRY
FOR A TRUE DIVERSITY
IN AMERICAN SOCIETY***

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Abstract

Funnyhouse highlights the struggle of Sarah whose black skin evinces a lack of identity and a lack of social placement in the dominant society. She projects her self onto various selves who punish and betray her, leading her to reject Blackness and femaleness as well, and eventually commits suicide. An example of extreme violence, it exposes the same conflicts African American women are still faced with. For Sarah, a “living dead” in Balibar’s words, life becomes “worse than death or more difficult to live than death itself and her failed attempt to “fit in” can be considered, in Bhabha’s terms, another form of colonized Other. Despite the media claims that racism is over, we may be facing a new kind of discrimination which relies heavily on the manipulation of ideas. *Funnyhouse* is still a valid reminder of how much we still need to achieve in terms of truly appreciating diversity among us.

Resumen

Funnyhouse plantea la lucha interior de Sarah, a quien su piel negra evidencia tanto su falta de identidad como su falta de lugar en la sociedad dominante. Ella se proyecta en una serie de yos que la castigan y la traicionan, llevándola a rechazar tanto su negritud como su feminidad, convirtiéndola en una “muerta viviente” según el término de Balibar. En un intento de borrar su herencia, se imbuye de las tradiciones históricas y literarias europeas convirtiéndose así en *otro*, en términos de Bhabha. El rechazo de su identidad lleva a Sarah a fracasar como mujer y como persona de color, y acaba suicidándose. La cuestión que se nos plantea es si hoy en día, cuando los medios de comunicación reiteran que el racismo es cosa del pasado, seguimos encontrándonos con situaciones como la de Sarah y aún nos queda camino por recorrer en cuanto a una verdadera apreciación de la diversidad.

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Metafiction implies an artistic stance, that which talks about a changed relation between the subject and the object, between the writer and the language, very often emphasizing the suffocating weight of material culture. It acknowledges the artistic impossibilities the modernists were unable to see, as Jameson stated; by subverting the same epistemological principles it establishes, and by exposing the rigidity of most cultural codes –language the first and most immediate– postmodernism is an artistic project that incorporates its own failure, playing the game of supreme creation whilst assuming its deficiencies in the same move. The materiality of language and its accumulative effect in many metafictional texts synthesizes the ephemeral and sceptical postmodernist aesthetics with the most ambitious goals of high modernism, both artistic modes persuaded that the quality of verbal “thingness” is the primary attribute of a text that designs a unique epistemology.

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artistic self-sufficiency. But Gass wants to play the game of supreme creation, conceiving a tropological principle that grants aesthetic integrity to each of his texts; snow, ice, houses, a collection of insects, a body, a tunnel etc., are symbolic centres that he projects to the metafictional dimension, the whole piece committed in its purest verbal materiality to the visionary performance of that principle that will ideally illuminate certain attributes of the literary text and of the poetic function as Gass considers them to be. This constitutes an iconic and virtual form of pronouncement, the text becoming thus an allegory of its own writing and "shining" in a kind of utopian totality. The accumulative effect of Gass's works responds to a "rhetoric of waste" very similar to the one used by Don DeLillo and explained in section II, a kind of "cultural debris" devoid of functional value but with an essential structural purpose granted by its "thingness."

Gass himself offers examples of texts that he considers models of aesthetic coherence and integrity, works that reveal a blatant materiality ruled by principles that make of them intuitive prototypes of structure and proportion. That's for Gass the case of Lowry, who makes of the cantina in *Under the Volcano* a metatextual image of the head, "the container of consciousness" (Gass 1979:19), or a paragraph in the same novel that, according to Gass, encloses us like the fuselage of the plane it describes (*ibid.*:30), or Gertrude Stein's textual "cubes" in *Tender Buttons*, that get also to enclose the reader in their three dimensions (*ibid.*:78), or Nabokov's novels being as clocks for Gass, "each marking and making its own sweet time" (*ibid.*:206).

Many other texts could be analyzed in this same light, like most of the stories by Donald Barthelme –Brian McHale does a very interesting study of "The Balloon" in *Postmodernist Fiction*; "The Indian Uprising", also in Barthelme's collection *Unspeaking Practices, Unnatural Acts*, can be interpreted, for instance, as a mutiny of phrases that seem to rebel against the conventional grammatical structures, a metafictional echo of the insurrection of a mysterious group of Indians in an urban setting that is the main action in the story, the barricades of rubbish evoked likewise in the lists of words that Miss R. calls *litanies*. Another interesting example that is very efficient in its "thingness" is Robert Coover's "The Elevator" from *Pricksongs and Descants*; here the constant ups and downs of a fictional elevator in an office building a working day –occupied by insignificant people with absurd lives and thoughts the description of which is basically a source of textual "material"– is mirrored in the sections and structural stages that build the text. And very challenging is also the reading of the parallel and semantically restricted misrepresentation of African geography in Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa*, to mention just one more example.

“thingness” of language. As in many postmodernist texts, in *White noise* the *code* –term used by some literary critics to refer to the way the story is told– is exposed in a novel-length trope, trying to open our eyes to our dependence on rigid semantic constructions and theatricalising, as Brown would say, the iconic nature of our material culture. *White Noise*, in its fulfilment of a formal white noise, becomes an allegory of its own writing.

III. CONCLUSION: THE VISIONARY “THINGNESS” OF LANGUAGE

In *Narcissistic Narrative* Linda Hutcheon explains how Barth sought by means of metafictional parody, internal mirrorings and allegorizings to use up all the possibilities of art; Barth’s belief that the identity of art and the artistic process on which metafiction is founded can result in “real life” is considered by Hutcheon a thought provoking affirmation that opens up for her new ways to literary research (Hutcheon 1984:56), these being still nowadays, it must be added, quite unexplored. Barth probably means that metafiction is a formal strategy that manages to pass over –always in an intuitive way, as it has been repeatedly pointed here– the “veil” of convention that Santayana considered an obstacle in the construction of a genuine work of art; the consequence might be in Barth similar to that moment of “total vision” that the philosopher defined, a stage in which new and more efficient semiotic structures will arise.

Hutcheon focuses her attention on Barth’s work, but there are many other authors that, beyond mere playfulness, could be said to share Barth’s belief in the superior epistemology of metafiction, and among them are Richard Brautigan, Walter Abish, Italo Calvino, Julio Cortázar, Vladimir Nabokov, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Ishmael Reed, William Gass, Ronald Sukenick and, of course, Don DeLillo. All of these conceive some of their narratives as allegorical compositions –result of an extended application of *mise en abyme* as a comprehensive structural strategy, as Linda Hutcheon explains in her book (1984:52-6)– and all of them must be located on the threshold between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics as a consequence of their transcendental and visionary treatment of languages’ “thingness” in their pursuit of a superior –though always intangible– order of meaning.

Special attention deserves William Gass’s work, the author who coined the term *Metafiction*. Gass combines a deep belief in the expressive potential of language to procure the aesthetic coherence and singularity of the legitimate work of art with a sceptical attitude towards the possibility of a consistent

Plot a murder, you're saying. But plot is a murder in effect. To plot is to die, whether we know it or not." "To plot is to live," he said. I looked at him. I studied his face, his hands. "We start our lives in chaos, in babble. As we surge up into the world, we try to devise a shape, a plan. There is dignity in this. Your whole life is a plot, a scheme, a diagram. It is a failed scheme but that's not the point. To plot is to affirm life, to seek shape and control. (DeLillo 1985:291-2)

This passage constitutes a veiled diagnosis of *White Noise*, a novel without a plot in which everybody tries to imprint shape and control to their lives and to the reality around them –with the exception of Jack, the main character and narrator, unwilling even to devise a proper plot for his own story. Frank Lentricchia has already observed this quality of plotlessness in *White Noise*, and he puts it this way:

In the usual sense of what it means to say that a novel has plot, *White Noise* has no plot. But plotlessness is itself a controlled effect of this book because until its concluding chapters (when Gladney decides that he will put some plot into his life) the novel is narrated by a man who fears plots in both conspiratorial and literary senses –a distinction hard to make in DeLillo's world– and who therefore resists them, even prays for plotlessness, a life ungoverned by design and intention [...]. (Lentricchia 1991:97)

In fact, the mock version of a plot that is the climactic crime scene where Jack becomes an unlikely killer and *White noise* turns unexpectedly into a far-fetched thriller is one more fictional delusion that contributes to the metanarrative evocation of toxicity, reinforcing the predominating effect of arbitrariness and discontinuity.

The novel can be seen as pure surface, a dialogue between the "thingness" of material culture and the "thingness" of language's metatextual "noise". In Arnold Weinstein's terms, "If there is anything *White Noise* teaches its readers, it is a respect for the dignity of surfaces [...]" (Weinstein 1993:310). With their capricious and counter-narrative nature, the lists and the disembodied sounds in *White Noise* lack a primarily functional dimension, like objects that become things in Bill Brown's theory. Their plasticity evokes the semantic supremacy of the object in contemporary societies, and consequently they speak of a changed relation between subject and object, a new context where the object and its symbolic representation is prior to the subject. As Christopher Donovan declares, in the world of *White Noise* "Commodity and technology are supreme. Certainly in 1985 the time had come for a novel that could digestibly skewer our product-oriented society, the rarefied product with its 'familiar life-enhancing labels'" (Donovan 2005:157-8).

