



e-ISSN: 2822-3950 ★ Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021

e-ISSN: 2822-3950 ★ Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

ETKİ:  
*Journal of  
Literature,  
Theatre and  
Culture Studies*

ETKİ:  
*Edebiyat,  
Tiyatro ve  
Kültür  
İncelemeleri  
Dergisi*



e-ISSN: 2822-3950 ★ Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021

e-ISSN: 2822-3950 ★ Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

**Editor-in-Chief | Baş Editör**

Önder Çakırtaş, *Bingöl University*

**Associate Editors | Yardımcı Editörler**

Rebecca Blanchard, *University of Toronto*

İlker Özçelik, *Süleyman Demirel University*

**Editorial Review Board | Yayın Kurulu**

Sevcan Işık, *İnönü University*

Marisa Kerbizi, *Albania Durres University*

Saumya Priya, *IDCN Copenhagen*

Hatice Bay, *Independent Researcher*

Anjum Khan, *Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women*

Jillian Curr, *University of Western Australia*

Daniela Hasa, *University of Tirana*

Maria Luisa Di Martino, *Ca' Foscari University of Venice*

Yeşim Sultan Akbay, *Süleyman Demirel University*

**Editorial Assistants | Editör Yardımcıları**

Marietta Kosma, *University of Oxford*

Muhammed İkbâl Candan, *Van Yüzyüncü Yıl University*

Pedro Panhoca, *Mackenzie Presbyterian University*

Adnan Aydınürk, *Bingöl University*

Seda Özsağır, *Kapadokya University*

**International Advisory Board | Uluslararası Danışma Kurulu**

James Mackay, *European University Cyprus*

Mehmet Ali Çelikel, *Pamukkale University*

Betüre Memmedova, *Süleyman Demirel University*

Márcio Roberto do Prado, *Maringá State University*

Rafael Climent-Espino, *Baylor University*

Luisa Maria Soeiro Marinho Antunes Paolinelli, *Madeira University*

José Eduardo Franco, *Open University (Portugal)*

**Contact Info | İletişim**

[www.etkijournal.com](http://www.etkijournal.com) | [editor@etkijournal.com](mailto:editor@etkijournal.com) | [etkijournal@gmail.com](mailto:etkijournal@gmail.com)

Bingöl Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi 12200 Bingöl, Türkiye



e-ISSN: 2822-3950 ★ Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021

e-ISSN: 2822-3950 ★ Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

## **Table of Contents**

<b>1-16</b>	<b>Time and Space of Homesickness: Nâzım Hikmet's Homesickness as a Chronotope</b> <i>İlayda Buse Demirci</i>
<b>17-37</b>	<b>Tracing Matrilineality in Alice Walker's <i>Meridian</i> and Gloria Naylor's <i>Mama Day</i></b> <i>Marietta Kosma</i>
<b>38-51</b>	<b>A Panorama Of Victorian Society Through Dickensian Minor Characters: <i>Bleak House</i></b> <i>Sevcan Işık &amp; Rızkın Tok</i>
<b>52-68</b>	<b>Memory and Power: Unreliable Narrator in Ma Jian's <i>Beijing Coma</i> and Mo Yan's <i>The Republic of Wine</i></b> <i>Dania Shaikh &amp; Annaashirvadita Sacha</i>
<b>69-81</b>	<b>Memory storytelling: structural aspects in <i>O drible</i></b> <i>Pedro Penhoca da Silva &amp; Camila Concato</i>

*The page has been intentionally left blank.*

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

### Editor's Preface

On behalf of our authors, reviewers, editorial board, and editorial team – I warmly welcome you to the inaugural issue of *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*.

I am proud to present the first issue of *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the editorial board and the refereeing committee, especially the issue writers, for their help in delivering the first issue of this journal. I am equally grateful for the many authors who offered candidate contributions to this first issue – and for the many more colleagues around the globe who consistently provided critical but supportive reviews. Many of these reviewers were drawn from our Editorial Board, whose broader support has likewise been essential.

*ETKI*, like many scientific and academic journals that have pioneered literature and drama studies, aims to host self sacrificing and qualified works that have not had the chance to be published but must be delivered to readers and literature/drama experts. Each work that is filtered from the theoretical and practical knowledge of the authors and passed through the filter of field expert referees and editors will be included in the scope of this journal, which aims to close a gap in the world of literature, theatre and cultural studies. I wish *ETKI* to be beneficial to the academic world, and I wish it to guide our dear readers, field experts, professionals, undergraduate and graduate students in literature, cultural studies and the arts of stage, performance, theatre and drama.

Önder Çakırtaş  
Editor-in-Chief

### Editör'ün Önsözü

Yazarlarımız, hakemlerimiz, yayın kurulu ve yayın ekibimiz adına – *ETKİ: Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi*'nin açılış sayısına hoş geldiniz.

*ETKİ: Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi*'nin ilk sayısını sunmaktan gurur duyuyorum. Bu derginin ilk sayısının yayımlanmasında emeği geçen başta sayı yazarları olmak üzere, yayın kuruluna ve hakem heyetine en içten teşekkürlerimi sunarım. Bu ilk sayıya çeşitli katkılarda bulunan birçok yazara ve sürekli olarak eleştirel ve destekleyici incelemeler sunan dünya çapındaki birçok meslektaşına aynı derecede minnettarım. Bu hakemlerin çoğu, her zaman desteğini esirgemeyen yayın kurulumuzdan seçilmiştir.

*ETKİ*, edebiyat, tiyatro ve kültürel çalışmalara öncülük etmiş birçok bilimsel ve akademik dergi gibi, yayımlanma şansı bulamamış, okuyuculara ve edebiyat, tiyatro, kültür incelemeleri ve drama uzmanlarına ulaştırılması gereken özverili ve nitelikli eserlere ev sahipliği yapmayı amaçlamaktadır. Edebiyat, tiyatro ve kültür dünyasındaki bir boşluğu kapatmayı hedefleyen bu dergide yazarların teorik ve pratik bilgilerinden süzülerek alanında uzman hakem ve editörlerin süzgecinden geçirilen her esere yer verilecektir. *ETKİ*'nin akademik dünyaya faydalı olmasını diliyor, siz değerli okuyucularımıza, alan uzmanlarına, profesyonellere, lisans ve lisansüstü öğrencilerimize edebiyat, kültürel çalışmalar ile sahne, performans, tiyatro ve drama sanatlarında yol göstermesini temenni ediyorum.

Önder Çakırtaş  
Baş Editör

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## Time and Space of Homesickness: Nâzım Hikmet's Homesickness as a Chronotope\*

İlayda Buse Demirci | MA | Free University of Brussels  
ilaydabd@gmail.com

### Abstract

Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Chronotope is a useful method to analyse the functions of temporal and spatial settings of a narrative. The fact that it is mostly applied to studies of prose should not mean that it is not suitable for the analysis of poetry, especially but not necessarily narrative ones. In that sense, the poetry of the Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet, as it is rich with elements of narratology, is examined in this article in light of the theory of chronotope. More specifically, his homesickness in his poetry is brought into light regarding the temporal and spatial aspects of and around it. It has been understood from this analysis that Hikmet's homesickness for his homeland is mostly settings of blurry, fleeting, and both metaphorically and physically far-away images and that it is interwoven with his love and longing for his partners and his son.

### Keywords:

homesickness,  
chronotope,  
chronotope of homesickness,  
Nâzım Hikmet

### Article History:

Received: 01.10.2021

Accepted: 27.11.2021

### Citation Guide:

Demirci, İlayda Buse. "Time  
and Space of Homesickness:  
Nâzım Hikmet's  
Homesickness as a  
Chronotope" *ETKI: Journal of  
Literature, Theatre and Culture  
Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021,  
pp. 1-16.

\*This article is a revised version of a part of the author's master's thesis.

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## Sıla Özleminin Zamanı ve Mekânı: Bir Kronotop Olarak Nâzım Hikmet'in Sıla Özlemi\*

İlayda Buse Demirci | MA | Free University of Brussels  
ilaydabd@gmail.com

### Özet

#### Anahtar Kelimeler:

memleket hasreti,  
kronotop,  
memleket hasreti kronotopu,  
Nâzım Hikmet

#### Makale Bilgileri:

Geliş : 01.10.2021

Kabul : 27.11.2021

#### Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Demirci, İlayda Buse. "Time and Space of Homesickness: Nâzım Hikmet's Homesickness as a Chronotope" *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-16.

Mihail Bahtin'in Kronotop Teorisi, anlatılardaki zaman mekan unsurlarının işlevlerini incelemede kullanılan yararlı bir yöntemdir. Bu teorinin çoğunlukla düz yazı eserlerinin incelenmesinde kullanılması şiir incelemelerine, özellikle de anlatımcı şiirlerin incelenmesine uygun olmadığı anlamına gelmemelidir. Bu sebeple bu makalede, Türk şair Nâzım Hikmet'in şiirleri, anlatıbilim unsurları bakımından zengin olduğundan, kronotop teorisi ışığında incelenmiştir. Özellikle de şiirlerindeki memleket hasreti, bu duygu üzerinde ve etrafında kurulan zaman mekan unsurları açısından araştırılmıştır. Bu inceleme sonucunda Nâzım Hikmet'in memleket hasretinin çoğunlukla bulanık, belli belirsiz ve hem mecazi hem de fiziki anlamda uzakta betimlenen sahnelerden oluştuğu ve eşleri ile oğlu için duyduğu sevgi ve hasret ile yoğrulduğu anlaşılmıştır.

\* Bu makale yazarın yüksek lisansından üretilmiştir.

## Introduction

Home is, not necessarily but usually, a place to which relocated people feel themselves attached. It is a place where they feel they belong to and for which they long. This longing for a home, namely homesickness, can be seen arguably most strongly at exiled people. In this sense, rather than being the house that one inhabits, home becomes a place of origin, referring to the country or ‘homeland’ to which one belongs, but, in most cases, cannot return. It is in this condition of not being able to return to home that the homesickness of the person remains not remedied. A way of easing this homesickness can be then to write about and of it, an act which the exiled Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet did.

Nâzım Hikmet Ran (1902-1963) is celebrated for his immense contribution to Turkish and world literature. Spending many years in prison because of his political views, he finally fled to Soviet Union ever not to return and to spend his last twelve years in exile. This, in turn, resulted in a wide corpus of poems reflecting on his home and homesickness. Although the time and space of homesickness can traditionally be defined as a home left in the past, a closer examination might prove both other possibilities of definitions and various shapes it can take. A possible way of examining homesickness can therefore be via looking at it in light of the Theory of Chronotope by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). Bakhtin’s chronotope theory is mostly known for its contribution to narratology and especially the study of prose narrative. The temporal and spatial aspects of a narrative can be studied to expose their function in the storyline. As works of prose such as novels are full of temporal and spatial indicators, employment of the chronotope theory can yield very fruitful analyses regarding the temporal and spatial elements. However, it should not mean that it would not suffice to analyse poetry as “[i]n the centrifugal environment of non-narrative poetry, chronotopes flicker and flow in a series of hints, glimpses, dissolves, defining consciousness, world and values via evanescence rather than stability” (Ladin 2010: 133). The existence of the genre of narrative poetry proves the possibility of eligibility of chronotope theory to analyse temporal and spatial indicators of a story within a poetry. Considering that Hikmet’s poetry is not non-narrative, on the contrary, is full of with almost all the elements of narration such as characters, places, events and much more, it should not be difficult to detect those ‘hints’ which point to the chronotope of homesickness. This article, therefore, discusses the feeling of homesickness as a chronotope by outlining Hikmet’s homesickness in terms of its spatial and temporal indicators found in his poems.

## Nâzım Hikmet and His Homesickness

As already stated, Nâzım Hikmet spent many years in jail and consequently his last twelve



years in exile. Coming from a cosmopolitan family, he grew up in a rich environment and found the opportunity to engage himself with art, literature, and politics. His first poem “Feryad-ı Vatan” (Hikmet 2008: 1873), written only at the age of eleven, reflected the political unrest within his homeland, as well as the international scene at that time, foreshadowing World War I. He kept writing poems and gradually, he began to appear in various literary journals and magazines.

When he was nineteen years old, he went to Anatolia with a friend Vâ-Nû and two other aspiring poets to join the Turkish War of Independence, mostly referred to as *Milli Mücadele* in Turkish. Through friends and colleagues in Anatolia, they were introduced to Marxism and consequently decided to embark on a journey for Moscow to enrol at the newly founded Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV). Upon Lenin's death and a call from the Communist Party of Turkey, Hikmet returned at the end of 1924 to a newly founded country, the Republic of Turkey. However, he was not content with the situation he found Turkey in, therefore, he started to write poems and articles for a journal called *Aydınlık*, often criticising the situation. However, following political unrest, *Aydınlık* was banned, and the people associated with it were arrested. Hikmet was also tried and sentenced, but he fled to the Soviet Union and escaped from getting arrested. Upon a law granting amnesty in 1928, he wanted to return to Turkey, but when he crossed the border, he was arrested. He gained his freedom with the help of countless articles written by many of his friends and intellectuals. In this period, he was being arrested and sentenced to jail now and again, getting out every time with the help of intellectuals or via benefitting from an amnesty law. However, he was arrested again in 1938, and this resulted in being the longest period he spent in prison. After being released finally in 1951, he had to leave Turkey, not being able to return ever again. Having been separated from his first wife, Piraye, during these years which partially led to their literal separation, Hikmet was separated again from his second wife, Münevver Andaç, and their child, Memet, along with his homeland.

Although he had to leave Turkey due to the reasons explained briefly above, he loved his country deeply before and during his exile years. It is evident that he suffered from homesickness due to his love for his country, which can be understood by examining not only his exile years but also the years before. He came to understand what it means to be away from the land before being a literal exile, given that he was imprisoned and went to live and study abroad even before being an exile. Therefore, his exile years, as well as his homesickness, can be better understood and defined if the years before are also studied. His love for his country is salient, for example, in the poem written at the prison of Istanbul in 1939:

I love my country:

I've swung on its plane trees,

I've slept in its prisons.