White Noise is a very good model of the kind of text that is structurally committed to an allegorical performance that is founded on the intuitive

For Martín Salván, the literature of Don DeLillo is infused with the sense of ambition and possibility that characterized the buoyant spirit of modernism:

However, against the postmodernist celebration of fragmentation, depthlessness, indeterminacy and the death of master narratives –as theorized by Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, Christopher Nash or Jean Francois Lyotard, among others– the firm belief that a transcendental meaning overcoming fragmentation and dispersion must emerge from chaotic accumulation can be said to be genuinely modernist. (Martín Salván 2006:221)

But the most interesting part of her analysis is her study of what she defines as “the rhetorics of waste”. She explains that all the work by Don DeLillo is permeated by a concern for waste that shapes his novels not only thematically but also tropologically; waste is a synonym for Martín Salván of everything that doesn’t fit into a system or an order of existence, whether it is the relinquished remains of human consumption that proliferate in DeLillo’s stories, or the paratactic naming of a chaotic accumulation of objects in which so often this author delights, which must necessarily be seen as a clear move to the postmodern practice.

Applying to this argument Bill Brown’s efficient rhetorics, the verbal “thingness” of lists and other textual “obstacles” that have lost their functional value in *White Noise* must be seen as a lyric and sensuous performance of the pervasiveness of material culture in the modern social order, as it has been stated above; that kind of encoded assertion shows that DeLillo’s novel has an abstruse but evident semantic concern with reality and is thus referentially outdrawn, as most modernist works are. Furthermore, adopting now an equally valid postmodernist approach, these same “obstacles” constitute a bulky and intuitive echo of the fictional world in *White Noise*, and so they depend for their interpretation on a turn of referential introversion which exposes the novel’s concern with its own compositional machinery.

In the postmodern mode, *White Noise* teaches that the “thingness” of waste is to be apprehended in the massive verbal constructions on which the plot reverberates; the lists and the disembodied voices must be studied then as a kind of structural toxicity, a metaphorical *white noise* that mirrors the also metaphorical toxicity that pervades the Gladneys’ fictional life. This is the introverted kind of reference on which many postmodernist works depend to disclose their intuitive and apocryphal epistemology, an unmediated experience of language that goes a step ahead of Stein’s “Experiential meaning”.

The following conversation between Jack and Murray Siskind is just one example among many that reveal how inescapable the metafictional interpretation is in *White Noise*:

of hair, soap, ear swabs, crushed roaches, flip-top rings, sterile pads smeared with pus and bacon fat, strands of frayed dental floss, fragments of ballpoint refills, toothpicks still displaying bits of impaled food. There was a pair of shredded undershorts with lipstick markings, perhaps a memento of the Grayview Motel." (*ibid.*:259)

This list is, like the first one, referentially cryptic; its abstract motifs and its anarchic observation of detail destabilize its descriptive value. On the other hand, the carefully designed aural and rhythmic properties of this list reveal the novel's genuinely poetic penchant.

DeLillo relies on the accumulative semantics of the list to reveal the habits of a frivolous and opulent society, and proves that even the junk it produces can be transformed into a lyric expression of the masses. With the recurrent use of the list in *White Noise*, DeLillo dramatizes rather than narrates, proposing a semantic happening that ideally illustrates vividly the pervasiveness of material culture in our society and the subject's ultimate dependence from it.

But abstruse lists are not the only textual element that produces an estrangement of the reader with the narrative, since the proliferation of commercial mottos, fragments of TV shows and advertisements, radio messages with instructions or advice, etc., are also disruptive strategies that DeLillo conceives to create a bizarre background in *White Noise*. Some of these elements are of untraceable origin and adopt the form of disembodied voices that add to the aural confusion that characterizes the novel. Utterances such as "Master Card, Visa, American Express" (*ibid.*:100) or "Dristan Ultra, Dristan Ultra" (*ibid.*:167) appear as decontextualized consumerist mantras that can be interpreted as echoes in the narrator's mind but which are, in fact, disengaged from any evident source of sound. What these commercial reverberations dramatize is that material culture is necessarily verbally mediated; within a narrative text, besides, they have additional consequences, since, together with the lists, they interfere with the plot, boycotting the logical development of the story line and neutralizing the reader's expectations. They "stop working" for the reader, as Brown would say, becoming thus narrative "things" in this author's terminology.

Paula Martín Salván interprets DeLillo's tendency to write long lists and enumerations –that she calls *paratactic accumulation*– as being heir to the artistic endeavours of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, and this connection is made explicit for her in the choice of particular sounds that create a weird musicality and a new order of meaning (Martín Salván 2006:213). Like many literary critics before her, though, she appreciates the difficulty of classifying DeLillo's work into either the modernist or the postmodernist categories, but she appeals to the derrotist character of the postmodernist movement, that she considers entirely alien to DeLillo's project, to justify its relative disengagement from it.

halo of American middle-class consumerism and habits, like the enumeration of the belongings that escort the students at their arrival to the College-on-the-Hill for the course opening in the first chapter of the novel:

The roofs of the station wagons were loaded down with carefully secured suitcases full of light and heavy clothing; with boxes of blankets, boots and shoes, stationery and books, sheets, pillows, quilts; with rolled-up rugs and sleeping bags; with bicycles, skis, rucksacks, English and Western saddles, inflated rafts. As cars slowed to a crawl and stopped, students sprang out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside; the stereo sets, radios, personal computers; small refrigerators and table ranges; the cartons of phonograph records and cassettes; the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets, soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows; the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags –onion-and garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut crème patties, Waffelos and Kabooms, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints. (DeLillo 1985:3)

Lists are naturally designed to convey useful data, and they may have a descriptive function, as the list above apparently has; this puzzling and heterogeneous list, however, challenges referentiality, and its subjective plasticity makes of it a lyric and evocative verbal composition that must be interpreted as a rhetorical performance of the superfluous materialism that affects modern societies.¹²⁵

Characters in the novel get defined by what they possess and consume, literally “supplanted” as subjects by a set of objects product of a personal and restless process of selection with which they try to control the image projected, transforming their own reality in a mode of social exchange. The construction of consumption allows people to interpret themselves for others, it becomes an artificial semantic alternative; though not as “alternative” as the semantics of waste, also revered by DeLillo as signifying material, like the list conveying the revolting dissection Jack Gladney does of the family garbage:

“I found crayon drawings of a figure with full breasts and male genitals. There was a long piece of twine that contained a series of knots and loops. It seemed at first a random construction. Looking more closely I thought I detected a complex relationship between the size of the loops, the degree of the knots (single or double) and the intervals between knots with loops and freestanding knots. Some kind of occult geometry or symbolic festoon of obsessions. I found a banana skin with a tampon inside. Was this the dark underside of consumer consciousness? I came across a horrible clotted mass

¹²⁵ This brings again Gertrude Stein to mind, since, as it was explained in the first section of this article, she is the most fervent advocate of naming –the basic strategy in the composition of any list– as an efficient way of defying referentiality.

third chapter of the novel; Murray asks Jack to drive him to a tourist attraction intended for people to take pictures of the most photographed barn in America and, on their way there, they can count five signs announcing the attraction before they reach the site. Murray interprets the essence of the attraction: “‘No one sees the barn’ he said finally. A long silence followed. ‘Once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn’ [...] ‘They are taking pictures of taking pictures’” (DeLillo 1985:12-3). Reality has been engulfed by its different forms of representation as a consequence of a dynamic process of objectification which is markedly social; the barn is shielded by the signs and the photos, replaced by an artificial equivalent in a system intended to interpret the world and make it more accessible for man.

That’s also the paradoxical effect of television; it brings near events and situations occurring anywhere around the globe, but its electronic mediation constitutes a barrier preventing any emotional involvement –and, consequently, suffering– of the individual with what is being represented. The unexpected apparition of Babette on TV in chapter 20 of *White Noise* shocks the whole family, and Jack’s estrangement with his wife’s image surprises him. That’s not their Babette, the active, compulsive and hearty mother they know, but some artificial and remote substitute which, domesticity transcended, enters a timeless and self-contained dimension:

It was the picture that mattered, the face in black and white, animated but also flat, distanced, sealed off, timeless. It was but wasn’t her. [...] The kids were flushed with excitement but I felt a certain disquiet. I tried to tell myself it was only television –whatever that was, however it worked– and not some journey out of life or death, not some mysterious separation. (*ibid.*:104-5)

This sense of remoteness and transcendence that can be perceived in anything mediated by technology in *White Noise* was interpreted by Frank Lentricchia as a process of mystification, and he attributed it to “[...] the increasingly nonreferential character of postmodern culture. Since the technological media –television, the tabloids, radio, cinema– ultimately create their own reality, they appear to be free from all natural constraints on their constructions. They possess the seemingly limitless power to transform and reconstitute the very being of the contemporary individual” (Lentricchia 1991:72).

Material culture has in *White Noise* an effect equivalent to the above explained by Lentricchia concerning the mediating agency of technology, and it finds its quintessential expression in the lists of objects that have become a distinctive feature of DeLillo’s rhetorics; most times absurd and inconceivable, devoid of referential value and sometimes even ungrammatical, lists constitute in *White Noise* their own reality, and they convey iconically the quasi-mystic

applied in the second half of the twentieth century, which showed a higher specificity intended to reach a modern social diversity. He neglects the condemnatory academic approaches that conceive this diversity as representing a new superficiality and alienated form of existence, and he states that these identities “[...] need to be analysed as specific forms, and not merely be dismissed as a fragmented descent from some primitive authenticity of the ‘subjects’ of classic anthropology, not as merely the symbol of capitalist oppression, nor yet as the mere surface of a superficial era” (*ibid.*:11). The interest of Miller’s argument is his defence of the ‘seriousness’ of modern mass culture as a dynamic relationship between persons and things, not as an inauthentic derivative of a higher concept of culture and of a prior and more valid set of social relations. As he explains:

The belief underlying this attitude is often that members of pre-industrial societies, free of the burden of artefacts, lived in more immediate natural relationship with each other. This kind of academic criticism extends the distaste evident in colloquial discourse for materialism as an apparent devaluation of people against commodities. I shall question the implication that separable real selves and authentic classes are to be found. I shall argue that people cannot be reified under the concept of ‘society’ outside of their own cultural milieu. (*ibid.*:11-12)

Culture is for Miller not to be identified with a set of objects originated ideally in the artistic domain, nor is to be reduced to its subject form; culture must be seen as the process through which objects are constituted as social forms. Published two years before Miller’s study, *White Noise* offers a vision of post-industrial America which is neither exalted nor condemnatory, but which similarly explores the concept of culture as a result of the dynamic relationship between subjects and objects, often becoming a strategy of survival in a hostile environment.

In *White Noise*, material culture is a mediating presence that shields and transforms reality in conformity with the subject; thanks to it the individuals conceive artificial systems of meaning that they project on an otherwise undecipherable and most often insufferable reality. Far from being an interference, these cultural forms are fascinating and thought-provoking for Murray, whereas for Heinrich, one of Jack Gladney’s sons, it derives in a pathologic solipsism; like Oedipa Maas, Pynchon’s heroine in *The Crying of Lot 49*, truth is for Heinrich an unstable notion that depends on subjective categorizations, getting even to question the very evidence provided by his own senses.

Technology and the media become thus manifestations of a new form of exchange between the individual and his world, and a good example of this is the often quoted passage of “the most photographed barn in America”, in the

II. DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

White Noise is a perfect chronicle of absurdist family life in the meaningless background of technological American society. The Gladneys represent a new kind of family model bound by their commitment to the empty pleasures of irrational consumption and by their fear to nameless forms of toxicity and, ultimately, by the very prospect of death.

The threat of chemical radiation pervades the novel, but the title refers as well to the "white noise" produced by consumerism, technology and the media; the TV set –perpetually on–, the supermarket, the mall, constitute ideal contexts for the different forms of acoustic and visual propaganda to take shape and reach the individual, who establishes a necessarily mediated contact with reality. "Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material" (DeLillo 1985:37) says Murray Jay Siskind, Jack Gladney's colleague at the university and pop culture theorist, in one of their meetings at the supermarket, temple of consumerism "[...] It's just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakability" (*ibid.*:38). For Siskind, objects and purchasable goods in general are not the ultimate units of meaning, but they convey a relative value to be interpreted within the social network of a specific time and place.

As Daniel Miller explained in his work *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987), it is wrong to rely on the unique properties of the individual object, since every object has the symbolic set of values of a category ascribed and deserves being decoded:

In most material culture, the individual object is as much a type-token of the larger group of identical handbags, armchairs, spears or canoes as is the case with words, and, even when held as individual property, may thereby mark the relation of object and owner to the set of items it represents. (Miller 1987:97)

Like most Marxist theorists, Miller thinks that an essential relationship is always established between the subject –understood as the human agent– and the object –understood as the circumstances of his existence; but unlike them, he claims that the concept of objectification, that is, a process of externalization and sublation, isn't only denigrating, but "essential to the development of a given subject" (*ibid.*:85).

Miller appreciates a change between the structure of commerce developed from the 1920s through the 1960s, which tried to create a highly predictable market for an ideally homogeneous society, and the commercial strategies

confers the text a provisional ontology and an allegorical dimension, the literary work becoming thus the utmost expression of itself.¹²⁴

One of the authors that delights in the composition of these accumulative allegories which are very often informed with symbols and images of material culture is Don DeLillo who, within the frame of referential disregard and signifying “opacity” of his literary project, enhances the sensorial properties of language and exploits its plasticity to the limit in quest of a superior semantics. *White Noise* in particular is the perfect example of a work that exhibits the lyrical potential of language when it stops functioning as a mere instrument of material culture, when its sensorial properties are enhanced and its most eloquent plasticity becomes a structural element. DeLillo makes of material culture a poetic performance that delights in its semantic involution and complies easily with the theoretical formula introduced by Brown’s “rhetorics of thingness”, a characteristic that places this author on the boundary between the modernist and the postmodernist projects, as the following section will thoroughly illustrate.

¹²⁴ It is precisely in the contingent nature of meaning in the postmodernist text where its most outstanding difference with the modernist project can be found, since it reveals a change of attitude from the confident creative excitement of previous decades to a resigned awareness of what Jameson understands as the impracticability of art in conditions of modernity; the naïve incapacity of modernist artists to discern that unquestionable truth is for Jameson what makes of modernist art an “aesthetics of failure”. Jameson states: “But there is a paradoxical corollary of this particular version of the imperative to fail, and that is the requirement that the writers in question not merely attempt to succeed, but also believe success is somehow possible. Yet their capacity to do so, and to sustain a vision of the concrete possibility of genuine aesthetic construction under conditions of modernity, would also surely stand as a symptom of some deeper lack of insight and intelligence into the conditions that make modern art impossible in the first place” (Jameson 2007:4). The utopia of modernism is short-circuited in the contradictions and inconsistencies of postmodernism, where the text is often ironically conceived as a metaphor of a visionary and unprecedented aesthetic event as fancied by modernist artists, but it becomes though a delusive rhetorical performance of what they know the poetic text should be but will never be.

experimented towards a non-referential or “anti-representational” literature that she adopted as a way of resistance to ‘semantic’ meaning, proposing an alternative ‘experiential’ meaning that yielded a pure and unique verbal experience. Ashton justifies her position thus: “The postmodern idea so often attached to Stein’s most opaque literary styles of the later period –that the reader is meant to confront the words apart from their associative meanings, in something like their ‘pure materiality’– suggests that the aim of such a style is above all to offer unmediated experience of the language” (Ashton 2005:32-3).

This “opaqueness” that Ashton understands is derived in Stein from her concern with the pure materiality of the verbal medium can be appreciated in other key modernist figures like Eliot or Pound that, like Stein, showed the tendency to produce literature with a marked self-referential character. And also in artists like W.C. Williams and Wallace Stevens, the two great poet-theoreticians of modernism, who imbued their hermetic poems with their almost obsessive concern with the role of the artist as a mediating figure between the chaos of reality and the order and harmony of the resulting masterpiece.

If it can be then justified that many of the central figures of “high” modernism such as Stein, Eliot, Pound or Stevens among others have frequently been seen as proto-postmodernists, it is no less true that many postmodernist writers such as John Barth, Robert Coover, William Gass, Don DeLillo, Donald Barthelme, Ishmael Reed and Thomas Pynchon among others could be defined as late-modernists, since they combine typically postmodern strategies like anarchy and dispersal with a deep belief in language’s expressive potential and in its capacity to model the artistic medium into an intuitive and grand form of meaning.¹²³

These authors can be said to have assimilated some of the basic dogmas of the most vigorous modernism, such as the principles of aesthetic coherence and epistemological self-sufficiency that they have forged into the design of metaphorical structures conceived as unifying but ephemeral support of their metafictional narratives. Similarly to the modernist texts above mentioned, the materiality of the language is exploited in the quest of an unmediated artistic expression; but this materiality is mainly channelled in postmodernist literature through the accumulative rhetorics of metafiction, a strategy by means of which the verbal medium –very often an ironic echo of the trivial semantic codes and patterns that forge material culture– appears as a dense semiotic substance that

¹²³ Against what is generally accepted, there are critics, like Manuel Barbeito, that think that grand narratives –or Grand Narratives as he calls them– are still possible in postmodern times, though they may very often be epistemologically intuitive and twisted, falling into a new semantic dimension that is never easy to conceive (Barbeito 2000:15).

postulates; for James –as well as for some of his disciples Stein, Santayana y Stevens– language has the virtue of translating and fixing the chaotic flux of experience, but it has the handicap of rigidity, since it becomes a “veil” that separates the thing perceived from the perceiver (in Burkhardt 1981:727). His disciple Santayana expands this argument explaining that eliminating this veil of convention is followed by a fall into the disconcerting world of unmediated sensations, where the poet will ideally have a moment of “total vision”; new semiotic structures will emerge then, and they will be harmonious with our natural perceptive tendencies and will sustain the construction of a genuine work, which is the goal of all art, according to Santayana (Santayana 1900:168, 269-70). Construction is also a key word in modernism, where the creative process and the artistic materials start to acquire a visibility and an unexpected relevance in many pieces that claim to be aesthetically self-sufficient and referentially introverted.