Nothing lifts my spirits like its songs and tobacco. (Hikmet 2002: 82)

He is fond of his country through and through, not only of its positive aspects but also of its shortcomings, as he finishes the poem in such fashion:

and then my people,

ready to embrace

with the wide-eyed joy of children

anything modern, beautiful, and good—

my honest, hard-working, brave people,

half full, half hungry,

half slaves... (Hikmet 2002: 83)

Thus, it is evident that his homesickness stems from his love for his country and the fact that he experienced being kept away from his land, although not in a literal 'exiled' sense. His homesickness resulting from his exile might then be a reflection or a continuation of his homesickness resulting from his years in prison. The poems he wrote during his exile are evidence of this. And, as argued above, looking at these later poems in light of theory of chronotope might yield substantial proof of his homesickness. For that matter, for example, the poem titled "The Mailman" from 1954 contains those hints. The first lines of the poem in which he declares "I've been a poet / which is a kind of mailman" (Hikmet 2002: 160) read as follows:

Whether at dawn or in the middle of the night,

I've carried people news

—of other people, the world, and my country,

of trees, the birds and the beasts—

in the bag of my heart. (Hikmet 2002: 160)

Since the poem unfolds and introduces a scene beginning from the first line, first glimpse of a chronotope is presented with "at dawn or in the middle of the night". Providing a sense of space and time, this phrase functions as an opening of what is yet to be filled with other phrases'

contributions to the whole picture. With the present perfect tense of “I’ve carried”, the temporality is enriched as it suggests an event that has begun in the past and continues to the present time. These first two lines are cyclical by nature as one dawn comes after another each day, every night has a ‘middle’, and present perfect tense used here refers to an action that is repeated, which gives the impression that the poet is essentially there, and arguably stuck. The following lines furnish the spatiality and define this ‘there’, especially the words “the world” and “my country” add a definitive sense of place. Of course, “my country” is of great importance here since it once again carries and reflects the poet’s love and concern for his country as it is exclusively mentioned and not included in the comprehensive word “world”. These three places, which are organically strung together in an idyllic way, are what he carries “in the bag of [his] heart”. That very phrase, “in the bag of my heart” adds to the spatiality, completing the picture for this excerpt. Thus, the action of carrying is realised through the large and expansive idyllic chronotope of his country, the locus of his homesickness. A few lines down more elements that contribute to the chronotope is provided:

Here, I'm driving a dogsled  
                                over ice,  
canned goods and mail packets  
                                glint in the Arctic twilight:

I'm crossing the Bering Strait.

Or here, under the shadow of heavy clouds on the steppe,

I'm handing out mail to the soldiers and drinking kefir. (Hikmet 2002: 160)

Thus far, the temporal and spatial sense of the poem was limited to faint, general suggestions, however, as the poem zooms in a scene, that blurred image gets clear and the fragments of this cyclical time-space are presented. The “dogsled / over ice” implies the winter season, thus suggests a temporal indicator and it provides a spatial indicator with “ice”, that is furnished with “Arctic twilight” and is finally completed with “Bering Strait” as a rather precise location is presented. The glinting “canned goods and mail packets” is interesting for it bears both aspects of the chronotope: the fact that canned goods and mail packets glint in the Arctic twilight hints that they are in the Northern Pole, covering the spatial aspect and they attest to events that have taken place in order to can the food and to package, or already before that, to prepare the mail, indicating the temporal aspect. Thus, they expand time to include before and after, causes and effects (Ladin 2010: 142), as it is the case with “ice” since it also implies a process of freezing. In the other imaginary situation, “steppe” is mentioned, which again adds to the spatial aspect of the chronotope. “Heavy

clouds”, on the other hand, points to the temporal aspect as the reader is reminded of clouds passing by, or a possible rain to come. The “mail” that is being handed out also contributes to the temporal sense similar to that of canned goods and mail packets, as “the soldiers” as well, since the soldiers suggest transiency, being people who has come to serve in the army and will probably be going back home or retire. On another note, soldiers might imply Hikmet’s reminiscence of home and homesickness as they are highly associated and affiliated with the nation. Which seems to be the case as he mentions his country a few lines below:

But it’s a difficult art in my Turkey.

In that beautiful country

a mailman bears all manner of pain in telegrams

and line on line grief in letters. (Hikmet 2002: 161)

Although he has been a poet, “which is a kind of mailman”, and has delivered posts to places some of which are abovementioned, he finds it difficult of a job to do in Turkey. It is also interesting that while he has “carried news of [...] the birds and the beasts”, he considers mails of a Turkish mailman painful and grievous. This is, of course, to be explained with the pain and the grief he feels because of his homesickness. As the poems ends, this becomes apparent:

One envelope

writes:

“Memet,

Nazim Hikmet’s son,

Turkey”.

Back in Moscow I’ll deliver the letters

to their addresses one by one.

Only Memet’s letter I can’t deliver

or even send. Nazim’s son,

Highwaymen block the roads—

your letter can’t get through. (Hikmet 2002: 161)

In his beloved country lives his son, and he is separated from both of them: his country and his son. Just as the letter he wishes to send to his son cannot be delivered, or even sent; it cannot get through, he himself cannot go to Turkey. The imaginary situations as well as the very fact that they

are imaginary, thus, infeasible, both spatially and temporally far-away, which is created and enriched by the chronotopical aspects of this poem, explain the poet's homesickness as his return to home is just as imaginary and infeasible as these situations in the poem. It is also through these micro-chronotopes of scenes that the larger, idyllic chronotope of homesickness is portrayed.

Furthermore, this is not the only time he identifies himself with items that are meant for Memet but cannot reach him. In the poem "In the Snowy Night Woods" from 1956, those items become the toys addressed to his son:

The old calendar says

Spring came in today.

The toys I sent my Memet

Were all returned to me.

His pickup sits brooding, hurt

Its spring never got wound up,

And Memet never got to sail

His white boat in the tub. (Hikmet 2002: 176)

With just two words, namely "old calendar", temporal senses are presented: "old" indicates the passing of the time and "calendar" in itself refers to time itself. "Spring" renders it more definitive and precise, and the fact that toys had been sent and were returned adds to the temporal aspect. Finally, the toys are now sitting, which completes the string of events. It is striking but not surprising that the toys are described in a moody manner, "brooding, hurt", most probably indicating the poet's feelings that result from his homesickness. Hikmet travelled a lot, especially during his exile years, despite his heart condition. However, some cities were of great importance for him, furnishing his poems with spatial indicators of the chronotope. Istanbul was the most beloved and is probably the most recurring one in his exile poems:

I left my budding rose

In my city of seven hills. (Hikmet 2002: 176)

or:

There are no guests, no one.

Poor Istanbul out the window. (Hikmet 2002: 178)

Another salient example of his love and longing for Istanbul is found in the poem titled Faust's House (Hikmet 2002: 181-82):

Below the towers, under the arcades,

I wander through Prague late

at night.

The sky is an alembic distilling gold in the dark—

an alchemist's still over a deep-blue flame.

I walk down the hill toward Charles Square:

on the corner, next to the clinic there,

is Doctor Faust's house set back in a garden.

As the poet describes Prague, he makes use of more specific temporal and spatial indicators compared to other examples. "Below the towers, under the arcades" and "through Prague" refer to the spatial setting and render the place almost precisely while "late / at night" and "dark" signal the temporal setting. The opening scene and therefore the spatial and temporal setting become clearer when the poet describes Faust's house and the way leading to it. As the poem continues the reader gains insight into the function of this setting:

I knock on the door.

The doctor isn't home.

As we all know,

on a night like this

about two hundred years ago,

the Devil took him

through a hole in the ceiling.

I knock on the door.

In this house I, too, will hand Satan a deed—

I, too, signed the deed with my blood.

I don't want gold from him  
or knowledge or youth.

I've had it with exile,  
I give up!

If I could have just one hour in Istanbul...

The use of present tense here serves to emphasise the act, making the temporal setting repetitious. The poet wishes to “have just one hour in Istanbul”, and this repetitiveness renders his wish more precise and straightforward. Same repetitiveness continues as the poem does:

I knock and knock on the door.  
But the door doesn't open.  
Why?  
Am I asking the impossible, Mephistopheles?  
Or isn't my tattered soul  
worth buying?

The scene closes with another repetitive act, which is knocking on the door:

In Prague the moon is rising lemon-yellow.  
I stand outside Doctor Faust's house  
at midnight, knocking on the closed door.

The poem begins and ends with the image of Prague and Faust's house, which are the only precise setting of the poem, which is rendered as an endless loop with the repetitiveness of the usage of present tense and the act of knocking on the door. Across this setting stands Istanbul alone as a vague concept, representing the poet's longing. The “closed door” also serves as a metaphor of his longing, representing his inability to return to his homeland, or more specifically to Istanbul. The setting of “at midnight” before this metaphor signifies the darkness, emphasising this inability.

His love and longing for Istanbul manifest itself even in his poems from prison, as accepted as a form of homesickness apart from as a result of exile:

And every night, doctor,  
when the prisoners are asleep and the infirmary is deserted,  
my heart stops at a run- down old house

in Istanbul. (Hikmet 2002: 136)

Thus, it is safe to say that Istanbul is a recurring micro-chronotope that adds to and completes the chronotope of homesickness. Another recurring image which can be the micro-chronotope of love, is his love and longing for his partners, both before and during his exile.

Whether he is yearning for Piraye in prison or Münevver in exile, he also yearns for his city and country. And even when he is happy with Vera in Moscow, his happiness is inseparable from his homesickness, which is, in turn, inseparable from his vision of Turkey and the future he envisioned for his people. (Konuk Blasing 2013: 225)

This is, for example, to be seen in the poem he wrote in prison in Istanbul addressing Piraye: “I thought of the world, my country, and you.” (Hikmet 2002: 180). In Çankırı, his waiting for her seems to embody his waiting for his release in the poem “Letters from Chankiri Prison”:

Four o’clock,

no you.

Five o’clock,

nothing.

Six, seven,

tomorrow,

the day after,

and maybe—

who knows... (Hikmet 2002: 185)

By listing of the time and days, an image of passing, but most importantly, never-ending time is created, which is furnished with “maybe / who knows”, completing the image of a lingering and unknown future. As the poem continues, his love for his country and its people becomes his longing for Piraye, and his longing becomes his yearning for being outside again:

3

Wednesday today—

you know,

Chankiri’s market day.

Its eggs and bulgur,



its gilded purple eggplants,  
 will even reach us,  
 passing through our iron door in reed baskets...

Yesterday

I watched them come down from the villages  
 tired,  
 with sorrow under their brows.

They passed by—the men on donkeys,  
 the women on bare feet.

You probably know some of them.

And the last two Wednesdays they probably missed

the red-scarfed, “not-uppity”

lady from Istanbul... (Hikmet 2002: 108-109)

This third part of the poem begins already with a day, Wednesday, which opens the scene ready to be furnished. With the “Chankiri’s market day”, the reader indeed gains a more solid insight into where and when of the scene, which is equipped with colourful images of eggs, bulgur, and eggplants. Arguably the most striking and important spatial and temporal indicators are provided in the next two lines: the fact that these foods will reach them points to a time that is to come, and “iron door” refers to the entrance of the prison, pinpointing the exact location. The two lines “Yesterday / I watched them come down from the villages” provides another layer of the spatial and temporal elements as they expand the scene to another past time. The description of the people supplies more information on this expanded time, but especially “tired” contributes to another past time since it points to an event, most probably working, that made the people tired. With the “last two Wednesdays”, the line of the expanded scene is drawn further back, spanning at least two weeks. And lastly, the “lady from Istanbul” who is being missed indicates both a temporal and a spatial, and also both a literal and a metaphorical distance, which is, as argued, linked with Hikmet’s homesickness and the homesickness chronotope. In the series of poems addressed to Piraye titled “9-10 Pm. Poems”, his two loves, namely Istanbul and Piraye, thus, the two micro-chronotopes become one:

Dark news comes from my far-off city  
of honest, hard-working, poor people—  
the real Istanbul,  
which is your home, my love,  
and which I carry in the bag on my back  
wherever I'm exiled, to whatever prison,  
the city I hold in my heart like the loss of child,  
like your image in my eyes... (Hikmet 2002: 108)

These words exemplify what has already been explained: he loves and longs for the “far-off” city in which his love inhabits, from both of which he is exiled. What fully demonstrates how he associates his love for his country with his love for his partner, and therefore his longings for both, is the poem titled “You’re”:

You’re my bondage and my freedom,  
my flesh burning like a naked summer night,  
you are my country.

Hazel eyes marbled green,  
you’re awesome, beautiful, and brave,  
you’re my desire always just out of reach. (Hikmet 2002: 138)

His longing for being able to be outside with Piraye turns into his yearning for his country in which Münnever and their son Memet reside, from all of which he is literally exiled. He associates his partner with his country again in the poem he wrote in exile titled “You”:

You are a field,  
I am the tractor.  
[...]  
You’re a mountain village  
in Anatolia,  
you’re my city,

most beautiful and most unhappy.

You're a cry for help—I mean, you're my country;

the footsteps running toward you are mine. (Hikmet 2002: 155)

Just as he identifies himself with the toys or packages that are meant for Memet but cannot reach him, and implicitly Turkey, he identifies his partners with his country, both of which he cannot, again, reach. When he thinks of his partners, here especially Münevver, he thinks of his country:

Under the chestnut I just thought of you

and you alone—I mean Memet,

just you and Memet, I mean my country... (Hikmet 2002: 190)

Finally, his last partner, Vera, also seems out of reach, which can be explained with the age gap between the two or the fact that Vera was married when they met:

Then she called out from Poland, but I couldn't answer,

I couldn't ask, "Where are you, my rose, where are you?"

"Come," she said, but I couldn't reach her,

the train was going like it would never stop,

I was choking with grief.

[...]

Then suddenly I knew I'd been on that train for years

—I'm still amazed at how or why I knew it—

and always singing the same great song of hope,

I'm forever leaving the cities and women I love,

and carrying my losses like wounds opening inside me,

I'm getting closer, closer to somewhere. (Hikmet 2002: 235)

All in all, through all these experiences; after being away or being kept away from his country as a student, as a prisoner, and finally as an exile, after being away from his partners and his child, he came to know all sorts of separations:

some people know all about plants some about fish

I know separation

some people know the names of the stars by heart

I recite absences (Hikmet 2002: 259)

### Conclusion

The temporal and spatial indicators of a story function not just as a setting but also as a way of telling the story. The theory of chronotope by Bakhtin is a fruitful method to analyse those temporal and spatial indicators. Although it is mostly applied to studies of narrative, chronotope might be beneficial to examine poetry, especially but not necessarily narrative ones. And although the source of the homesickness that an exiled person feels might seem to be obvious, being the home and homeland he/she left behind, looking at this feeling in the writing of the exile can make it easier to place and understand it. And by making use of the theory of chronotope, the functions of the temporal and spatial settings of homesickness can be brought into the light.

For this reason, this article has examined the homesickness in the poems of Turkish poet, Nâzım Hikmet in light of theory of chronotope. This analysis has shown that Hikmet's homesickness for his homeland is mostly settings of blurry, fleeting, and both metaphorically and physically far-away images. His homesickness is interwoven with his love and longing for his partners and his son. He identifies himself with the toys, letters, and, in general, goods addressed to his son, which cannot be reached and delivered to him, and identifies his homeland, his home city, and, in general, his home with his partners; thus, his homesickness with his separation from them. Hikmet almost always carried two loves at his heart: "[t]here is never one of anything, but always two women, two loves, two cities, two countries, two commitments—they make him a 'whole person'" (Konuk Blasing 2013: 225). He loved Münnevver when he was with Piraye, he fell in love with Vera when he was in exile away from Turkey and from Münnevver. He loved and yearned for Turkey while residing in the Soviet Union. He always longed for Istanbul, although he was fond of Moscow. "These splittings (or doublings) that collect [Hikmet]'s emotional history in the poems" (Konuk Blasing 2013: 225) present, as argued, a chronotope of homesickness, which is enriched with the micro-chronotopes. The micro-chronotopes within a poem as well as the salient micro-chronotopes such as love chronotope and Istanbul chronotope found in numerous poems provide a rich number of elements that are linked to the macro-chronotope of homesickness by painting a picture of both literally and metaphorically distant, sometimes fleeting, but always never-ending settings of separation. A lingering image of events and places, an awaiting of some goods or letters or visits, vivid images of Turkish people and Istanbul, and, arguably most remarkably, his partners add up to his homesickness. Hikmet's love for his country reflects his longing for it, and his love and longing for the women in his life merge with and fuse in this longing for his country,

thus, his homesickness. All these images of fleeting settings as well as identifications provide the chronotope of homesickness.

### Bibliography

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics". *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist, 1981, pp. 84-258.
- Hikmet, Nâzım. *Bütün Şiirleri*. 4th ed., Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008.
- . *Poems of Nâzım Hikmet*. Trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, revised and expanded ed. Persea Books, 2002.
- Konuk Blasing, Mutlu. *Nâzım Hikmet: The Life and Times of Turkey's World Poet*. Persea Books, 2013.
- Ladin, Joy. "'It was not Death': The Poetic Career of the Chronotope." *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives*, by Bemong et al., 2010, pp. 131-155.

ETKI:	ETKİ:
<i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>	<i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021	e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

## Tracing Matrilineality in Alice Walker's *Meridian* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

Marietta Kosma | DPhil | University of Oxford  
[marietta.kosma@lmh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:marietta.kosma@lmh.ox.ac.uk)

### Abstract

In the article “Tracing Matrilineality in Alice Walker’s *Meridian* and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*”, I will explore the Black Nationalist assumption that motherhood is the sole pillar of communal life, crucial to the physical and cultural survival of black communities through a consideration of Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1976) and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* (1988). Notably, individuality and motherhood are locked in opposition in Black Nationalist discourse, as motherhood entailed a sacrifice of selfhood to a degree. Black Nationalists expected their mothers to place their needs behind those of everyone else. I want to examine the role that Meridian, Mrs. Hills, Cocoa and Miranda played as mothers in the cultural construction of their communities. I would like to examine the degree to which these maternal figures are depicted as cornerstones of black resistance and custodians of life-sustaining African American traditions, as well as how these novels position them as individuals. I will attempt to answer the question of how the marginalized flees from systems of subjugation and attempts to dissolve the strictures of white supremacist imperialist patriarchy. In addition, I would like to explore the alternative modes of being available to Meridian’s and Cocoa’s due to their non-communal or even anti-communal choices.

### Keywords:

Motherhood,  
 American literature,  
 community,  
 Black nationalism.

### Article History:

*Received:* 20.09.2021

*Accepted:* 17.11.2021

### Citation Guide:

Kosma, Marietta. “Tracing Matrilineality in Alice Walker’s *Meridian* and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*.” *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 17-37.

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKİ: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## Alice Walker'ın *Meridian*'ı ile Gloria Naylor'un *Mama Day*'inde Anaerkilliğin İzini Sürmek

Marietta Kosma | DPhil | Oxford Üniversitesi  
marietta.kosma@lmh.ox.ac.uk

### Özet

Bu makale, Alice Walker'ın *Meridian* (1976) ve Gloria Naylor'un *Mama Day* (1988) romanlarını göz önünde bulundurarak, Siyahi toplumlarda fiziksel ve kültürel açıdan hayati önem taşıyan anneliğin toplumsal yaşamın tek direği olduğuna dair Siyahi Milliyetçi varsayımı irdelemeyi amaçlar. Özellikle, bireysellik ve annelik Siyah Milliyetçi söylemde birbiriyle çelişen iki olgudur, çünkü annelik bir dereceye kadar benlikten fedakarlık etmeyi gerektirir. Siyahi Milliyetçiler, annelerin kendi ihtiyaçlarını diğer herkesin ihtiyacı karşılandıktan sonra karşılamaları beklentisindeydiler. Bu çalışmada, *Meridian*, Mrs. Hills, Cocoa ve Miranda'nın toplumlarının kültürel inşasında anneler olarak oynadıkları roller incelenecektir. Bu anne figürlerinin Siyahi direnişin temel taşları ve yaşamı sürdüren Afro-Amerikan geleneklerinin koruyucuları olarak temsil edilişleri ve bu romanların onları bireyler olarak nasıl konumlandığı incelenecektir. Marjinalleştirilmişlerin boyun eğdirme sistemlerinden nasıl kaçtıkları ve beyaz üstünlükçü emperyalist ataerkilliğin kısıtlamalarını nasıl çözmeye çalıştıkları tartışılacaktır. Ek olarak, bu çalışmada, *Meridian* ve *Cocoa*'ların toplumsal olmayan ve hatta toplumsal-karşıtı seçimleri nedeniyle varoluşsal alternatif biçimleri incelenecektir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Annelik,  
Amerikan edebiyatı,  
Topluluk,  
Siyahi milliyetçilik.

### Makale Bilgileri:

Geliş : 20.09.2021

Kabul : 17.11.2021

### Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Kosma, Marietta. "Tracing Matrilineality in Alice Walker's *Meridian* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *ETKİ: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 17-37.

“When she tried to defend herself by telling him the children were just frightened of him because he was drunk he beat her senseless. That was the he knocked out a tooth. He knocked out one and loosened one or two more. She wanted to leave him, but there was no place to go” (Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* 32).

In this essay “tracing matrilineality”, I will explore the Black Nationalist assumption that motherhood is the sole pillar of communal life, crucial to the physical and cultural survival of black communities through a consideration of Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1976) and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* (1988). It is confirmed by Simeon-Jones that black mothers “serve[d] as a pillar [...] in the community” (90). Notably, individuality and motherhood are locked in opposition in Black Nationalist discourse, as motherhood entailed a sacrifice of selfhood to a degree. As Hill Collins affirms black nationalists expected their mothers “to place their needs behind those of everyone else” (174). I want to examine the role that *Meridian*, Mrs. Hills, Cocoa and Miranda played as mothers in the cultural construction of their communities. I would like to examine the degree to which these maternal figures are depicted as cornerstones of black resistance and custodians of life-sustaining African American traditions, as well as how these novels position them as individuals. I chose to focus in this chapter on *Meridian* and *Mama Day*, community-oriented, matrilineal narratives because they monumentalize and dignify black women and their culture. I borrow the term ‘matrilineal narrative’ from Tess Cosslett who defines it as a narrative that “either tells the stories of several generations of women at once, or which shows how the identity of the central character is crucially formed by her female ancestors” (7).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, female bonding across and within one’s generation is central. The women at the center of the narratives I have chosen to investigate, exist in a state of conflict vis-a- vis their community that queries the ordering practice of Black Nationalism the privileging of collective self-definition. Black women are particularly vulnerable to the regulating impulse of the communal, especially in a nationalist context. For these black mothers, to be member of a community is “to be posed in exteriority, having to do with an outside in the very intimacy of an inside” (Nancy xxvi). Ultimately, their membership to the community makes them feel exposed.

I identify Walker and Naylor as Black Women Renaissance writers. Black Women Renaissance writers began writing in the 1970s and reached their peak in the 1980s. BWR narratives paid homage to black women and specifically to black mothers because of their quintessential role in the cultural construction of their communities. By commemorating strong black foremothers and by honoring their contribution to their respective communities, Walker and Naylor imparted their imprint on black cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism is more directly

<sup>1</sup> “In feminist matrilineal narratives there are two time-frames going on at once. There is a synchronic horizontal plane, on which the generations of women are united by a common femaleness; and a diachronic, vertical axis of descent, leading back into the past and forward into the future” (Cosslett 7).



relevant to my discussion due to its palpable impact on the black literature of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Walker and Naylor's focus on female matrilineal tradition could be seen as a response to the masculine nationalist tradition of the previous decades, underscored by the Black Power Movement in America, disrupting it. Masculine nationalist tradition valued women solely for their services to the patriarchal black family, castigating them as a "womb" of black fighters (Cleaver 208). Robert Staples also argued that "from her [a black woman's] womb have come the revolutionary warriors of our time" (346). Black nationalists saw value only in reproductive femininity. According to Robert J. Patterson, all they wanted was black women to give birth to "(male) babies (warriors) for the revolution as a way to consign black women to the role of mother and force their economic dependence" (93). In addition, Hill Collins states that motherhood "working on behalf of the new Black nation" was considered to be the ultimate benchmark of women's value for the African American community (174).

The themes central to matrifocal nationalism that will be explored in this chapter are the passing down of knowledge of black resistance from generation to generation, the exploration of diverse forms of mothering and the issue of female bonding. In the 1970s, black female writers were in dialogue with the tenets of black cultural nationalism. Their goal was to provide "unbiased and full characterizations of black women", whereas black nationalists aimed at depicting black communities solely positively (Dubey 2). The BWR female writers of the 1970s aimed at constructing fully-fledged psychological profiles of female characters to reveal the full nature of black female subjectivity. The BWR novels written in the 1970s depicted black communities realistically on the most part, introducing a "productive interplay of differences" to "subvert ideological celebration of a unified black community" (Dubey 153). The communities described were in the most part replete with anxiety about the roles of women as "Obedient Daughter[s]," "Devoted [Wives]," and "Adoring Mother[s]" (Walker, *Meridian* 19). BWR novels of the 1970s disheveled these assumptions about black womanhood, "imagin[ing] a different script for women" (McDowell, "The self in bloom" 103). BWR writers explored the parameters of community belonging. They declined to be bound by the black cultural nationalist assumption of women being "degraded matriarchs who "emasculated" black men" (Penier 5).

### **Matrifocal Nationalism and the Fear of Disinheritance in the 1980s.**

According to Gloria Wade-Gayles, the BWR novels of the 1980s "recite black matrilineage" (8). Contrary to the 1970s, when black motherhood had been subject to relentless scrutiny, the 1980s novels were "packed full of female achievement" (Ogunyemi 29) that was the effect of "motherwork" (Hill Collins). These novels lavished praise on black mothers and

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of brevity and convenience, I have used the term black nationalism throughout the chapter to refer to cultural, and not revolutionary, nationalism.

foremothers, evoking a womanist ideology that sprang from African dreams, myths, histories and memories – what Toni Morrison called the “discredited knowledge” of black people.<sup>3</sup> BWR novels of the 1980s firmly placed motherhood and matriliney at the center of communal and national life; they used what Elleke Boehmer called “a strategic matrifocal nationalism” to forge unity and provide continuity between ancestral and modern times (101). Home was rendered as the central locus of the reproduction of black culture and black foremothers its guardians. Female writers of the 1980s “celebrated matrilineal roots, emphasized the iconic status of the Black mother and underlined the importance of female networks” (Penier 3).

Whereas novels of the 1970s depicted the devastating repercussions of structural oppression on black motherhood, the 1980s novels reinstated black motherhood as a site of possibility. In other words, in the 1970s “female possibility” was viewed as “massacred on the site of motherhood” (Rich 13) whereas the novels of the 1980s pose a different treatment of black motherhood, as the trope of “motherwork” was re-evaluated (Hill Collins 213). A possible reason for this ideological shift could be “the pressures of negative publicity” in reciprocation to the unfavorable depiction of black motherhood and specifically of the black community in the novels of the 1970s (McDowell, “The self in bloom” 135). BWR literary criticism of the 1980s embraced Walker’s theories about the role played by black mothers in insuring black cultural and political survival and also praised the strength of the mother-daughter bond. Braxton argues that black mothers “remain sources of consciousness and personal strength: models of independence, self-reliance, perseverance, and self-determination” (“Afro-American Culture” xxv). What I find troubling is that critics such as Braxton, argued that it is only through the experience of mothering that black women can form their sense of self. The implication of such assertions is that the black women who do not have a child or do not mother a child, are denied membership in the community. Only if they embrace the role of the mother, they can be accepted. Bell Hooks is also concerned about this legacy of marginalization and claims that womanists were “promot[ing] monolithic notions of black female experience” based on suffering (232).

The questions that I will attempt to answer in this chapter are to what extent are mothers central or peripheral to identity formation, both for the individual and the collective? How does the marginalized flee from systems of subjugation and attempts to dissolve the strictures of white supremacist imperialist patriarchy? What alternative modes of being do Meridian’s and Cocoa’s non-communal or even anti-communal choices suggest? Ultimately how do such freedom practices disrupt Black Nationalist theorizations of the individual and the community? To what extent is the mother-figure central in social and political resistance? In order to answer these questions, it is

<sup>3</sup> See Trudier Harris for a detailed discussion of the deployment of culture-bearing women and the transmission of popular memory. Harris, Trudier. *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*. U of Tennessee P, 1991.

important to consider “what choices are available to black Women outside their own society’s approval and what are the risks of individualism in a determinedly individualistic” community? (Glover xiii). I will examine how Walker and Naylor construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct motherhood and the significance of those gestures for the political implications of their writing.

I would also like to engage with the question raised by Bell Hooks who argued that “black females must ‘invent’ selves - what kind of self?” (224). I argue that this question has been overlooked and mostly remains unanswered. Even though “black women [were portrayed] being wild in resistance, confronting barriers that impede self-actualization” this new self is rarely defined (Hooks 224). Departing from hooks who thought that BWR writers were “not able to express the wider, more radical dimensions of themselves, in sustained and fruitful ways” (Hooks 224), I will argue that these black mothers developed a new form of feminist consciousness, creating what I call an oppositional Black aesthetic countering patriarchy. What I intend to do is question and rethink how the black mother’s positioning can be understood both in parts and as a whole. A process of interrogating this ‘new’ self that hooks proclaims will enrich hooks’ quest of radical subjectivity. I want to extend her idea of selfhood by moving away from merely interrogating the individual’s self-awareness to examine the communal aspect of the interaction of mothers. To what degree the idea that “the individual story, the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” applies to motherhood narratives of the 1980s (Jameson 85-86)? It is interesting to investigate whether this paradigm of the individual’s experience as a collective experience is rather an overgeneralization, a vast homogenization of the nationalist experience.