Most works were thus designed in the modernist period to enhance the sensuous dimension of language and the evocative potential of linguistic structures when they are not conceived with a purely denotative aim. The ears, eyes and mouth must necessarily plunge into the performance of texts with a signifying plasticity, such as the textured collages of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* or Pound’s *The Cantos*, the new rhythms of Joyce’s sensory prose, or the fresh meanings that emerge when grammatical categories and functions have to be reassigned within each sentence in Gertrude Stein’s compositions.

Gertrude Stein already revealed in the early twentieth century that naming was an efficient way of defying conventional referentiality; she found a close connection between names and poetry, whereas she considered that prose depended instead upon sentences and paragraphs. As Jennifer Ashton argues: “Stein claims that nouns –as opposed to verbs, prepositions, and other mistakable parts of speech– are primarily responsible for the function of naming in writing, which she says is one of the central aims of poetry” (Ashton 2005:62). Ashton explains that Stein’s project of modernizing poetry involves reinventing the name: “For Stein, writing poetry at all necessitates recognizing its essential features, which for her means recognizing that poetry is ‘a vocabulary entirely based on the noun.’ And insofar as ‘a noun is a name of anything by definition,’ poetry’s most essential feature proves to be its naming function (Writings, 327)” (*ibid.*:68). No doubt that Gertrude Stein must be seen as a precursor of what was to come, since from her revolutionary ideas to the most recent aesthetic proposals, writers have repeatedly emphasized that meaning in poetry falls on the side of the signifier.

Due to her particular conception of poetry, Gertrude Stein has got to be considered by many literary critics –including Jennifer Ashton herself– a proto-postmodernist. The shift from the modernist to the postmodernist mode is based, according to Ashton, on the progressive move Stein’s work

composition is not an arrangement of objects but of signs, and its alphabetical rigidity denounces the artificiality of all the systems of meaning that we project on the world of things.

It is the purpose of this article to show that Bill Brown's theory can be applied to the study of many modernist and postmodernist works that speak of a changed relation between subject and object in modern societies, works which are on many occasions the embodiment of an aesthetic stance that reveals in sum a new relation between the artists and the context and materials of their production. The application of Brown's illuminating conceptual premises and terminology displace some of the arguments that have often made the modernist and the postmodernist project appear as incompatible; they enhance instead the elements they share in their allegiance to the kind of aesthetics that involve an "objectification" of the word as a prerequisite for the full and genuine assimilation of a literary piece. This point is based on the premise that for many artists from modernist times languages's "thingness" is the primary attribute of a text which aims at a unique epistemology and at a withdrawal from the world of immediate reference. This property has become thus a formal and structural concern in the last century, joining rather than detaching artistic manifestations that, like modernism and postmodernism, have often been perceived as alien modes.

Brown compares things to poems in his article and quotes Michael Riffaterre who argues that poems, growing out of a "word-kernel", "[...] defy referentiality" (Brown 2001:3). And clearly the defiance of all forms of current referentiality has been an omnipresent goal in the last century, since the works of many artists representing diverse aesthetic tendencies have repeatedly tried to avoid the conventional mechanisms of meaning by conceiving different and often innovative formulas of epistemological resistance. This can be appreciated in all the arts in general, that have been commonly driven in the twentieth century by the lure of abstraction in their quest of an expression that eschews the exhausted epistemology provided by the prevailing semantic codes.

Bill Brown's theory is a very valid rhetorical instrument for the study of modernism in the first place; their concern with the renewal of the artistic prospect made artists in the early decades of the twentieth century conceive art works of a self-contained referentiality, striving at pieces of semantic irreducibility and devoid of a primary functional value. Such were the goals of Gertrude Stein with her cubist "objects", T.S Eliot's Objective Correlative or William Carlos Williams with his maxim "Not ideas but in things", all of them forerunners of an art that explores the "thingness" of verbal compositions.

They all made different proposals of what they conceived as a renovation of signification, which brings to mind some of William James's most important

cravats	dental crowns	drains	eyeliner
crayons	dental flosses	dramas	eyes
crazy straws	dentures	drapes	eyeshadow
credenzas	deodorants	drawer pulls	fabrics
credit cards	depilatories	dreidels	fabric softeners
credits	deposit slips	dress patterns	facelifts
crewneck sweaters	depots	dressers	faceplates
cribbage boards	derbies	dresses	fairs
cribs	derricks	dressings	fake nails
crochet hooks	desks	drill bits	families
crockery	desserts	drill presses	fan belts
crockpots	detergents	drills	fans
croquet sets	devotionals	drinking fountains	faucets
crosses	diadems	drive trains	fax machines 44
crossword puzzles	diagrams	driveways	feather dusters
crowbars	dialysis machines	drugs 39	fedoras
crowns	diapers 18	drugstores	feedbags
crucifixes	diaphragms	drums	ferries
cruise control	diaries	dry erase boards	ferris wheels
cruise ships	dice	dry erase pens	fertilizers
crutches	dictionaries	drywall	festivals
cryostats	diets	dune buggies	fezzes
crystal	digital cameras	dustpans	figurines
crystal balls	dikes	duvets	files
cubicles	dildos	DVD players	fillings
cuckoo clocks	dimmers	DVDs	film
cuff links	dinghies	dynamos	fire extinguishers
cuffs	dining rooms	earpieces	fire hoses
culottes	dinners	earmuffs	fire hydrants
cummerbunds	dioramas	earrings	fireplaces
cup holders	directories	ears	fireworks
cupboards	disco balls	eggs 49	firing ranges
cups	discos	electric chairs	first aid kits
curbs	dishes	electrified fences	fish food
curios	dishwashers	electrocardiographs	fish tanks
curlers	disks	electronic games 20	fishing hooks
curling irons	dispensers	elevators	fishing lures
currency	display stands	embroidery hoops	fishing rods
curricula	displays	emergency brakes	fixtures
curtain rods	dissertations	emergency exits	flags
curtains	diving bells	emery boards	flash bulbs
cushions	docks	encyclopedias	flasks
cuticle creams	dog collars	engines	fliers
cuticle nippers	dog dishes	engravings	flies
cutlery	doghouses	envelopes	flip-flops
cutting boards	doilies	epaulets	flippers
cymbals	dollhouses	erasers	floor plans
dams	dollies	escalators	flooring
dances	dolls	espresso makers	flotation devices
dashboards	domes	exams	flower arrangements
day planners	dominoes	exercise machines	flower pots
dead bolts	donut shops	exercises	flowers
debutante balls	donuts	exhaust pipes	flues
debuts	door knockers	exhibitions	flutes
decanters	door stops	experiments	fly swatters
decoys	doorbells	explosives	fog lights
deep fat fryers	doorknobs	extension cords	foghorns
defenses	doormats	extensions	folders
delicatessens	doors	eyeglasses	folding chairs
demonstrations	dormitories	eyelash curlers	fondue pots
dens	downspouts	eyelets	fonts 46

This massive inventory of objects and devices associated with daily routine and familiar actions is an ironic illustration of the superfluous pervasiveness of material culture in our lives; it emphasizes as well its iconic nature, since this

Special interest deserves for Bill Brown the interpretation of the art of the contemporary pop sculptor Claes Oldenburg. Brown explains that Oldenburg's interest in the oversized re-creation of everyday objects such as the light bulb, the telephone, the mixer or the cheeseburger, is meant "[...] to pose some question about, by physically manifesting the affective investment Americans have in the hamburger, the ice cream cone, chocolate cake" (Brown 2001:15). With their flabby materials, though, they exhibit an insubstantial monumentality which is interpreted by Brown as an anthropomorphic caricature of how we make of these things objects of our desire, of how they become cultural totems; as Brown explains, Oldenburg's work "[...] draws attention to the discrepancy between objectivity and materiality, perception and sensation, objective presence (a fan, a Fudgsicle, a sink) and material presence (the canvas, the plaster of paris, the vinyl), as though to theatricalise the point that all objects (not things) are, first off, iconic signs" (*ibid.*:14).