### **Personal and political subjectivity in *Meridian*.**

Set during the U.S. civil rights movement, Alice Walker's second novel *Meridian* is the coming-of-age story of Meridian Hill. In general in her novels, Walker examines the dynamics of being a black woman. In *Meridian*, Walker explores the notions of individual autonomy, self-reliance and self-realization central in the tradition of the Bildungsroman. She accounts for Meridian’s relationship with her mother in her effort to find her identity and develop a completeness of being.

Existing literary criticism focuses on the novel's political context and points towards Walker's feminist critique of Black Nationalist discourse. Karen F. Stein views *Meridian* as "a fictionalized political essay, with the result that the inwardness of the characters is sometimes sacrificed" (130). In "Teaching Alice Walker's *Meridian* : Civil Rights According to Mothers," Brenda O. Daly states that *Meridian* "tells the story of the Civil Rights Movement from the point of

view of a mother - or, more accurately, from the point of view of a variety of different mothers, old and young, white and black, violent and nonviolent, self-denying and self-defining" (240). Her reading focuses on the maternal discourse that informs the novel and draws a careful distinction among the different constructions of motherhood in the novel. However, what I find troubling is that she ultimately essentializes Meridian's identity, castigating her solely as a figure who "mothers the community", overlooking her involvement to the Civil Rights movement (Daly 253). In the same vein, in her reading of *Meridian*, Susan Danielson focuses on the civil rights movement, casting aside Meridian's "personal development and salvation" (Danielson 317). She perceives Meridian's subjectivity as solely linked to the rediscovery of her personhood through her membership to her community. In my reading, I do not wish to set an opposition between Meridian's personal and political transformation which seems to privilege personal subjectivity over political praxis but I would like to show instead the connection between these two discourses and how they inform each other.

In the beginning of the novel, Meridian is in a state of decay. She is experiencing dizzy spells and has no hair. Her face is "wasted and rough, the skin a sallow, unhealthy brown, with pimples across her forehead and on her chin. Her eyes were glassy and yellow and did not seem to focus at once. Her breath, like her clothes, was sour" (Walker, *Meridian* 25). One of the most prominent obstacles that Meridian faces in her quest of selfhood is the traditional images of women. She struggles because "she lives in a society that domesticates conformity that censures individual expression, especially for women" (McDowell, "The self in bloom 263). Nevertheless, she flourishes into a prototype of individual autonomy. In her community, the traditional image of the 'mummy' is deeply valued. She exists in sharp contrasts to the image of the "Obedient Daughter", "Devoted Wife" and "Adoring Mother" (Walker, *Meridian* 20). This image of woman as "a mindless body, a sex creature, something to hang false hair and nails on" is challenged by Meridian who is a human rights activist (Walker, *Meridian* 70).

Mrs. Hills, Meridian's mother is one of these women who pay attention solely to appearances, as she embodies the devoted wife type. "Her children were spotless wherever they went. In their stiff, almost inflexible garments, they were enclosed in the starch of her anger, and had to keep their distance to avoid providing the soggy wrinkles of contact that would cause her distress" (Walker, *Meridian* 79). Mrs. Hill does not acknowledge her children's emotional needs, instead they become "stiff, almost inflexible", keeping their distance from their mother and from the rest of the community. Especially Meridian, is emotionally unavailable. She is basically left motherless because her mother is psychologically incapable of mothering her. The mother embodies Adrienne Rich's assertion that "the loss of the daughter to the mother, is the essential

female tragedy" (Rich 240).

*Meridian* does not receive the fundamental knowledge about sex from her mother. She only learns about it when she gets raped in a local funeral home and subsequently forms a relationship with Eddie because she needs to feel protected from the men surrounding her. Their relationship ultimately fails because *Meridian* does not enjoy having sex with him. Sex for *Meridian* is not pleasureable nor does it signify self-fulfillment. Eddie complains about *Meridian* that her legs are "like somebody starched them shut" (Walker, *Meridian* 57). He forms an affair with another woman because of his wife's disinterest in sex. *Meridian* views sex as a conduit primarily linked to procreation and subsequently motherhood as a "ball and chain" (Walker, *Meridian* 63). Motherhood further signifies for her the means through which she becomes further cut off from life.

### **Have you stolen anything?**

The opening chapters' events commence Walker's textual construction of black female subjectivity. *Meridian* is a daughter, however not an obedient one and a mother who denounces motherhood because the demands of the role of the mummy are stifling. It is in her role as daughter that *Meridian*'s independence surfaces. She views her mother as "black motherhood personified" due to the self-sacrifices she makes (*Meridian* 97). For her insurgent self-awareness to surface, *Meridian* needs to break free from her mother's possessive hold. She aims freeing herself from her mother's shadow, a "willing know-nothing, a woman of ignorance" (*Meridian* 30). She discredits her mother's personal choices as she believes that she "was not a woman who should have had children" (*Meridian* 39). Even though Mrs. Hill was a woman who valued her personal independence as a schoolteacher and wanted "more of life to happen to her", she felt as if something was missing, as if she should have had a "secret mysterious life" (*Meridian* 39). She became married to Mr. Hill, *Meridian*'s father because she thought that this way she would experience some excitement in her personal life. She perceived motherhood as a distraction and for this reason passes on to her daughter, *Meridian*, a sense of guilt.

While many critics have pointed out the theme of guilt as the driving force of *Meridian*'s actions, I would like to argue instead that *Meridian*'s mother never forgive "her community, her family, the whole world, for not warning her against children" is herself a victim of the myth of black motherhood<sup>4</sup> (*Meridian* 40). Mrs. Hill is aware of "the fact [that mothers] were dead, living enough for their children" (*Meridian* 51). *Meridian* becomes aware through the discursive construction of black motherhood that it robs a woman of her life, both literally and figuratively speaking. *Meridian* realizes that she has stolen something. She felt guilty because she realized that

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Christian uses this term – myth of black motherhood- to expose the essentialization of black women as "earth mothers", women who sacrifice themselves in order for their children to be able to thrive (465). Other literary critics and scholars have also used this expression.

she was “stealing her mother’s serenity [...] shattering her emerging self” however, she did not how (Meridian 51).

Even though Meridian denounces Mrs. Hill’s mothering abilities, her own experiences align with those of her mother. “The ambiguous designation [of motherhood] applies equally to and beyond [Meridian and her mother], universalizing and specifying simultaneously” (Collins 178). At the age of seventeen, Meridian is left on her own to consider what to do with her life and her child’s life. She was forced to get married because she got pregnant however, struggles to embody the role of the devoted wife. Due to her involvement in activism, she earns a scholarship for Saxton college. However, in order to attend college she would have to give up her child for adoption. When Meridian says no to motherhood and decides to give her baby for adoption, she offends and loses her mother, her family, and her community. She feels guilty for leaving her baby, and cannot adequately explain why. Meridian’s rejection of the role of motherhood could be viewed as a denaturalization of the legacy of “enslaved women [who] had been made miserable by the sale of their children [...] and the daughters of these enslaved women [who] had thought their greatest blessing from ‘Freedom’ was that it meant they could keep their own children” (Dubey 91). Women during slavery did everything within their power to have their children with them. They were willing to even sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their children. They were feeling morally obliged to take on the sole responsibility for their children. Meridian’s situation is different from that of her foremothers as in her case giving away her child signifies freedom. She feels guilty about giving away her child yet acknowledges that “she had saved a small person’s life” (Meridian 76). She knows that he would have more opportunities in life by being mothered by someone else but this does not acquit her of her guilt. She feels “condemned, consigned to penitence for life” (Meridian 77). Meridian makes the choice to protect her child by giving it away, she adopts a moral stance but ironically she feels alienated from her foremothers’ legacy, even though she is herself is willing to give her life for her child.

Meridian feels unworthy of her maternal history because she gives away her own son whereas, black women had fought to keep their own children. She is aware of her foremothers’ hardships – as they have been slaves and were often denied their children even though they would do anything for them. Meridian is aware of the gap between her foremothers’ endorsement of motherhood and her own ambivalent thoughts about this institution. Meridian’s mother thinks of freedom as slave women do; as having the ability to “keep [your] own children” (Meridian 91). She believes that “as far as she knew,” she was “the only member” of “an unworthy minority, for which there was no precedent” (Meridian 91). Meridian is tormented by the memory of the slave mothers who were forced to sacrifice their own needs, starve themselves to death in order to

provide nourishment to their children. She believes that these women "had persisted in bringing them all (the children, the husband, the family, the race) to a point far beyond where she, in her mother's place, her grandmother's place, her great-grandmother's place would have stopped" (*Meridian* 121). Mothers who need to live a life full of personal sacrifices are seen as the norm. Motherhood is depicted in a way that limits the options available to women. These women are valued because they give up their independence, their personal life in order to raise their children.

Meridian feels that she cannot confront her mother alone to inform her about her decision, so she brings with her two women that function as her supporters; Delores Jones, a movement worker and Nelda Henderson, an old classmate of hers. These women have different qualities, yet support the same cause. Delores is intrepid, exclaiming to Meridian that "You have a right to go to college" (*Meridian* 83). Nelda shares her own personal experiences with Meridian. She was forced to help her mother to take care of her younger siblings. She became pregnant when she turned fourteen years old as she was not adequately informed about sex. Not even Mrs. Hill, her neighbor did not inform her adequately about sex. In *Meridian*, no adult talks about motherhood and the changes it inflicts in one's life because sex remains taboo. The community's attitude is reflected in the statement "Everybody else that slips up like you did *bears* it" (*Meridian* 84). Mrs. Hill accuses Meridian about her decision to give her child for adoption, exclaiming that "It's just selfishness. You ought to hang your head in shame. I have six children [...] though I never wanted to have any. And I raised every one myself" (*Meridian* 75). She shames her daughter for her decision even though she is aware of the opportunity that opens up for her. Meridian is having herself some conflicting thoughts and is second-guessing her decision after arguing with her mother but ultimately gives away her child.

In the chapter "The Happy Mother," Walker describes the teenager Meridian's experience of motherhood as slavery. Although she was told by everyone that she was an exemplary young mother, it took "everything she had to tend to the child" (*Meridian* 63). Meridian is well "aware of patriarchy's desire to 'encase' her, to 'process' her according to the secular code of the media" (Pifer 83). Meridian rejects embodying the figure of the happy mother as it would stunt her growing individualism. Meridian starts thinking about committing suicide and considers self-harm because she cannot enjoy the experience of motherhood. She does not have the necessary resources to raise her child and cannot tend for her child's needs. No one is aware of Meridian's feelings of inadequacy that led her to contemplate suicide as a viable choice because she feels excluded from her community.

## The Saxon Type

Meridian needs to forsake any memory she has about having sex in order to be part of the university's community. "The knowledge of sex was only acceptable when tempered by the institution of marriage" (Meridian 111). She wanted to maintain this façade especially in front of Truman, a sophisticated Black man who she starts dating because she is aware that "had she approached him on the street dragging her child with her by the hand, he would never have glanced at her" (Meridian 89). She did not even stand a chance to form a relationship with him if he had known that she had given birth to a child. Mrs. Hill castigates Meridian as morally reprehensible uttering "I always thought you were a good girl and all the time you were fast" reflecting the views of the wider community (Meridian 87). Even the doctor who performs an abortion on Meridian assumes that Meridian is 'fast' to be in need of such an operation. He angrily states "I could tie your tubes [...] if you'll let me in on some of all this extracurricular activity" (Meridian 112). Meridian needs to be viewed "as chaste and pure as the driven snow" at college (Meridian 89). The emphasis at Saxon was on form, and the preferred 'form' was that of the school girl who "knew and practiced all the proper social rules" (Meridian 95). The concepts of Ladyhood and chastity are contradictory and therefore, Meridian rejects both. She distinguishes herself as a "willful, sinful girl" (Meridian 94).

The extent to which Saxon upholds tradition in its emphasis on form, is dramatized in the account of Meridian's choice to become a substitute mother for a pregnant homeless girl with learning difficulties known as the Wild Child. This decision of hers comes in contrast to her earlier decision to abandon her own son. When Meridian sees the so called Wild Child, a thirteen year old girl for the first time, she goes on a death-like trance. She started hearing "a voice that cursed her existence; an existence that could not live up to the standard of motherhood that had gone before" (Meridian 78). This was the moment that led to the beginning of her spiritual degeneration. She feels obliged to help her even though she embodies the opposite of every ideal that Saxon represents. The Wild Child is independent and unkempt, a threat towards Saxon's social etiquette. The house mother "the only person in the honors house that Wild Child trembles and cowers at" confronts the girl telling her that she cannot stay there any longer as "this is a school for young ladies" (Meridian 37). Frightened by the house mother, Wild Child storms out of college and gets run over by a speeding car. The girl could not have survived anyway in that environment due to her independent spirit. The Wild Child does not get buried on campus because such an action was not tolerated by its administrators. When the other members of the Saxon community feel that they need to rebel, they are so compelled in maintaining their membership to this group that they do not know how to do it. Rioters for Wild Child's death destroyed the statue of Sojourner truth, the



most potentially subversive object on campus. It should be noted that while figures such as Sojourner Truth provide Meridian with significant strategies for coping with everyday life, her own mother, Mrs. Hill fails to do so.

Wild Child's death signifies Meridian's transition from motherhood to a subjectivity that revolves around her life as a student centered on her political activism. She explores the alternatives available to her during the civil rights movement and explores what it means to be a mother not just in a biological sense but in a figurative way as well, in terms of justice. By shedding her prescribed "happy mother" role and standing up for her own needs, Meridian takes the first steps toward becoming a "revolutionary petunia."<sup>5</sup> She stops living by others' standards, learns to bloom for herself, as her rebellious acts will alienate her from the rest of society. Meridian commits herself to the civil rights struggle and disengages from motherhood, a deterrent to her growing individuality. Meridian's decision to become a motherless revolutionary suggests that "there is a forgotten tradition of black women who should be valued for their recalcitrant spirit that puts them on a par with revolutionary black men" (Penier 114). Meridian, who refuses to have children, is a "symbol of a non-reproductive black femininity that refuses to be bound by reproductive determinism" (Penier 114).

In the chapter "Battle Fatigue", contrary to conventional notions of womanhood, Meridian looks like and acts like a male. She has little hair, she wears a cap and does not conform to conventional notions of femininity. I would like to argue that Meridian experiences a queer subversion of identity, as she escapes her position as a woman. She exemplifies Toni Cade Bambara's assertion that "You find your Self in destroying illusions, smashing myths ... being responsible to some truth, to the struggle. That entails [...] cracking through the veneer of this sick society's definition of 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (108). Meridian exposes leadership qualities, typically associated with males. Although she is hindered by police men from completing her mission, "she bravely marches on [...] kick[ing] open the door", leaving every man staring at her (21). A symbolic inversion of roles occurs in this scene and Meridian triumphs over tradition and patriarchal authority.

She is striving towards creating an androgynous, fluid self, deconstructing the prescribed roles stifling her personal growth. She turns into a "man/woman person with a shaved part in close-cut hair, a man's blunt face and thighs, a woman's breast" a woman who helps others "to get used to using their voice" and is not accountable to anyone (Meridian 217). Despite the hardships she has faced, Meridian is able to bring to the forefront the truth of her personal discovery. Meridian

<sup>5</sup> I borrowed this term from Walker's poem 'The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom' in which she notes: "Rebellious. / Against the Elemental Crush. / A Song of Color/ Blooming / For Deserving Eyes/ Blooming Gloriously/ For its Self. / Revolutionary Petunia" ("Revolutionary Petunias" 70).

“slouches off the victim role to reveal her true powerful and heroic identity” (Pearson and Pope 13). Meridian represents change, finding her own route instead of being an imitative marcher.

Ultimately, Meridian does not decide to resolve her problems by dying. In order to avoid being “the tragic hero”, she accepts the sacredness of her own life. As Barbara Christian argues:

“As many radical feminists blamed motherhood for the waste in women's lives and saw it as a dead end for a woman, Walker insisted on a deeper analysis: She did not present motherhood itself as restrictive. It is so because of the little value society places on children, especially black children, on mothers, especially black mothers, on life itself. In the novel, Walker acknowledged that a mother in this society is often buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick." Yet the novel is based on Meridian's insistence on the sacredness of life” (Christian 90).

Meridian does not object to mothers bearing children, or children themselves but she denounces the role that women are expected to portray once they become mothers. She rejects the figure of the black mother who needs to sacrifice her individual personality and concerns and solely live for her children. The only way Meridian can escape this unwanted role is to leave her child and distance herself from her family, coming to terms with her mother's disapproval. She flees the symbolic death of being killed by patriarchy's standards of the obedient daughter and the devoted wife. She transgresses the bounds of sexism and asserts herself against racist patriarchal hegemony, rather than remaining in the margins.

### **On the black mother's identity; the case of Miranda (Mama Day)**

Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* revolves around the story of the descendants of a black slave woman named Sapphira Wade. Sapphira Wade's descendants, Miranda also known as Mama Day and Abigail her sister, are Willow Springs' protectors. Most critics have primarily focused on the themes of cultural inheritance and ancestral belonging overlooking the issue of motherhood in *Mama Day*. They center their conversations on cultural identity and overlook Miranda Day's role as a mother. In “‘The Whole Picture’ in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*,” Susan Meisenhelder argues that Naylor drafts a love story that “deals with the issue of maintaining black cultural identity in the face of attempts by the white world to order, control, and define black people” (405). In the same line of arguing, Nagueyalti Warren points out that the story focuses on the love affair between George and Cocoa and exposes the tension among the individual versus the community. Both critics place their attention on the primacy of George and Cocoa's relationship, two individuals who struggle to find balance among their communal belonging and personal longings. On the one hand, George has been orphaned at a very young age by his mother, a prostitute and grows up adopting Western

ideas. Cocoa on the other hand, also orphaned by her deceased mother, grows up being surrounded by a group of women and her value system is aligned with her African heritage. George and Cocoa's marriage represents the union of the two different value systems. As W.E.B. Du Bois explained in *The Souls of Black Folk*, black people in America had to face a sense of twoness. He argued that "one ever feels his twoness- an American a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (215). This double consciousness prevented them from seeing themselves clearly therefore they form two separate identities; one self that among the public and one self among other African Americans. I would like to argue that this merging is best exemplified by Miranda, widely known as Mama Day. Miranda Day, has been overlooked in academic discourse, yet I submit that she must be the primary character in discussion and therefore, she is at the center of my discussion. I would like to explore the difficulty she is facing finding balance among the part of herself created by her community and the part created by the individual. She is trying to find a way to balance the demands of an identity that calls for allegiance to community and heritage and at the same time for allegiance to individuality. I do not wish to eradicate the primacy of the concerns of critics about cultural belonging but I wish to use their point of view as a departure point to consider to what degree black women maintained their cultural heritage, part of their communal belonging and to what degree they shifted their focus on their individuality. Mama Day is a figure that "functions as an illustration of the psychological tightrope that black people must walk in the creation of their identity" combining her individual needs with her communal positioning (Spears 111).

I want to argue that Miranda's individual standing outweighs her collective standing as Naylor presents to us the pull of the individual in the depiction of her character. Mama Day is the granddaughter of Sapphira Wade's seventh-son, John Paul. She is known by the islanders as Mama Day and she is the last direct descendent of Sapphira Wade, the founder of Willow Springs who is said to have killed her master Bascombe Wade, father of her seven children and returned to Africa walking across the ocean. Miranda is the leader of the Willow Springs community now. More specifically, she is a doctor, a healer and also a midwife, she protects her community from the threats it faces from white lawmen and land developers but most importantly, she is a legacy bearer, keeping the memory of her foremother who has given the people their freedom. The identity assigned to her is important because "of her birthright and because of their very real need for someone to help maintain their sense of self?" (Spears 113). Her own mother has abandoned her at a young age after the loss of Peace, her baby. Miranda loses the opportunity to be mothered and this creates an emotional void. She cannot understand why her mother gave her up and gasps

“but I was your child, too” (Naylor 88). Her mother’s choice to leave her due to personal reasons, forces Miranda to fight for herself and her sister from a very young age. Her mother’s individualistic choice has scared her in the long term, as when she has the opportunity to experience emotional proximity with George, with whom she has fallen in love, she pushes him away. Even though she wants to run away with him because she is in love with him, she refuses to do so because she is aware of her responsibilities towards the other members of her community. She tells him “How can I go with you? [...] One foot before the other, he told her; a voice dancing on the fading night wind” (Naylor 89). Naylor interjects this scene in the narrative, to expose the keen understanding of romantic relationships that Mama Day has. In this occasion, Miranda had the strength to choose the community over the individual.

Ultimately, Miranda is revealed as an older woman who acknowledges that she cannot accomplish everything by herself. Mama Day is one of the most important mother figures in the island, who transmits her memories to the other members of her community. She is the matriarch of Willow Springs, a direct descendant of Sapphira Wade, a defiant figure, who rebels against her oppressor and ultimately kills him, getting a hold of his land for all the slaves of the island. She might not be able to remember Sapphira’s name but she carries her memories through her body. “[C]ultural memory is grounded in a collective history that is enclosed on bodes that bear the physical and psychic scars of trauma. This memory is carried by black bodies as well as on the tongue through orality” (Lamoth 160). Sapphira Wade is Mama Day’s foremother, as Mama Day is the daughter of the seventh son of Sapphira. She is a bearer of resistance and of the memory of her community’s history. Her positioning as a twenty-first subject permits her to consciously assess and maintain her community’s traditions. It is obvious that the community of Willow Springs views her as a mother-figure, but her role as mother is even more personal. Miranda is called “mama” although she does not have any children. She mothered her sister Abigail due to their mother’s escape and subsequent breakdown, as she was not in a position to mother her daughters herself. Miranda reminisces that her childhood was “no time to be young. Little Mama. The cooking, the cleaning, the mending, the gardening for the woman who sat in the porch rocker twisting, twisting on pieces of thread... Being there for mama and child. For sister and child” (Naylor 88). She ponders “Why, even Abigail called me Little Mama till she knew what it was to be one in her own right. Abigail’s had three and I’ve had –Lord can’t count’em- into the hundreds. Everybody’s mama now” (Naylor 89). The need to take up the role of the mother emerged due to her obligation towards her community, her sister and her mother.

Miranda is “an archetypal mother *par excellence*” (Penier 90). Even though Miranda was not Cocoa’s biological mother, her communal mothering was more important than merely experiencing

motherhood. Miranda “reject[ed] breeding in favor of mothering as a multivalent practice” (Thorsson 49). The BWR is abound with such “maternal archetype[s]” (Braxton, “Ancestral Presence” 303), with mothers whose role was to protect the younger generation. They often “[assume] the mythical proportions of the archetypal outraged mother” (Braxton, “Ancestral Presence” 304-5) to protect their children and nation. According to Washington, the black mother’s “sense of herself [is] part of a link in generations of women” (161).

Cocoa is also in need of a mother and is subsequently mothered by Mama Day, who she perceives as her mother. She is mothered by Mama Day although being Abigail’s granddaughter. Patricia Hill Collins has demonstrated the critical role that race plays in shaping ideas about motherhood. She has described how African American women have engaged in ‘othermothering’ – raising children alongside women-centred, community-based networks to make sure that the black community survives. In that context, motherhood was understood more as a communal rather than an individual responsibility.<sup>6</sup> Cocoa believes that Abigail and Mama Day make the perfect mother, as Abigail is comforting whereas Mama Day is organizing. Cocoa is the most appropriate candidate to preserve Sapphira’s legacy. Cocoa is “best able to adapt to both environments”, western and African (Lamoth 163). Mama Day is the figure that helps her realize that she is necessary for the preservation of the island’s cultural tradition. Cocoa is reluctant to accept that her role as a cultural bearer. When she is sick, near to death Mama Day tries to help her heal through reminding her, her connection to the Western world and George. She argues that:

“he believes in himself.. but she needs that belief buried in George. Of his own accord he has to hand it over to her. She needs his hands in hers... so she can connect it up with all the believing that had gone before. A single moment was all she asked, even a fingertip to touch hers here at the other place. So together they could be the bridge for Baby Girl to walk over” (Naylor 285).

Miranda understands that she is not capable to accomplish everything by herself, she is able to discern when she needs to ask for help. More specifically, when Cocoa is sick she seeks help from George, as she understands that “he’s part of her” so in order to help Cocoa she needs to cooperate with him (Naylor 267). She does not act singularly in such crisis situations. She “does not take self-congratulatory stands [n]or [does she] seek to stand alone in the limelight (Spears 112). George helps Mama Day nurture Cocoa back to health and accept her role as a memory bearer. Her experience mirrors the African American women’s strife to grapple with their double consciousness that forces them to choose between their individual identities and their communal

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000, pp. 178-183. Also see Stanlie M. James, ‘Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation?’. *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, edited by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia. Routledge, 1993, pp. 44-54.

selves. The question that arises is should they disassociate with the communal aspect of their identity and tune in with their individuality or not? Should they sacrifice the needs of their family in order to tend to their personal professional aspirations or sacrifice instead their professional longings for the sake of their family?

African- American women were forced to make between their own needs and the needs of their families. These women were conflicted between catering to their own needs or sacrificing themselves for the sake of their family. This dilemma is ever-present in black women's communities. Frances Beale in "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female" confirms that those women "who feel that the most important thing that they can contribute to the black nation is children are doing themselves a great injustice" (149). She actively reaches out to women to join the workforce instead of merely "sitting at home reading bedtime stories" (149). Her call is not merely circumscribed by making a choice among family and self, but also by thinking through the categories of self and the community. I argue that the black woman is impelled to acknowledge the need of the community in shaping her own identity however, she does not have to choose the community to the exclusion of her own desires as Miranda does. I suggest that it is critical for her find a balance among the stipulations of the individual self and those of the community.

### **Quilting to sustain and transmit matrilineal heritage.**

According to the family tree at the beginning of the novel, Cocoa is Abigail's granddaughter and Mama Day's grandniece, the last member of the matriarchal lineage of the Day family. Mama Day and her sister Abigail create for Cocoa a wedding quilt which signifies the continuation of the Day line, not biologically but culturally this time. Mama Day chooses the double-ring pattern for Cocoa's wedding quilt, a difficult pattern to make: "From edges to center, the patterns had to twine around each other. It would serve her right if it took till next year, and it probably would" (Naylor 135). Mama Day denies settling for a simpler pattern when Abigail informs her that Cocoa does no mind and utters that this quilt "will be passed on to [her] great-grand nieces and nephews when it is time for them to marry. And since [she] won't be around to defend [her]self, [she] do[es]n't want them thinking [she] was a lazy old somebody who couldn't make a decent double-ring quilt" (Naylor 136). Therefore, Mama Day is sewing herself into the quilt, passing on her perseverance to the next generations. Even though the process of quilting most often involves the contribution of many women, Cocoa's quilt is special as it is sewn only by Mama Day and Abigail. Novels such as *Mama Day* celebrated multigenerational black families that were presided over by wise maternal figures, emphasizing "the unity of the tribe [and giving] a new twist on the family plot" (McDowell, "*The Changing Same*" 123).

Given that Mama Day and Abigail are the direct descendants Sapphire Wade, the history of all Day women must be stitched onto the quilt:

“A bit of her Daddy’s Sunday shirt is matched with Abigail’s lace slip, the collar from Hope’s graduation dress, the palm of Grace’s baptismal gloves [...] corduroy from her uncles, broadcloth from her great-uncles. Her needle fastens the satin trim of Peace’s receiving blanket to Cocoa’s baby jumper to a pocket from her own gardening apron [...] [t]he front of [Cocoa’s now deceased mother’s] gingham shirtwaist” (Naylor 137).

Every member of the family is included in the quilt, even Cocoa’s distant great-grandmother Ophelia and her mother whom has left her. From the way that the quilt is stitched, it is obvious that there is no hierarchy in the piecing of the fabrics, no borders between the center and the margins, as the scraps are overlapping. By stitching the pieces of the quilt together, she creates a cultural web of stories to be passed on from generation to generation. She wonders:

“Could she take herself out? Could she take out Abigail? Could she take ‘em all out and start again? With what? Miranda finishes the curve and runs her hands along the stitching. When it’s done right, you can’t tell where one ring ends and the other begins. It’s like they ain’t sewn at all, they grew up out of nowhere” (Naylor 137).