Brown is an apologist of the materialism of modern societies, claiming that new forms of expression can arise out of the exhausted meanings things have in their utilitarian function. The suddenness with which things seem to assert their presence and power, says Brown, helps us discover their physicality, and he explains metaphorically that we must learn to appreciate the window in its opacity rather than looking through it to the world. As in a modernist poem, that "begins in the street with the smell of frying oil, shag tobacco and unwashed beer glasses", says Brown quoting Simon Schama (*ibid.*:2), material culture is the ideal ground of genuine creativity, and the last century has shown the multiple ways in which an everyday object can be transformed into art.

In order to illustrate his point, Brown includes at the end of his article a selection of art works among which, besides the photograph of Claes Oldenburg's *typewriter Eraser* (1999), are the works *Mask I* (1996), by Kyle Huffman, *Yin Xiuzhen* (1998), by Yin Xiuzhen, *Big Red* (1998), by Irina Nakhova, and the following fragment from *Voices* to be found in the exhibition catalogue of the AIGA National Design Conference held at Washington D.C in September 2001 (p.3):

involve a “materialization” of the word in texts that aim at a unique epistemology and at a withdrawal from the world of immediate reference. One of the best examples to illustrate this is Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, a work that exhibits the lyrical potential of language when it stops functioning as a mere instrument of material culture; as a limit-modernist postmodernist poetic performance, *White Noise* delights in its semantic involution and complies solidly with Brown’s “rhetorics of thingness.”

Key Words: Bill Brown, Thing theory, Material Culture, Modernism, Postmodernism, Don DeLillo, Metafiction.

palabra en textos que aspiran a la exclusividad epistemológica y al distanciamiento del mundo de la referencia inmediata. Uno de los ejemplos que mejor ilustra esto es *White Noise* de Don DeLillo, una obra que muestra el potencial lírico del lenguaje cuando éste deja de funcionar como mero instrumento de la cultura material; como exhibición poética postmodernista en el límite del modernismo, *White Noise* se deleita en su involución semántica y responde solventemente al concepto de “retórica cosística” de Brown.

Palabras clave: Bill Brown, Teoría de la cosística, Cultura material, Modernismo, Postmodernismo, Don DeLillo, Metaficción.

I. BILL BROWN’S *THING THEORY* AND THE “OPAQUE” TEXT

In his illuminating study of material culture, “Thing Theory” (2001), Bill Brown adopts from Heidegger the distinction between “things” and “objects”, and he explains metaphorically that objects are “transparent” because we see “through” them as a consequence of the semantic values they have encoded; he considers that we interpret them and make them meaningful because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts (Brown 2001:4). A thing is, however, “opaque” for Brown, and we can have a glimpse at it as a consequence of its irreducibility. Things can never have a functional value; objects, though, can lose theirs and get close to becoming things, and this only happens when their relation with the subject changes:

We begin confronting the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (Brown 2001:4)

**BILL BROWN'S "THING
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EPISTEMOLOGY IN
MODERNIST AND
POSTMODERNIST
LITERATURE: A STUDY
OF DON DELILLO'S
*WHITE NOISE***

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Abstract

Bill Brown's *Thing Theory* distinguishes between things and objects, and he explains metaphorically that objects are "transparent" because we see "through" them as a consequence of the semantic values they have encoded; a thing is, however, "opaque" for Brown, and we can have a glimpse at it as a consequence of its irreducibility. Brown is an apologist of the materialism of modern societies, claiming that new forms of expression can arise out of the exhausted meanings things have in their utilitarian function. The application of Brown's illuminating conceptual assumptions and terminology enhance the similarities between modernism and postmodernism, since both modes adopt the kind of aesthetics that

Resumen

En su *Teoría de la cosística* Bill Brown distingue entre cosas y objetos, explicando metafóricamente que los objetos son "transparentes" porque podemos ver "a través" de ellos a consecuencia de los valores semánticos codificados que conllevan; una cosa es, sin embargo, "opaca" para Brown, y podemos contemplarla gracias a su irreducibilidad. Brown es un defensor del materialismo de las sociedades modernas, apostando por que pueden surgir nuevas formas de expresión a partir de los significados manidos que tienen las cosas en su función utilitaria. La aplicación de los reveladores supuestos conceptuales y de la terminología de Brown enfatizan las semejanzas entre el modernismo y el postmodernismo, pues ambas tendencias adoptan planteamientos estéticos que implican una "materialización" de la

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However, despite this modern vision of the country, New Labour's Britishness was also based on traditional values like tolerance, democracy, equality and liberty; its national achievements, especially the empire and military victories (Gamble and Wright 2009:4); traditional institutions like the Monarchy, the Parliament, the common law, etc (Hazell 2009:104); and the importance of rights and duties of the British citizens. In this regard, this version of Britishness seemed to be too rooted in the past, an image that resembles that idyllically rural, stereotyped and traditional Englishness portrayed by Sir Jack Pitman in the novel.

Additionally, this artificial construction of identity and history is not only institutionalised by the government or society leaders like Pitman, but also by the influence of national identity on the tourist market. Both Blair's Britain and Pitman's "England, England" embody the exploitation of a marketable nation. On the one hand, Blair's Cool Britannia was utilised to activate a young consumerist society (Osgerby 2005:127) but it also intended to attract international tourism, promoting a new and modern image of the country. Likewise, in the novel, Pitman's theme park expects to profit from national identity in order to captivate tourists and increase his personal income. As mentioned in the novel, The Island turns out to be "a pure market state" (Barnes 2008:183) where perfect capitalism resembles the business industry of the late nineties.

As Thomas M. Stein suggests when claiming that *England, England* deconstructs New Labour's agenda (2003:201), Barnes's novel represents an illustration of how invented and imagined versions of what the political elite thinks a nation should be end up being created realities. This shows that man-made convenient constructions of history and identity take place in contemporary societies, leading to the assumption that those artificial creations are unreliable accounts of the past. Subjectivity, partiality and inauthenticity form part of a postmodern era in which historiographic practices become mere discourses that, like literature, contribute to history writing. In his novel Julian Barnes, deals with the unnatural construction of collective memory and national identity, suggesting that, even though the former is a fake and artificial invention, it is necessary for the composition and formation of the latter.

could be analogous to Blair's intention of the reinterpretation of contemporary national identity as being modern, young, urban and culturally tolerant. In this respect, Lunn stated that the construction of Britishness in this process of edition and selection, other versions of Britain are excluded or omitted: "it is clear that public versions of 'Britain' are constructions, achieved in a number of ways and using a variety of social, cultural and political techniques. [...] They work not merely at the level of identifying and stereotyping a particular image of Britain and Britishness but, in the process, they actively exclude other possibilities, other versions of Britain" (1996:87). The transformations of the national image, together with the construction of modern national emblems like the Millenium Dome, go in the direction of Pitman's construction of the nation as a theme park. Both Blair's New Britain and Barnes's novel exemplify the manipulation and subjectivity of political leaders when defining national identity, sustaining, subsequently, the theory of the unreliability of history and artificial constructedness of national identity and collective memory under both commercial -Pitman's business, his theme park- and political and ideological interests -Blair's modernization programme.

Institutionalisation of man-made creations of nationhood also takes place in states like Blair's Britain or Pitman's "England, England". These versions of history are reproduced in public representations such as "in education, books, television documentaries, museums and monuments, but also in the rituals of daily life" (Weedon 2008:26). In the case of Barnes's novel *England, England*, the magnate represents an all-powerful figure that designs and controls everything in his territory officialising and institutionalising his imagined representation of the nation. Pitman's institutionalisation of "their history" is achieved by the presentation of an official history designed and adapted by the Official Historian, Dr. Max (*ibid.*:58), but also through the reproduction of national monuments like the Houses of Parliament, the Big Ben, Stonehenge, castles, thatched cottages, churches, etc (*ibid.*:74); the recreation of legends and myths like Robin Hood and the Merrie Men; as well as the national emblems such as the Royal Family or the cup of tea. On the other hand, with regard to Blair's institutionalisation of modern British identity, we acknowledge the construction of the Millenium Dome, the public recognition of modern cultural products like Britpop and Britart, and the intention of promoting museums of Britishness and a British national day:

There have been suggestions for a British national day, for encouragement to Britons to fly the flag in their gardens, making the teaching of citizenship involve instruction in British history, for the creation of an Institute of Britishness, and a national conversation on Britishness, charged with drawing up a list of the values everyone can agree on a constituting part of Britishness. (Gamble and Wright 2009:4)

rethink its role in the world and its sense of nationhood. Blair's Britain, post Thatcherite and at the doors of the new millennium, required a new approach to Britishness, a new conception of being British and a new way of projecting Britain to the future. On the other hand, Pitman's resembling attitude towards a declining historical moment in terms of nationhood and national identity drives him to dream about the construction of the theme park "England, England" as a way of preserving his version of the authentic Englishness.