Mama Day decides therefore, to create the double-ring quilt because Cocoa is the last descendant of the Day lineage and she is paramount to the reconstruction of the Day women’s stories. In addition, the quilt is the physical thread that connects black women across time and space. By owning the quilt, Cocoa continues this matrilineal lineage and preserves the cultural memory of the Day women. It is also important to note that the quilt is not only a way of making sure that the matrilineal lineage will be preserved but it is also a means through which the communal past can be altered in the future through temporal changes. The quilt is the trope that weaves together the past, the present, and the future.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, motherhood was seen as the primary function expected of women during the 1960s and 1970s according to Black Nationalist discourse. Walker and Naylor support the view that such reductionism of women’s value occurs because black women had little control over societal structures that interpret this aspect of their potentiality. They agree that motherhood is not merely an issue of the individual but rather an ideology that is interwoven into every aspect of society’s structures. Through *Meridian* and *Mama Day* they expose the complexity of the ideologies surrounding motherhood. Part of the reason why I chose to analyze these two novels in this

chapter is because both Walker and Naylor share a profound belief in the value of women as individuals, whether they identify with the communal longing of motherhood or not. Through their novels, Walker and Naylor have challenged the predominant views about motherhood held by their respective societies. They have poised their personal experiences of motherhood, not hesitating to stand in opposition to the literary tradition that preceded them. *Meridian* and *Mama's Day* constitute a highly mediated responses to Black Nationalist utterances on motherhood. These texts "conduct a subtextual dialogue with black nationalist discourse, adopting the several strategies of directly contradicting, berating, appeasing, beguiling, and dodging an assumed and typical Black Aesthetic reader" (Dubey 11). Walker and Naylor produce ideologically incongruous figures of the black mother and the nationalist. By creating this fictional, ideological hybrid they expose the inconsistencies of Black Nationalist discourse. *Meridian* and *Cocoa* attempt to question, a maternal heritage that is at odds with their own understanding of their positioning in their community. These protagonists are deprived of a sustained relationship with their maternal ancestors or the personal experience of maternity. They are focused on the present as reclaiming, re-inscribing and preserving community is not their main concern. These women in their continuous refusal to embrace sisterhood, undermine the "bonds of mutuality or coalitions of resistance" that one would expect them to reproduce (Campbell 34). They proclaim societal change through individual awareness in order to transform their society's ideology of motherhood. Walker and Naylor celebrate black mothers' strength and sacrifices they make on an individual level in order to support their daughters but at the same time proclaim their right to fullness of life. Walker and Naylor acknowledge the respect for motherhood that African-American culture professes and at the same time contend that women should be valued for themselves and not reduced to a function. Being a mother, does not necessarily proceed from being a biological mother, it is a state of mind.

### Works Cited

- Bambara, Toni Cade. "On the Issue of Roles," *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara, New American Library, 1970, pp.101-110.
- Beale, Frances. "Double Jeopardy: Being Black and Female." *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall, The New Press, 1995, pp. 146-155.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation. Manchester and New York*. Manchester University Press, 2005.
- Braxton, Joanne M. "Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance." *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, edited by



Joanne Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin, Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. xxi-xxx.

---. "Ancestral Presence: The Outraged Mother Figure in Contemporary Afra-American Writing." *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, edited by Joanne Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin, Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. 299–315.

Campbell, Elaine. "Narcissism as Ethical Practice? Foucault, Askesis and an Ethics of Becoming." *Cultural Sociology*, vol.4, no. 1, 2010, pp. 23–44.

Christian, Barbara. "An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*". *Mothering: ideology experience, and agency*, edited by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, Routledge, 1994, pp.95-121.

---. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. Pergamon, 1985.

Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice*. Dell, 1968. Cosslett, Tess. "Feminism, Matrilinealism, and the 'House of Women.'" *Contemporary Women's Fiction. Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1996, pp. 7–11.

Crummell, Alexander. *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses*. Mnemosyne Publishing Inc., 1969.

Daly, Brenda O. "Teaching Alice Walker's *Meridian*: Civil Rights According to Mothers," *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*, edited by Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, University of Tennessee Print, 1991.

Danielson, Susan. "Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Feminism, and the 'Movement.'" *Women's Studies*, vol.16, no.3-4, 1989, pp.317-330.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Three Negro Classics, Avon Books, 1965.

Hill Collins, Patricia. "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, edited by Patricia Hill Collins, Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 221–238.

Hooks, Bell. "Revolutionary Black Women: Making Ourselves a Subject." *Postcolonial Criticism*, edited by Bart Moore-Gilbert and Willy Maley, Longman, 1997, pp. 215–233.

Jameson, Frederic. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, no. 15, 1986, pp. 65–88.

Lamoth, Daphne. "Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*: Bridging Roots and Routes." *African American Review*, vol.39, 2005, pp.155-169.

McDowell, Deborah E. *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory*. Indiana University Press, 1995.

- "The self in bloom: Alice Walker's *"Meridian"*". *CLA Journal* , vol. 24, no. 3, 1981, pp. 262-275.
- Meisenhelder, Susan. "'Whole Picture' in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *African American Review*, vol.27, 1993, pp.405-419.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*, edited by Peter Connor, translated by Peter Connor et al. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day*. Vintage Contemporaries, 1988.
- Patterson, Robert, J. "African American Feminist Theories and Literary Criticism." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danielle K. Taylor, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 87-106.
- Pearlman, Mickey and Katherine Usher Henderson. "Interview: Talks with America's writing women." *University Press of Kentucky*, 1990, pp.23-29.
- Pearson, Carol and Katherine Pope. *The Female Hero in American and British literature*. R. R. Booker, 1981.
- Penier, Izabella. *Culture-bearing Women: The Black Women Renaissance and Cultural Nationalism*. De Gruyter, 2019.
- Pifer, Lynn. "Coming to Voice in Alice Walker's *Meridian*: Speaking Out for the Revolution". *African American Review*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1992, pp. 77-88.
- Reed, Harry. "Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* and Black Cultural Nationalism." *Centennial Review*, vol. 32, 1988, pp. 50–64.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W. W. Norton, 1976.
- Sadoff, Dianne. "Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston." *Signs (Chicago, Ill.)*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1985, pp. 4–26.
- Scott, Joyce Hope. "From Foreground to Margin: Female Configurations and Masculine Self-Representation in Black Nationalist Fiction," *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, edited by Andrew Parker et al. Routledge, 1992, pp.296-312.
- Simeon-Jones, Kersuze. *Literary and sociopolitical wirings of the black diaspora in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. Lexington Books, 2010.
- Smith Spears, Rashelle. "Everybody's Mama Now. Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* as Discourse of the Black Mother's Identity". *Motherhood(s) Contours, Contexts and Considerations*, edited by Karen T. Craddock, Black Demeter Press, 2015, pp.109-118.

Staples, Robert. "The Myth of the Black Matriarchy." *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, edited by Filomena Chioma Steady, Schenkman, 1981, pp. 335–348.

Stein, Karen F. "Alice Walker's Critique of Revolution". *Black American Literature Forum*, vol.20, no.1-2 , 1986, pp.129-141.

Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn. "Black Women in Resistance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective", *Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro- American History* , edited by Gary Y. Okihiro, U Massachusetts P, 1986, pp.188-209.

Thorsson, Courtney. *Women's Work: Nationalism and Contemporary African American Women's Novels*. University of Virginia Press, 2013.

Wade-Gayles, Gloria. "The 'Truths of Our Mothers' Lives: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Black Women's Fiction." *Sage*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1984, pp. 8–12.

Walker, Margaret. "Black Women in the Academy". *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall, The New Press, 1995, pp. 454-460.

Walker, Alice. *Meridian*. Harcourt, 1976.

---. *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*. Harcourt, 1971.

---. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Pocket Books, 1970.

Washington, Mary Helen. "I Sign My Mother's Name: Alice Walker, Dorothy West, Paule Marshall," *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and Their Silent Partners*, edited by Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley, Holmes & Meier, 1984, pp.143-163. 161

Williams, Dana, A. "Contemporary African American Women Writers." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 71–86.

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## A Panorama of Victorian Society Through Dickensian Minor Characters: *Bleak House*

Sevcan Işık | Assistant Professor | İnönü University  
sevcanakcag@gmail.com

Rızkan Tok | Research Assistant | Trabzon University  
rizkantok@gmail.com

### Abstract

This paper aims to show the use of social realism in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens in terms of representing the Victorian sociocultural diversity, some corrupted sides of the Victorian community such as paralyzed law system, and bad conditions of the lower class. With this aim, the conditions which bring about realism will be discussed in the introduction. Introduction will be followed by the methodology of the study in which realism and social realism will be explained. Then, *Bleak House* will be examined with a focus on minor characters. Although minor characters in the novel are of great importance in terms of portraying the social events of their times, they are neglected most of the time by the critics. However, studying all the minor characters is beyond the scope of this paper as Dickens uses more than fifty minor characters in the novel. Thereupon, Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Skimpole, Mr. George, Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet, and Mr. Turveydrop are chosen to reflect the Victorian sociocultural diversity in the novel. In terms of reflecting some corrupted sides of the Victorian community, especially law system and bad conditions of the lower class, Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite and Mr. Krook, Jo and Jenny's husband are chosen. The paper concludes that *Bleak House* provides an insight to the readers about reflecting a panorama of Victorian society through the lens of social realism.

### Keywords:

Charles Dickens,  
*Bleak House*,  
Social Realism.

### Article History:

Received: 22.09.2021  
Accepted: 25.11.2021

### Citation Guide:

Işık, Sevcan, and Rızkan Tok.  
“A Panorama of Victorian  
Society Through Dickensian  
Minor Characters: *Bleak  
House*.” *ETKI: Journal of  
Literature, Theatre and Culture  
Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021,  
pp. 38-51.

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKİ: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## Dickens'in Yan Karakterleri Aracılığıyla Viktorya Toplumunun Bir Panaroması: *Kasvetli Ev*

Sevcan Işık | Doktor Öğretim Üyesi | İnönü University  
sevcanakcag@gmail.com

Rızkan Tok | Araştırma Görevlisi | Trabzon University  
rizkantok@gmail.com

### Özet

Bu çalışma Charles Dickens tarafından yazılan *Kasvetli Ev* adlı romanda sosyal realizmin Viktorya toplumundaki sosyal çeşitliliği, paralize olmuş hukuk sistemi gibi çürümüş olan bazı kurumları ve alt sınıfın içinde bulunduğu kötü koşulları yansıtmada nasıl kullanıldığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu sebeple, realizmi doğuran sebepler giriş bölümünde ele alınacaktır. Ardından, realizm ve sosyal realizm çalışmanın metodolojisi kısmında açıklanacaktır. Sonrasında, *Kasvetli Ev* romanı yan karakterler üzerine yoğunlaşarak incelenecektir. Romandaki yan karakterler dönemlerine ait sosyal olayları yansıtmada konusunda çok önemli olmalarına rağmen çoğunlukla ihmal edilmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte Dickens sözü geçen romanında elliden fazla yan karakter kullandığı için tüm karakterleri incelemek bu çalışmanın kapsamını aşmaktadır. Bu sebeple, romanda yansıtılan Viktoryen sosyo kültürel çeşitliliği göstermek için Bayan Jellyby, Bay Skimpole, Bay George, Bay ve Bayan Bagnet, ve son olarak Bay Turveydrop seçilmiştir. Bay Tulkingshorn, Bay Gridley, Bayan Flite, Bay Krook, Jo ve Jenny'nin kocası da Viktoryen toplumundaki bozulan kurumları ve alt sınıfların yaşadığı kötü koşulları yansıtmak için seçilmiş yan karakterlerdir. Çalışma *Kasvetli Ev* adlı romanın sosyal realist bir okumayla okuyuculara Viktoryen toplumun bir panaromasını verebileceği görüşü ile sonuçlanmaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Charles Dickens,  
*Kasvetli Ev*,  
Sosyal Realizm.

### Makale Bilgileri:

Geliş : 22.09.2021  
Kabul : 25.11.2021

### Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Işık, Sevcan and Rızkan Tok.  
“A Panorama of Victorian  
Society Through Dickensian  
Minor Characters: Bleak  
House.” *ETKİ: Journal of  
Literature, Theatre and Culture  
Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021,  
pp. 38-51.

## Introduction

The social conditions that are responsible for the birth of social realism can be explained with realism's becoming popular as a genre in nineteenth century. The dominant form in the nineteenth century English literature is realism. Georg Lukács explains the reason why realism is so popular in the nineteenth century fiction as follows: "Novelistic realism as a response to the upheavals of the industrial and political revolutions of the late eighteenth century and the rise of Napoleon, which prompted a new sense of history on a mass scale" (Lukacs, 1937, p. 86). Besides, the Industrial Revolution affects the lives of people dramatically. As a result of using steam power and cotton mills, there was a great increase in the economy of England. Thus, many factories were built, and people moved from countries to cities to find jobs in factories. All these things "transformed the society, swooping away old privileges and monopolies and offering new opportunities and changes to the lower, and middle classes" (Mulder, 2013, p. 10). As a result of these changes, the middle classes became more powerful. Thanks to the printing press, more and more people could read. In this regard, Mulder writes: "A new mass reading public came to be consisting for the most part of middle-class people" and this removes "the old equilibrium, in which the higher classes used literacy as a way to overpower the poorer classes" (Mulder, p. 11).

The middle classes preferred to read about "things like the question how to deal with the newly acquired amount of freedom and leisure time and the need for new guidelines in a time where the former social institutions providing security, like the church, the guild and the family, were no longer granted" (Mulder, p. 12). Thus, the realist novels became popular as they portrayed the realities of the society. In other words, the novelists reflected the realities of their times in their works "with a focus on the representation of class, gender, and labour relations, as well as on social unrest and the growing antagonism between the rich and the poor in England" (Diniejko, 2014, p. 1). These works were called as the "condition of England novels" or "social problem novels", and they aimed to create awareness about the wrongdoings and unpleasant conditions in the society. As a consequence of this awareness in society, people could understand the hard conditions of the working-class people. To this end, these novels portray the plight of the poor in detail.

## Theoretical Background (Method of the Study)

Realism in literature is defined as the representation of ordinary life as it is without idealizations. Levine (2013) gives a definition of realism by saying: "Realism reflects the observable world of lived experience by refusing allegory and symbol, romantic and sensational plots, supernatural explanations and idealized characters" (84). However, the definition of realism has changed over time. For instance, Khuman explains realism in literature as being "not a direct or

simple reproduction of reality (a ‘slice of life’) but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader” (Khuman, 2010, p. 79). Thus, realist novels include believable characters and events, which provide the reader a sense of reality. Nonetheless, these novels may also include allegory or supernatural elements and they still are realist novels. In this respect, Watt (1957) mentions the realist novel of Victorian period as follows

The premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (28)

As for social realism, it is used in order to show the unpleasant conditions under which poor people have to live and to criticize the causes of these conditions. According to Khuman (2010), social realism is used by writers in literature with the aim of showing the current situation of the society and, thus, to call for a change in the society (80). In this context, he explains the reason of the emergence of this movement in literature as being “the need to respond critically and in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanisms of repression and the frustration of personal and collective aspirations” (Khuman, 2010, p. 82). Therefore, it can be claimed that Victorian novelists employ social realism as a style in their works which are based on social realities of their times. These novels show ordinary people with their ordinary lives by giving them proper names in a particular place and time. In addition, these novels give importance to the “causality: what sets off events, produces social change, instigates relationships?” (Levine, 2013, p.100). The lives of the middle class and the lower-class people are reflected as being oppressed by the upper class.

### **The Representation of the Victorian Sociocultural Diversity**

The underlying reason of Charles Dickens’ productivity in creating wide range of characters in his novels may be related with both his outstanding capacity of imagination and his selective perception as a result of which he can monitor his environment in a very attentive way. It may this special ability of observation which gives him a chance to make up a new character in a very amazing way that it cannot be interesting for his readers to come across approximately forty characters in Dickens’ novels. Even the number of characters exceeds fifty in his ninth novel, *Bleak*

*House* which is also regarded as his masterpiece and includes lots of minor characters. Dickens achieves to depict each of these characters so realistically that any of them deserves an in-depth analysis. With the help of these characters, Dickens not only tries to reflect the Victorian sociocultural diversity but also aims at revealing some corrupted sides of the Victorian community such as paralyzed law system and the bad conditions of the lower class. It may be possible to analyze some of the minor characters in *Bleak House* with discussing how Dickens, by means of these characters, reflects the Victorian sociocultural diversity, and reveals the abovementioned corrupted sides of the Victorian community.

To begin with the characters reflecting the Victorian sociocultural diversity; Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Skimpole, Mr. George, Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet, and Mr. Turveydrop can be taken into consideration. It can be said that Mrs. Jellyby is a character with which Dickens tries to criticize the situation of some philanthropists who neglect their families in order to help some needy people living in Africa. In his book, *Charles Dickens*, Brian Murray implies that “Dickens also ridicules, through Mrs. Jellyby, not the practise of philanthropy per se, but those unable to grasp the simple principle that it ought to start at home.” (Murray, 1994, p.138). Mrs. Jellyby becomes so wholly absorbed in the issues about Africa that she hardly shows an interest even in her daughter’s wedding. When her daughter, Caddy says that she will marry and she wants to introduce her boyfriend to Mrs. Jellyby, her reaction is very strange, and it shows how much Mrs. Jellyby ignores her family and gets lost in her philanthropy.

You won’t object to my bringing him to see you, Ma? ‘O dear me, Caddy’ cried Mrs. Jellyby, who had relapsed into that distant contemplation, ‘have you begun again? Bring whom?’ ‘Him Ma.’ ‘Caddy, Caddy’ said Mrs. Jellyby, quite weary of such little matters. ‘Then you must bring him some evening which is not a Parent Society night, or a Branch night, or a Ramification night. You must accommodate the visit to the demands upon my time (Dickens, 1993, p. 275).

An excessive sense of charity can be seen almost all of Mrs. Jellyby’s manners and this artificial kind of benevolence seems to be chosen intentionally by Dickens in order to bring out the factitious side of human relations in Victorian society. In this sense, in his book, *Dickens and Religion*, Dennis Walder indicates that the character, Mrs. Jellyby is not the product of Dickens’ imagination, but she is created by inspiration from a real personality living in that period.

It is now familiar knowledge that Mrs. Jellyby embodies several features of the woman whose Family Colonization Loan Society Dickens enthusiastically published in Household Words, Mrs Caroline Chisholm; and that the Jellyby project for settling families



in Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger, is probably derived from Fowell Buxton's ill-fated Niger expedition of 1841-42. (Walder, 2007, p. 161).

As to Mr. Skimpole, it may be easily claimed that he is one the most extraordinary characters in the novel. Most of the critics perceive Mr. Skimpole as a selfish character who does not think of the people around him and wants to exploit them. For example, Murray claims that "through Skimpole, Dickens underscores the book's larger attack on parasitical individuals and institutions." (Murray, p.138). Apart from these kinds of interpretations, it may be possible to analyze Mr. Skimpole from another aspect that he may symbolize the man of Romantic Period who gives so much importance to the five senses through which he can observe and feel nature. Due to Industrial Revolution, this connection between man and nature becomes eroded and some new concepts such as productive usage of time, saving money, working hard gain importance. If you go for a walk to feel nature, it means you are idle and you do not spend your time productively in a Victorian sense. If you work hard in any institution of society and spend all your time in there, then you can save money. It may be claimed that through Mr. Skimpole, Dickens rejects this kind of time and money perception which are penetrated into people lives as a result of Industrial Revolution. The fact that Mr. Skimpole does not have the idea of time and the idea of money instead he gives much importance to satisfy his senses signifies Dickens' aspiration to the Romantic Period in which the most significant thing for man is to discover nature. This situation is reflected in a very effective way by William Blake who is one of the most prominent Romantic poets. In the first stanza of his poem, *Auguries of Innocence*, he says: "To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour."<sup>1</sup> Actually, there may be parallelism between these lines and Mr. Skimpole's character in a way that he has a different kind of time concept; he wants to seize the time, he wants to feel even each moment.

For he must confess to two of the oldest infirmities in the world: one was that he had no idea of time, the other that he had no idea of money. In consequence of which he never kept an appointment, never could transact any business, and never knew the value of anything! Well! So he had got on in life, and here he was! He was very fond of reading the papers, very fond of making fancy-sketches with a pencil, very fond of nature, very fond of art. All he asked of society was to let him live. THAT wasn't much. His wants were few. Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more. He was a mere child in the world, but he didn't cry for the moon. He said to the world, 'Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves; put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only—let Harold Skimpole

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.artofeurope.com/blake/bla3.htm>

live!’ (Dickens, 1993, p.59).

In this quotation, when we look at the last sentence, it can easily be said that Mr. Skimpole makes a clear distinction between to live with sentimental motivations based on feelings and to live with pragmatic motivations. Saying that ‘let Harold Skimpole live!’, he underlines this kind of passion for sustaining his life. In this sense, there is a sharp contrast between Mrs. Jellyby, who spends most of her time with working hard for others, and Mr. Skimpole. Mr. Skimpole stresses this gap between himself and her with these words which are also the indicators of the differences between the man of Romantic and Victorian Period:

We have been mentioning Mrs. Jellyby. There is a bright-eyed woman, of a strong will and immense power of business detail, who throws herself into objects with surprising ardour! I don’t regret that I have not a strong will and an immense power of business detail to throw myself into objects with surprising ardour. I can admire her without envy. I can sympathize with the objects. I can dream of them. I can lie down on the grass—in fine weather—and float along an African river, embracing all the natives I meet, as sensible of the deep silence and sketching the dense overhanging tropical growth as accurately as if I were there. I don’t know that it’s of any direct use my doing so, but it’s all I can do, and I do it thoroughly. Then, for heaven’s sake, having Harold Skimpole, a confiding child, petitioning you, the world, an agglomeration of practical people of business habits, to let him live and admire the human family, do it somehow or other, like good souls, and suffer him to ride his rocking-horse! (Dickens, 1993, p. 60).

About Mr. George, it can be said that he is the signifier of the soldier’s incapability to handle the issues of civil life. Since the soldiers are accustomed to living in a very hierarchical structure in which they do whatever the superiors want them to do, they have a difficulty in adapting the civil life when they leave the army. Although he has a healthy, well-built body, he looks small while he requests something from Mr. Tulkinghorn with giving reference to his being soldier. With paying no attention to Mr. George’s respectable standing as a soldier, Tulkinghorn responses his request in a very humiliating way by saying: “My friend, I don’t care a pinch of snuff for the whole Royal Artillery establishment – officers, men, tumbrils, waggons, horses, guns, and ammunition.” (Dickens, p.399). Through Mr. George, Dickens wants to reveal this helplessness of soldiers also with the help of the relationship between grandfather Smallweed and Mr. George. He fails to perceive grandfather Smallweed due to his insufficient capacity to form an efficient social relationship. Here is one of his unlucky attempts:

‘That’s just what I mean. As you say, Mr. Smallweed, here’s Matthew Bagnet liable to be

fixed whether or no. Now, you see, that makes his good lady very uneasy in her mind, and me too, for whereas I'm a harum-scarum sort of a good-for-nought that more kicks than halfpence come natural to, why he's a steady family man, don't you see? Now, Mr. Smallweed,' says the trooper, gaining confidence as he proceeds in his soldierly mode of doing business, 'although you and I are good friends enough in a certain sort of a way, I am well aware that I can't ask you to let my friend Bagnet off entirely.' (Dickens, p. 396).

Other interesting characters of the novel are Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet who are used by Dickens both to make a sense of humour in the novel and to imply the presence of ideal, middle-class family in the Victorian society. Just like Mr. George, Mr. Bagnet is also a soldier who always consults his wife when he encounters a problem in his social life. He usually remains in her wife's shadow due to the fact that he relies on the abilities of his wife in solving any difficulties in daily life. In this sense, Mrs. Bagnet becomes one of the most remarkable characters through which Dickens tries to show the presence of female dominance in most of the middle-class families in contrast to the idea that there is a male dominance in these families. With the help of Bagnet family, Dickens may underline the fact that this seemingly male dominance is a superficial one rather than being an ultimate authority which makes all decisions about the family. Dickens reflects this situation in a very ridiculous way with his character, Mrs. Bagnet who does all the talking in the name of his husband seemingly not because of the fact that her husband has no idea about the issue but because of the fact that he wants her to do so. When Mr. George asks something to Mr. Bagnet, he gives some funny reactions such as: "Old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, 'give him my opinion. You know it. Tell him what it is.' " (Dickens, p.320), " 'Old girl!' murmurs Mr. Bagnet , after a short silence, 'will you tell him my opinion?' " (Dickens, p. 392), " "The old girl' says Mr. Bagnet, 'is correct – in her way of giving my opinions – hear me out!' " (Dickens, p. 392). With these reactions, Dickens not only makes a sense of humour but also reveals the key role of the females in the decision-making process of the families. Even his husband expresses this role of her wife though he cannot confess it to her. With the help of this conversation quoted below, between Mr. George and Mr. Bagnet, it can be seen that both Mr. Bagnet and Mr. George accept Mrs. Bagnet's power to do everything with a great success:

'George,' says Mr. Bagnet. 'You know me. It's my old girl that advises. She has the head. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then we'll consult. Whatever the old girl says, do—do it!' 'I intend to, Mat,' replies the other. 'I would sooner take her opinion than that of a college.' 'College,' returns Mr. Bagnet in short sentences, bassoon-like. 'What college could you leave—in another quarter of the world— with nothing but a grey cloak and an umbrella—to make its way

home to Europe? The old girl would do it to-morrow. Did it once!’ ‘You are right,’ says Mr. George. ‘What college,’ pursues Bagnet, ‘could you set up in life—with two penn’orth of white lime—a penn’orth of fuller’s earth—a ha’porth of sand—and the rest of the change out of sixpence in money? That’s what the old girl started on. In the present business.’ (Dickens, p.318).

As to Mr. Turveydrop, he is one of the most arrogant figures in the novel. He is always proud of his deportment and gives much importance to display gentlemanlike behaviours. He is also used as an element of humour in the novel whose pompous manners may amuse the reader. His snobbish attitudes and the way he exploits the efforts of his son make him an unattractive character. There is no integrity in his behaviours rather he behaves only for being perceived as a respectable person. He may be the only character that Esther seems to be disturbed from his deportment. Esther describes him in a way from which it can be easily deduced that through this character, Dickens tries to portrait the ridiculous position of this sort of people in the Victorian society:

He was a fat old gentleman with a false complexion, false teeth false whiskers, and a wig. He had a fur collar, and he had a padded breast to his coat, which only wanted a star or a broad blue ribbon to be complete. He was pinched in, and swelled out, and got up, and strapped down, as much as he could possibly bear. He had such a neckcloth on (puffing his very eyes out of their natural shape), and his chin and even his ears so sunk into it, that it seemed as though he must inevitably double up if it were cast loose. He had under his arm a hat of great size and weight, shelving downward from the crown to the brim, and in his hand a pair of white gloves with which he flapped it as he stood poised on one leg in a high-shouldered, round-elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had a cane, he had an eye-glass, he had a snuffbox, he had rings, he had wristbands, he had everything but any touch of nature; he was not like youth, he was not like age, he was not like anything in the world but a model of deportment. (Dickens, p. 158)

From this extract, it can be deduced that Mr. Turveydrop represents the other side of ‘Victorian gentleman’ whose typical characteristic is based on pretentious manners. From this perspective, it can be said that with his character, Turveydrop, Dickens tries to deconstruct the canonized behavioural patterns of Victorian gentleman. Therefore, the fact that Dickens puts excessive emphasis on Mr. Turveydrop’s deportment may be explained by the myriad apparency of ostentations figures in Victorian society.

### The Corruption of the Law System

After analyzing the characters reflecting the Victorian sociocultural diversity, now it may be applicable to discuss the characters revealing the corrupted sides of the Victorian society such as paralyzed law system and the bad conditions of the lower class. At first, it may be said that the paralyzed law system in the Victorian Period forms the main theme of the novel. There are four important minor characters with which Dickens depicts the evil sides of law system in that era. These characters are Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite and Mr. Krook. While Mr. Tulkinghorn signifies the stony and savage sides of this inoperative law system, Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite and Mr. Krook may be regarded as the miserable victims of this system. As a character that is always serious and rigid, Tulkinghorn reflects the merciless sides of the court of Chancery whose suitors must wait long years to get favorable results. Yet, it is impossible to get these kinds of results in this corrupted system that is why there are several people suffering from this situation. The common feature of these three characters, Mr. Gridley, Miss Flite and Mr. Krook is that all of them are the sufferers of the Chancery. Mr. Gridley gets stuck in his lawsuit so passionate that he spends all his life for the sake of getting any result from it. Since he becomes identical with the court of Chancery, he is seen as a figure of fun by lots of people. He defines his pitiful situation with these words:

I have been dragged for five and twenty years over burning iron, and I have lost the habit of treading upon velvet. Go into the Court of Chancery yonder and ask what is one of the standing jokes that brighten up their business sometimes, and they will tell you that the best joke they have is the man from Shropshire. I,” he said, beating one hand on the other passionately, “am the man from Shropshire.” (Dickens, p.177).

While Mr. Gridley dies for the sake of his lawsuit at the end, the mysterious death of other character, Mr. Krook gives a chance to reader to form a relationship between decayed structure of law and Mr. Krook’s putrid corpse. His spontaneous combustion and the offensive odor spreading from his body may be confronted with the foggy atmosphere of Chancery and its deteriorating effects on people. In his book, *The English Novel*, Walter Allen touches on this issue with saying: “Another instance of symbolism from *Bleak House* is the horrible and fantastic account of the death by spontaneous combustion of the gin-sodden rag-and-bottle collector Krook, who by virtue of his name symbolizes the whole Chancery system.”(Allen, p.196). The death of Mr. Gridley and Mr. Krook may emphasize the idea that death is the only salvation for the people who become trapped after involved with the lawsuits in Chancery. (Richard Carstone, who also becomes obsessed with Jarndyce and Jarndyce and cannot give up struggling for it until he dies, may be seen another sample of this situation.) In the book, *Charles Dickens* edited by Steven Connor, the issue about the

deaths in the novel is interpreted with these words:

The deaths in *Bleak House* constitute only in a paradoxical way ‘ends’ which establish the destinies of those who die. Their deaths define them once and for all as people whose lives were unfinished, as people who never achieved the peace of a settlement. Their lives had meaning only in reference to the perpetually unsettled system of which they were part.” (Connor, 1985, p.74).