Furthermore, both character and Prime Minister represent how the political elite manipulate the construction of national identity and how history writing is artificially composed. On the one hand, Blair's efforts to modernize the country were popularized under the slogan "Cool Britannia", and were based on the Prime Minister's personal concept of what it meant to be British, an idealisation of Britishness that he aimed to implement. Similarly, the character Jack Pitman aspires to artificially construct an English national identity based on his own personal understanding of what it means to be English. In this respect, the novel explicitly mentions Blair's national renewal when making reference to a "Government of Renewal, which pledged itself to economic recovery, parliamentary sovereignty and territorial reacquisition" (*ibid.*:252) and New Labour's nationalism is acknowledged in the novel as the "modernizing patriots" (*ibid.*:253).

Blair and Pitman's plans of national construction are based on the *imagined community* they aspire their nations to be, transforming societal mechanisms to implement their ideals. Such is Blair's idealism of creating a fair society, a young and dynamic nation, economically efficient and prosperous (Blair 1996:3-4), and proud of its history, which recalls Sir Jack Pitman's attempts of making "everything you imaged England to be, but more convenient, cleaner, friendlier, and more efficient" (Barnes 2008:184). Barnes's character dreams about shaping a faultless nation free from crime, and identified with economic success and social harmony, portraying both Blair and Pitman's idealism when forging the nation. Therefore, in this artificial construction that is both Blair's "Cool Britannia" and Jack Pitman's theme park "England, England", man-made influence and manipulation determines the definition of national identity and history writing. On the one hand, Pitman's remodeling of English history means adding invented details, changing and omitting past events. Such are the cases of characters Samuel Johnson or Nell Gwynn who are asked to modify some of their authentic features as historical *personae* to adjust their performance to customers' demands; not to mention Dr. Max, the historian, whose mission was to adapt real English history to visitors' partial knowledge of British history (*ibid.*:70-71); or the redefinition of the English character from cold and emotionally self-restraint to "warm-hearted" (*ibid.*:108). This process of rewriting and editing history and national identity

American immigrant who has changed his “real” name, enjoys telling fake and invented legends of the place to entertain visitors. Among other manufactured constructions for the village’s history, the scene where the schoolmaster insists on the need to revive or institute the Village Fête could be mentioned. However, due to the lack of records, they need to start from scratch and invent, with Martha’s memories, the events that will take place, such as the band, the songs, and the games (Barnes 2008:262, 263).

Moreover, Anglia or Old England is, at the same time, presented as a dystopian place in which all the advantages of a rural and agrarian state also contribute to the consumption of the nation; while England, England, enjoyed “power, territory, wealth, influence and population” (*ibid.*:251), Old England experienced disintegration and isolation in the world: “Old England had lost its history, and therefore –since memory is identity– it has lost all sense of itself” (*ibid.*:251).

Barnes’s satirical portrait of national creation converges with the idea that even though nationhood and history are artificial and interested constructions, history is important for the creation of identity, and together they favour the psychological stability and completeness of a nation. In this direction, Nünning states that “Barnes’s novel also suggests that one of the major functions of a nation’s collective memory lies in its importance for forging its national identity” (2001:24). If we come back to the analogy that Barnes establishes between national identity and personal identity, personified in Martha, we realize that Martha’s inability to reconstruct her memories, and with them her identity, leads her to a state of dissatisfaction and unhappiness: “an individual’s loss of faith and a nation’s loss of faith, aren’t they much the same?” (Barnes 2008:237).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Barnes’s parody of national construction, a narrative halfway through utopian and dystopian reality, could be related with the utopia that Blair’s New Britain and his Third Way represented (Stein 2003:194, 195). Tony Blair’s modernization programme embodies the historical context in which the novel is set satirizing the remodeling process of the time when the Prime Minister took great pains to pursue his vision of a new and modern country. Hence, both Blair and Barnes’s character Sir Jack Pitman acknowledge the fact that their “England/Britain” finds itself in a critical period in which it is necessary to

Quality Leisure, *feel better*" (*ibid.*:70). In this respect, Pitman understands artful creation of nationhood as a natural process thanks to which the world develops. He compares it with nature, insisting that nature, as we know it, is not nature-made but man-made; rivers, woodlands, crops and animals are manipulated by man: "we change it all" (*ibid.*:60). Christine Berberich explained that "nations, whether imagined or not, are, of course, not nature-made. They are contained within man-made boundaries; they are run according to rules set by man. In order to 'forge the nation', countries often evoke their past- especially past success stories- in order to create a sense of togetherness" (2008:168).

In his attempt to create national identity, Pitman wants to make a worldwide survey to discover the top fifty characteristics associated with the word England. The survey results state that Englishness is Royal family, Big Ben, Manchester United Football club, the class system, the Union Jack, the BBC, Harrods, Queen Victoria [...] (Barnes 2008:83-85). However, Sir Jack disagrees with the list and tries to adapt it to his own conception of Englishness (*ibid.*:85). Similarly, with regard to the creation of a national character Pitman's team discusses the traits that describe the English people. They come across the problem that English character has a very bad reputation which is detrimental for marketing purposes: "how do we advertise the English? Come and meet representatives of a people widely perceived, even according to our own survey, as cold, snobbish, emotionally retarded and xenophobic" (*ibid.*:108). Hence, they decide to instill the locals other more practical characteristics like "warm-hearted hospitality" (*ibid.*:108). Therefore, "the nation is commodified and represented as a marketable, reified object and thereby converted into a series of saleable symbols" (Bentley 2007:490). Pitman's manipulation of Englishness is parodied in Barnes's novel to express the artificiality of nationhood and history. However, Barnes suggests that we should consider this artificiality as the "natural" way of history writing since it has never existed an authentic, innocent and real national construction: everything is created as a "positive improvement on the way things had been before [...] there is no authentic moment of beginning, of purity [...] We may choose to freeze a moment and say that it all 'began' then, but as an historian I have to tell you that such labeling is intellectually indefensible" (Barnes 2008:132). In other words, as Nünning states: "it highlights the impossibility of ever knowing what Englishness consisted of in the past, and it deconstructs the notion that there is either a continuity between past and present Englishness, or something like essential Englishness" (2001:25).

In the last section of the novel, "Anglia", Barnes concludes that history and identity construction are inevitable. Even in a country like Anglia that represents a bucolic and, for some reason, idyllic place to live, characters still contribute to the bogus formation of local history. Jez Harris, for instance, an

It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. The same went for individuals, though the process obviously wasn't straightforward. Did those whose lives had disappointed them remember an idyll, or something which justified their lives ending in disappointment? [...] An element of propaganda, of sales and marketing, always intervened between the inner and the outer person. (Barnes 2008:6)

History rewriting and editing means idealizing some past facts and omitting others that do not correspond with an imagined self. It is the present that designs how we want to live and remember our past, it is the artificial constructedness of our history which determines the image we project externally as an "element of propaganda and marketing" (*ibid.*:6). For Barnes, history is relative, it is partial and subjective and it is often consciously or unconsciously manipulated. In the novel, Martha's Spanish classmate, Cristina, teases her by saying that Francis Drake was a pirate, and Martha, convinced that Francis Drake had been an English hero, realizes that "one person's plundering privateer might be another person's pirate" (*ibid.*:7). Barnes therefore parodies a convenient construction of history through Martha's memories of school when British history was taught idyllically.

In the second section entitled "England, England", Barnes recreates an artificial state: Sir Jack Pitman's last dream of building an Englishness theme park on the imaginarily independent Isle of Wight. As the project takes form, English history and identity are artfully constructed and adapted to the economical interests of the Governor. The business mogul realizes that England is currently living in a period of decadence, and after the splendour era of the Empire, now finds itself in an identity crisis period and needs to find a way of encouraging its self-confidence and value: "So England, comes to me, and what do I say to her? I say, 'Listen, baby, face facts. We're in the third millennium and your tits have dropped'" (*ibid.*:37). As a solution, Pitman wants to preserve the essence of England and its splendor in *The Island*: "England [...] is [...] a nation of great age, great history, great accumulated wisdom" (*ibid.*:39).

Although Pitman's first idea is preserving real and authentic Englishness, we observe how in the process of its construction Pitman's team manipulates and varies the "recorded" version of history and the features that describe national identity in order to adapt them not only to commercial interests, but to Pitman's own conception of what Englishness should be. To carry out his purposes he employs a historian, Dr Max, who is in charge of elaborating the history of *The Island*, the history that will be offered and sold to visitors of the theme park. Sir Jack instills the historian to "change" history so as to adapt it to customers' likes and knowledge: "the point of *our* history –and I stress the *our*– will be to make our guests, those buying what is for the moment referred to as

Aujourd'hui l'abstraction n'est plus celle de la carte, du double, du miroir ou du concept. La simulation n'est plus celle d'un territoire, d'un être référentiel, d'une substance. Elle est la génération par les modèles d'un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel. Le territoire ne précède plus la carte, ni ne lui survit.