Miss Flite is another sufferer knowing that she cannot get any result from her lawsuit but still cannot help following it faithfully. Her remarkable collection of caged birds may symbolize her being taken captive by Chancery. She never stops expecting a judgement from the case though she knows that this pointless waiting process comes to an end on one condition, which is her death. She explains her deadlock with these words:

‘I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time,’ curtsying low and smiling between every little sentence. I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served or saved me. I have the honour to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time! (Dickens, p.29).

When it is looked at the victims of Victorian law system in the novel it is seen that it is quite difficult to encounter a case document which is worked out in a fair way. In this sense, when Chancery Court in the novel represents the ineffective legal order of Victorian society, the sufferers of this court like Miss Flite reveals the languished sides of Victorian law system.

### **Bad Conditions of the Lower Class**

It can be asserted that it may be suitable to analyze the bad conditions of the lower class in the Victorian society through discussing two minor characters, who are Jo, and Jenny’s husband, and their living conditions. With these two characters, the bad conditions of the Victorian lower class are indicated so shockingly that this pathetic, but realist picture may freeze the reader’s blood. For example, with the help of the place, ‘Tom-all-Alone’s’ where Jo lives, Dickens reveals this misery in a very striking way:

Jo lives—that is to say, Jo has not yet died—in a ruinous place known to the like of him by the name of ‘Tom-all-Alone’s’. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people, where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants who after establishing their own possession took to letting them out in lodgings.

Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it. (Dickens, p.182).

With the last sentence, Dickens stresses how the upper class neglects the lower one in a satirical way by giving absurd names like Coodle, Doodle, Foodle, Zoodle to the members of aristocracy. The dwellers of this place have no expectancy from life as if they are not human beings. Jo is one of them and through him; Dickens shows us the futile position of these kinds of people in the Victorian society by making a comparison between Jo and a dog:

A band of music comes and plays. Jo listens to it. So does a dog — a drover's dog, waiting for his master outside a butcher's shop, and evidently thinking about those sheep he has had upon his mind for some hours and is happily rid of. He seems perplexed respecting three or four, can't remember where he left them, looks up and down the street as half expecting to see them astray, suddenly pricks up his ears and remembers all about it. A thoroughly vagabond dog, accustomed to low company and public- houses; a terrific dog to sheep, ready at a whistle to scamper over their backs and tear out mouthfuls of their wool; but an educated, improved, developed dog who has been taught his duties and knows how to discharge them. He and Jo listen to the music, probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise as to awakened association, aspiration, or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute! Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark—but not their bite. (Dickens, p.184).

This extract indicates how a lower-class person is perceived in the Victorian society in a very impressive way with which Dickens emphasizes that the position of poor people in that period is even worse than an animal. The other character, Jenny's husband, who is a brickmaker, is also the indicator of this situation. With the chapter in which Mrs. Pardiggle, who is a rude and arrogant do-gooder, visits Jenny's house so as to help them by preaching, Dickens gives his readers a chance of conceiving the situation of lower class. Looking at the reaction of Jenny's husband to the Mrs. Pardiggle's nonsense efforts may be sufficient to clarify the issue:

‘Then make it easy for her!’ growled the man upon the floor. ‘I wants it done, and over. I wants a end of these liberties took with my place. I wants an end of being drawn like a badger. Now you’re agoing to poll-pry and question according to custom—I know what you’re a-going to be up to. Well! You haven’t got no occasion to be up to it. I’ll save you the trouble. Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she IS awashin. Look at the water. Smell it! That’s wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin instead! An’t my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty— it’s nat’rally dirty, and it’s nat’rally onwholesome; and we’ve had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides. Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an’t read the little book wot you left. There an’t nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn’t be suitable to me. It’s a book fit for a babby, and I’m not a babby. If you was to leave me a doll, I shouldn’t nuss it. How have I been conducting of myself? Why, I’ve been drunk for three days; and I’d a been drunk four if I’d a had the money. Don’t I never mean for to go to church? No, I don’t never mean for to go to church. I shouldn’t be expected there, if I did; the beadle’s too gen-teel for me. And how did my wife get that black eye? Why, I give it her; and if she says I didn’t, she’s a lie!’ (Dickens, p. 90).

With his characters, Jo and Jenny’s husband, Dickens aims to mirror inadequate conditions of Victorian lower class not only from the economic perspective but also from psychological point of view. When it is looked at the dialogue between Mrs. Pardiggle and Jenny’s husband, it is easy to say that Mrs. Pardiggle has a difficulty in understanding psychological state of Jenny’s husband. It can be said that there is a cultural barrier between these characters as a result of which it is impossible to establish an effective communication. Therefore, we can say that stressing this kind of miscommunication between these two characters, Dickens tries to remark class distinctions in Victorian society.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper aims to show how Dickens reflects the Victorian sociocultural diversity and reveals the corrupted sides of the Victorian community by means of minor characters in his outstanding novel, *Bleak House* through the lens of social realism. Before discussing the minor characters, the social conditions which lead to the emergence of realism in the genre of novel are explained. Then, the concept of realism and social realism are defined in the methodology of the study. After this background information about Victorian social conditions that bring about the rise of realism in nineteenth century fiction, the minor characters are analyzed.



To this end, the characters Mrs. Jellyby, who tries to help poor at the expense of neglecting her children, thus, is resembled Britain's colonial efforts abroad, Mr. Skimpole, who can be seen as the representative of Romantic period in the novel, Mr. George, who reveals the soldiers' incapacity to integrate into society, Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet, who expose the breakdown of Victorian happy family myth, and Mr. Turveydrop, who can be seen as the signifier of 'Victorian gentleman', are analyzed to show Victorian sociocultural diversity. The corruption of the law system is discussed with the help of the characters, Mr. Tulkinghorn, who represents the stony and savage sides of the inoperative legal order of Victorian society, Mr. Gridley, who dies for the sake of his lawsuit at the end, Miss Flite, who never stops expecting a judgement from the case although this pointless waiting process does not come to an end, and Mr. Krook, who may be considered as miserable victims of this system. Lastly, the characters Jo, homeless youngster who cleanses the streets surrounding the Chancery Court in exchange for a few cents from passers-by, and Jenny's husband, who is a brick maker and a sheer representative of lower class in the novel are analyzed to lay bare the bad conditions of lower class in Victorian society. Consequently, it can be said that in his novel *Bleak House*, through all these minor characters, Dickens presents a complete panorama of Victorian society.

### Bibliography

- Allen, Walter. (1954). *The English Novel*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Colby, Robin B. (1995). *Some Appointed Work to Do: Women and Vocation in the Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Connor, Steven (ed.). (1985). Charles Dickens. London: Routledge.
- Dickens, Charles. (1993). *Bleak House*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions.
- Diniejkó, Andrej. (2014). "Condition-of-England Novels." *The Victorian Web*.
- Khuman, Prakash. (2010). *Social Realism in Major Novels of Mulk Raj Anand: A Study*. Diss. Saurashtra University.
- Levine, Caroline. (2013). "Victorian Realism." *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Ed. Deirdre David. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Lukacs, Georg. (1937). *Theory of the Novel*. New York: Routledge.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *Dickens's Bleak House*. (1996). "Charles Dickens", Steven Connor (Ed.). New York Addison Wesley. Longman.

ETKI:	ETKİ:
<i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>	<i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021	e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

## Memory and Power: Unreliable Narrator in Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma* and Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*

Dania Shaikh | Master's Student | Gujarat University  
daniashaikh890@gmail.com

Annaashirvadita Sacha | Assistant Professor | Gujarat University

### Abstract

Emerging scholarly work has indicated that we live in times of the 'surveillance state'. Such states control all aspects of life: from the food one eats to the ideas they express in everyday life. The chief concern regarding such surveillance is its attacks on individual bodies and ideas. Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma* and Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine* explore the impact of state imposition on individual psyche. As responses to the Tiananmen Square Massacre (1989), the texts explore how the body remembers the violent incursions committed against it. Individual memory is upheld against the collective. This paper explores how the narrators in the novels present their point of view through their unreliability. As rationality has been singularly claimed as a tool of the powerful, the only imaginable solution is to articulate individual memories through the tool of unreliability.

By highlighting the collectiveness of any crime, the narrators articulate their trauma through their unreliability. The individual body is trampled upon by the combined forces of cultural norms and state control as the entire population is mobilised for slaughter under the guise of ensuring survival (Foucault 137). The unreliable narrators in the novels allegorise the consumption of memory and individuality by the body-politic due to internalisation of existing power structures. They highlight how establishing bodily control paired with sweeping claims to popular memory legitimises the state as the provider of all 'good things.' Playing of the themes of literal bodily hunger through food and bodily waste metaphors, the novels exhibit the yearning for a metaphorical hunger for knowledge and an open society.

### Keywords:

Unreliable Narrator,  
Historical Memory,  
Trauma,  
Amnesia,  
Public Discourse,  
Biopower

### Article History:

Received: 27.09.2021

Accepted: 24.11.2021

### Citation Guide:

Shaikh, Dania, and Annaashirvadita Sacha. "Memory and Power: Unreliable Narrator in Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma* and Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*." *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 52-68.

E

T

K

i

ETKİ:  
*Journal of Literature,  
Theatre and Culture Studies*

ETKİ:  
*Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür  
İncelemeleri Dergisi*

e-ISSN: 2822-3950  
Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021

e-ISSN: 2822-3950  
Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

## Bellek ve Güç: Ma Jian'ın *Beijing Coma*'sı ile Mo Yan'ın *The Republic of Wine*'inde Güvenilmez Anlatıcı

Dania Shaikh | Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi | Gujarat University  
daniashaikh890@gmail.com

Annaashirvadita Sacha | Yardımcı Doçent | Gujarat University

### Özet

Devam eden bilimsel çalışmalar, son dönemlerde “gözetim altında” yaşadığımızı göstermiştir. Bu gözetim durumu, kişinin yediği yemekten günlük yaşamda ifade ettiği fikirlere kadar yaşamın tüm yönlerini kontrol eder. Bu tür gözetimle ilgili temel endişe, bireysel bedenlere ve fikirlere yönelik saldırılarla ilgilidir. Ma Jian'ın *Beijing Coma* ve Mo Yan'ın *The Republic of Wine* devlet dayatmasının bireysel psikoloji üzerindeki etkisini araştırır. Tiananmen Meydanı Katliamı'na (1989) verilen yanıtlar olarak, metinler vücudun kendisine karşı yapılan şiddetli saldırıları nasıl hatırladığını araştırır. Bireysel hafıza kolektife karşı desteklenir. Bu makale, romanlardaki anlatıcıların bakış açılarını güvenilmezlikleri üzerinden nasıl sunduklarını araştırmaktadır. Akılcılığın tekil olarak güçlülerin bir aracı olduğu iddia edildiğinden, akla gelebilecek tek çözüm, bireysel anıları güvenilmezlik aracıyla dile getirmektir.

Anlatıcılar, herhangi bir suçun kolektifliğini vurgulayarak, travmalarını güvenilmezlikleri üzerinden dile getirirler. Tüm nüfus hayatta kalma kisvesi altında katliam için seferber edilirken, bireysel beden kültürel normların ve devlet kontrolünün birleşik güçleri tarafından çiğnenir (Foucault 137). Romanlardaki güvenilmez anlatıcılar, mevcut iktidar yapılarının içselleştirilmesi nedeniyle beden-politikasının bellek ve bireysellik tüketimini alegorize eder. Popüler hafızaya yönelik kapsamlı iddialarla birlikte bedensel kontrolün kurulmasının, devleti tüm “iyi şeylerin” sağlayıcısı olarak nasıl meşrulaştırdığını vurgularlar. Gerçek bedensel açlık temalarını yemek ve bedensel atık metaforları aracılığıyla ortaya koyan romanlar, bilgi ve açık bir toplum için metaforik bir açlığa duyulan özlemi sergilerler

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

GüvenilmezAnlatıcı,  
Tarihsel Bellek,  
Travma,  
Amnezi,  
Kamusal Söylem,  
Biyoktidar

### Makale Bilgileri:

Geliş : 27.09.2021

Kabul : 24.11.2021

### Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Shaikh, Dania, and  
Annaashirvadita Sacha.  
“Memory and Power:  
Unreliable Narrator in Ma  
Jian's Beijing Coma and Mo  
Yan's The Republic of  
Wine.” *ETKİ: Journal of  
Literature, Theatre and Culture  
Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021,  
pp. 52-68.

## Introduction:

The 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and its suppression mark a watershed moment in contemporary history namely due to the efficiency of the state-enforced silencing that followed. *Beijing Coma* and *The Republic of Wine* were conceived in response to such official erasures and control. The two novels differ in their subject matter; however, they place the unreliable narrator at the center in order to critique the larger political structure.

*Beijing Coma* is narrated by a singular first-person narrator, marked by temporal and casual disruptions, contradictions in speech, and foreshadowing. The narrative takes place inside the mind of Dai Wei where the readers are aware of his compromised consciousness given his comatose condition indicated by memory lapses and lack of bodily control. His position as a victim paired with non-linear narration infers his view where every event is presented as leading up to the massacre. On the other hand, *The Republic of Wine* has two narrators: “Mo Yan” and Li Yidou; the events unfold in a distorted logical sequence bifurcated into three strands where the narrators are heterodiegetic as well as homodiegetic. The triple narrative structure with its sequential and linguistic disruptions highlights the ambiguity between narrators as well narrative events.

## Literature Review:

In the absence of official historiography, a spectator’s perception of events are paramount testimonies of violent events. Previous researches have explored the texts as culminating points of earlier political upheavals rather than the implications it had on the postsocialist market economy that followed (Kong; Inge; Yang). Studies on narration have delineated the socio-cultural implications of the use of alimentary metaphors (Yue; Tsai). Others have applied various spatial theories on the texts (Kong). Neither of these researches has focused on the role of the traumatised disjointed narrator in the genre of political fiction. Drawing from James Phelan’s concept of bonding unreliability, the paper illustrates how unreliable narration plays a role in characterising political amnesia, instability of political

discourse and the implications and possibilities of subjectivity in the postsocialist nation.

### **Methodology:**

As public discourse is central to all political regimes, the genre of historical fiction has implications on various fields beyond literature. In order to gain a better insight into the relationship between discourse and historical memory, the sources referred to include history books, political theories, psychological theories, literary theories along with previous researches in the area. A special emphasis has been placed on the narrative structure. Given that the sole focus of the study has been the translated versions of the texts, the sources have been limited to English excluding the body of untranslated work written in Mandarin Chinese.

### **Lack of Historical and Political Awareness:**

Historical memory shapes how one perceives current political scenarios. Control over