C'est désormais la carte qui précède le territoire –précession des simulacres– c'est elle qui engendre le territoire et s'il fallait reprendre la fable, c'est aujourd'hui le territoire dont les lambeaux pourrissent lentement sur l'étendue de la carte. C'est le réel, et non la carte, dont les vestiges subsistent çà et là, dans les déserts qui ne sont plus ceux de l'Empire, mais le nôtre. Le désert du réel lui-même. (1981: 10)

Moreover, the novel provides an example analysis of the construction of national identity, and more specifically the constitution of Englishness, satirizing the artificial invention of nationhood; yet stating that despite its inauthenticity there exists a human need to construct the collective memory, the history that holds up identity's stability. Furthermore, it could be argued there is a direct connection between Barnes's analysis of national identity constructedness and the fabrication of Labour's New Britain, understanding the latter as a bogus invention and a marketable product for consumerism as is Jack Pitman's theme park.

Barnes's central message in *England, England* deals with the artificial construction of identity and history, by creating an analogy with the formation of personal and individual identity in the principal character Martha Cochrane. In the first section of the novel she is trying to remember her first memories, but is aware of the impossibility of providing a logical and authentic sequence to them: "What's your first memory?" someone would ask. And she would reply 'I don't remember'" (Barnes 2008:3). As memories are not a 'solid, seizable thing' (*ibid.*:3) she concludes that it did not exist a single memory that was not a lie, so she lied too when determining that her first memory was sitting on the kitchen floor trying to complete an England puzzle: "Yes, that was it, her first memory, her first artfully, innocently arranged lie" (*ibid.*:4). Through Martha's attempt to reconstruct her past and her memories, Barnes expresses the idea of the unreliability of memories, stating that the past is not simply a "solid, seizable thing" but it becomes an object of change, variation and artful manipulation: "And there was another reason for mistrust. If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between" (*ibid.*:6). The author establishes a metaphorical parallelism between the uncertain conceptions of personal memories and the formation of collective memory turning history into a textual discourse built up on untrustworthy records:

Barnes therefore explores the construction-of-history theme in *England, England*, focusing moreover on the invention of national identity: the man-made creation of Englishness in the novel reproduces the systematic construction of “nation-ness” in Britain, as in other contemporary societies, through the collection of national stereotypes that are so economically profitable in the tourist industry. Here we can come back to the possible reading of the novel in a Blairian context (Stein 2003) connecting the Prime Minister’s rebranding of the nation, the encouragement of a new and modern national identity that becomes a marketable product, to Sir Jack Pitman’s “England, England”, a theme park located in the Isle of Wight that gathers the essence of England: all the typically English monuments and the English character are reproduced in the living performance that this tourist attraction is.

The first section of the novel, entitled “England”, describes how the central character Martha Cochrane is trying to remember and reconstruct her first memories. She believes, with some uncertainty, that her first childhood memory goes back to the kitchen floor where she used to do a Counties of England jigsaw puzzle with her mother’s help. One day her father left the family home and he would not come back for years, which would affect Martha’s life-long emotional life and relations with men, making her always feel unsatisfied.

The second part, “England, England”, introduces the business tycoon Sir Jack Pitman who is scheming a way of executing his last great idea: under the belief that Britain is a great nation and has a great history, he is planning the construction of a theme park that encapsulates the essence of Englishness; it is an attempt to condense time perpetually and preserve the authentic nature of England, a replica of its most significant tourist attractions, its gastronomic variety, its character, and its emblematic and representative worldwide famous people.

Finally, “Anglia”, the last part of the novel, recounts how Miss Cochrane, already in her old age lonely and single, is settled back in a quiet village in Old England, where she expects to be buried one day. Anglia has moved back into a rural state with an agrarian production system where people live relatively peacefully. There Martha is still emotionally unsatisfied, and adopts an indifferent attitude towards life.

Julian Barnes’s *England, England* exemplifies a parody of the postmodern theory of Simulacra by Jean Baudrillard, in which contemporary society values more the artificial and the unreal than the original. In the book, Pitman’s replication project of the typically English attractions is more successful than the originals on the mainland Old England and at some point the old country decays. According to Baudrillard’s theory virtual representations become even more real than the authentic ones:

traditions. [...] To many outsiders, Britain may be fun to visit- if you want to step into the 19th century. (Leonard in Oakland 2001:43-44)

The tourist industry is co-responsible, together with the political elite, for the construction of the national image, as it has pragmatic, economical and political benefits. Nationhood as a man-made creation may psychologically influence the collective identity, forging the previously mentioned “imagined community”, yet with political and economical interests behind that manipulation.

4. ENGLAND, ENGLAND

Despite governmental interests in raising nationhood, other mechanisms like literature appear to construct or deconstruct the official patterns of history, contributing to the debate and reinterpretation of collective memory, as well as the rendering of national identity. Many authors have dealt with these questions, such is the case of Philip Larkin’s “Here”, Graham Swift’s *Waterland*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*, and others such as Peter Ackroyd, Kazuo Ishiguro and particularly Julian Barnes. All these authors have explored, in different ways, aspects of National Identity, Britishness/Englishness, questions of historical consciousness, the construction of identity in its relation with history, and the process of history writing understood as a narrative discourse (cf. Janik 1995; Ingelbien 1999; Finney 2003). In this respect, Barnes has specially been interested in the relationship between history (or past) and fiction in many of his novels such as *Metroland* (1980), *Before She Met Me* (1982), *Flaubert’s Parrot* (1984), *A History of the World in 10^{1/2} Chapters* (1989), and *The Porcupine* (1992), as we can see in the thorough study by Bruce Sesto *Language, History and Metanarrative in the Fiction of Julian Barnes* (2001). Perhaps the most clearly typified as historiographic may be *A History of the World in 10^{1/2} Chapters* where Barnes’s “A” history of the world represents “merely a history among many possible histories of the world” (Finney 2003: 49) highlighting a possible historical relativism. Barnes, consequently, wisely interweaves different genres, apart from the purely literary and manages to explore historiography and the metanarrative in his novels (cf. Ingelbien 1999; Janik 1995). As Keith Wilson stated, “Barnes is unusual among contemporary novelists in blurring distinctions between the imagined and the experienced, between fiction and nonfiction (including journalistic and biographical)” (2006: 363).

plan was a mere window-dressing and that Britain was still “old wine in new bottles” (Hyland 2000). In this direction, Driver and Martell pointed out that “New Labour is too traditional, too conservative, too white, too male, paying lip-service to the cultural diversity of Britain” (2004:468).

Across the Atlantic, the American magazine *Newsweek*, following the rise of modernizer Tony Blair, published an article satirizing the efforts of the Prime Minister to transform the image of the country. Some authorised voices, including magazine editor Stryker McGuire, criticised Britain’s new image as very “London-based”, extending the capital’s idiosyncrasy to the rest of the national geography. A burlesque tone is evident when it is recounted how a historical city like Birmingham, the birthplace of the Industrial revolution, with a “lovely old style” (McGuire and Underhill in Oakland 2001:48), was artificially dressed up in an aura of modernism, popular culture and technology:

So when the city hosted the G-8 summit in May, the prime minister brought new Britain to Birmingham. [...] He treated the world’s press to a sleek, high-tech media centre. He took his fellow heads of government and their wives to a glitzy concert led by the pop group All Saints. If only for those few days, Blair swaddled a bastion of very old Britain in the shiny foil of ‘Cool Britannia.’ (McGuire and Underhill in Oakland 2001:48)

The Labour Party’s unintentional slogan “Cool Britannia” became the catchphrase that symbolized the new Britain of popular culture in which young consumerist society was going to be the economic driving force of the late nineties. Blair’s conception of a “young country” (Osgerby 2005:127), the country of Britart and Britpop, connected both with youth culture and business culture, turning this social movement into an economic device. Bill Osgerby explains the importance that youth culture had as a valuable financial resource for the new government and the new era: “with the rise of media and culture industries as economic mainstays, the youth market had developed into a key business sector, with British pop music and style exerting a global cultural influence” (2005:127).

However, the artificial construction of a renewed British national image, being additionally a commercial advantage, has been considered a bogus façade, for Britain’s first and foremost touristic profit comes from that traditional, idyllically rural and stereotyped representation of the country. Despite the endeavour of offering consumers a modern product, Britain is still defined for the weight of its history and traditions that are rooted not only in the self-conception of the British people themselves, but in the external image that is projected:

Ask a businessman in Ohio, a housewife in Gdansk or a rickshaw wallah in Delhi what they think of Britain and you will get a picture that is stuck in the past: a sort of heritage theme park with bad food, worse weather and arcane

British in the twenty-first century, denouncing the notion that British national identity was “stuck” in the past instead of open to new and fresher ideas (Driver and Martell 2004:462).

New Labour’s notion of Britishness seemed to be an attempt to stimulate a modern nationalism characterized by a dynamic, multicultural, innovative and young country (Osgerby 2005:127), able to lead and set the example of a twenty-first century nation. Blair, in his definition of New Britain stated:

I believe few would disagree with the qualities that go towards that British identity: qualities of creativity built on tolerance, openness and adaptability, work and self-improvement, strong communities and families and fair play, rights and responsibilities and an outward looking approach to the world that all flow from our unique island geography and history. (Blair 2000)

Blair, at the beginning of his premiership, was increasingly convinced that there was a need to change the national image, a need to promote a new multicultural society. This modernized and open-minded model of a nation was still rooted in British values such as tolerance, democracy, equality, liberty, fairness and justice; in British institutions like the Monarchy, the Parliament, the common law, the BBC, the NHS [...] (Hazell 2009:104), and in responsibilities, rights and duties that distinguished British citizens. Additionally, New Labour’s view of the role of history in national identity represented a progressive evolution from a tepid commitment to the significance of history towards a veneration of Britain’s past. Brown’s celebration of British history illustrates it: ‘I think the days of Britain having to apologise for our history are over. I think we should move forward. I think we should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it and we should talk, rightly so, about British values’ (in Kearney 2005).

However, Blair’s renewed Britain as an attempt to change the national image is sometimes thought to have been unsuccessful. Britain is seen as a multicultural nation with too many racial tensions, a modern and “young country” (Osgerby 2005:127) excessively rooted in traditional values and traditions. All these factors, together with an ambiguous position regarding the relevance of history in the construction of national identity, put into question the authenticity of the modernization project that New Labour hoped to administer.

At the beginning of the New Labour government there existed the conviction of a need to reconsider and reinterpret the past from a renewed perspective. Nonetheless, as Blair’s time in office evolved, and after a perceived failure of the project of a multicultural Britain, efforts were made to constitute a “cohesive society”, which was entrenched in strictly British terms, causing British values and institutions, which promoted a unified national identity, to be celebrated. Blair’s nation rebranding was condemned by voices that argued the

historically specific, for example, the much maligned attempt by New Labour in Britain to rebrand the country as ‘Cool Britannia’” (2008:20).

Narrativization of history constitutes, therefore, another kind of discourse to report former facts, whose aim, on some occasions, is to compensate for the official accounts that people have access to. There are reasons to suggest, in this historical relativisation, that literature plays an important role, for it seems to be a step to institutionalize the different versions of a people’s past, the different stories in the construction of a nation’s history. In this respect, postmodern “historiographic metafiction”¹²² and literary practices may converge in the process of reading history, national identity and collective memory, applying subjectivity and partiality to the interpretation of events.

3. NEW LABOUR’S BRITAIN

Blair’s project of the definition of Britishness that has so often been debated in the recent times could be interpreted as part of this “artificial” construction and re-construction of the national identity; it is commonly said that politicians, governments and society leaders contribute to the discussion of what it means to be British, and those in power seem to take great pains to implement their ideals and their interpretation of history in their fabrication of what they believe a better society could be. In this respect, Kenneth Lunn pointed out the need to re-think the past in order to understand our present, who we are now, and who we want to be: “Responses to the political crisis have sought to draw upon a specific version of the past in order to attempt to make sense of the present” (Lunn 1996:87). Subsequently, their particular narrativization of history, through images and symbols, influence citizens’ understanding of Britishness, this is, the imagined community that is imposed and shared by the nation (Bentley 2007:488).

New Labour contributed to this nationalist tribute when Tony Blair and his “spirit of national renewal” (Blair 1996:4) transformed the principles of the party, and, by extension, his expectations about what Britain, as a great nation, would become: “I didn’t come into politics to change the Labour Party. I came into politics to change the country” (Blair 1997:62). Labour’s modernisation programme was intimately linked with nationhood, with what it meant to be

¹²² Historiographic Metafiction: A term first coined by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), (in Janik 1995).

integrative meaning to a sequence of facts. That is, in Roland Barthes's view, the actual role of the historian:

The historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series [...]. Historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an *imaginary* elaboration. (1997:121)

History writing, as Barthes suggested, understood as an *imaginary* elaboration, could be interpreted in its dichotomy between the reality (or the reality of historical facts) and the text (the historical narrative or discourse), meaning that the latter does not reflect only the objectivity of events but also an "elaboration" of reality that has to do more with what Hayden White called the "poetic and rhetorical elements": "Narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story" (1997:393). Therefore, (historical) narrative discourse, in its process of elaboration, involves omitting and forgetting, the so-called "selective amnesia" (Weedon 2008:84) which has often been condemned by some scholars for its sometimes unfair and partial view of history. Such is the case of Bhikhu Parekh, who, in relation to the concept of national identity, notes that "a sense of national identity is based on generalizations and involves a selective and simplified account of a complex history. Much that is important is ignored, disavowed or simply forgotten" (2000:16). Therefore, those accounts represent a desired and "imagined" version of the past that is needed to advocate a particular present and reinforce a certain future nation.

Hence, national identity and collective memory, as interdisciplinary practices, are frequently analyzed from a psychological perspective, comparing them to the individual and personal identity that is invented by human beings in order to construct and fulfill idealized personalities as a way of becoming what we really want or need to be. In this process, "individuals tell others about themselves, [...] the 'inner story' undergoes continual rewriting and editing; some experiences are forgotten, others are suppressed if they are disagreeable or painful to the ego" (Henke 2003:80), or in other words, "what doesn't fit the selected image is omitted" (Berberich 2008:170).

By extension, national historiographic narratives are equally constructed and edited to tell ourselves an idealized collective identity and a coherent collective memory in relation to the present that has been built and the future that is expected. Chris Weedon mentions New Labour's modernization project as an example of this identity creation by resorting to specific versions of history to validate their project: "Constructions of identity are always

up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population” (Gellner 1983:57). However, he adds that the construction of nationalisms on some occasions has nothing to do with the culture they claim to defend, but on a particular conception of them in which old traditions and languages are recreated artificially:

It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round. Admittedly, nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored. But this culturally creative, fanciful, positively inventive aspect of nationalist ardour ought not to allow anyone to conclude, erroneously, that nationalism is a contingent, artificial, ideological invention [...]. Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself. The cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition. (Gellner 1983:55-56)

In this direction, understanding nationalism as an aspiration to construct a particular nation, other authors have proclaimed the politicization of this phenomenon that is detached from the cultural objects on which nations are based, giving nations the “status of a *political subject*” (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:12) which is what defines nationalism:

“Nationalism” is a “political” phenomenon. This is not to dismiss economic, cultural and geographical factors as irrelevant to the subject of enquiry. But it does challenge the view that “nationalism” is somehow the product of pre-existing socio-cultural entities called “nations” [...]. We would thus prefer to invert the relationship and regard nations as “political” artefacts called into being by nationalist ideologies and movements. (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:11)

However, this man-made construction of nations, and by extension of nationalisms, is not only founded on contemporary culture. It is always linked to the history of a people, to the “collective memory” that is presented institutionally by governments or political elites. The current self-conception of nations is rooted in, and depends mostly on, the past, which is what gives us the sense of origins and belonging. But how is history constructed? Traditional historiography seems to be questioned in a postmodern era in which entrenched versions of history appear now unreliable. In other words, postmodernist studies may suggest that historical objectivity is put into question when historical facts are understood under a perceived subjectivity. This subjectivity is intimately linked with the conception of history as a narrative discourse. Jean-François Lyotard, to this effect, understood postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (1997:36). Therefore, writing history, from a postmodern perspective, may imply relativizing and interpreting the past, providing an

2. DISCUSSIONS OF “IDENTITY” AND “NATION”

In its current situation of national identity crisis due to the loss of Empire, globalization and mass migration (cf. Lunn 1996), Britain has recently been looking for a re-orientation of its external role in the world characterized by a need to re-think its “nation-ness” (cf. Anderson 1991: 4). In this context, voices are raised to define both notions of “identity” and “nation”. Firstly, identity needs to be considered in “collective” terms as “unity” and “sameness” amongst the group members, and as “those commonly shared features of a group with which members self-consciously identify” (Henke 2003:79). Stuart Hall, when arguing about the construction of identity mentions the “question of *identification*” understood as “some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group” (1997:2). Secondly, regarding the concept of nation, we should make reference to the German concept of “*Kulturnation*” which alludes to “‘communities of fate’ bound together by seemingly objective qualities, such as history, language and culture and often, by connotation, blood ties” (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:15). However, beyond the meaning that is associated with a common history, culture, language, and ethnic background, we should consider the idea of an “imagined community” as defined by Benedict Anderson:

My point of departure is that nationality, [...] nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind [...].

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (1991:4-6)

Therefore, it can be argued that national identity is a man-made construction perpetually forged to instil, in a particular era, an imagined and convenient conception of nationhood adjusted to the current political and social circumstances. That imagined community, unreal and invented, is infused and shared by the members of the group who, despite unknowing the reality and foundation of their shared features, believe in a fabricated commonness.

Taking this concept of nation as a starting point, the construction of “Nationalism” is, according to Ernest Gellner, similarly artificially constructed. He first defines “nationalism” as a proclamation of a particular “high” culture on the whole society. In his own words: “Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken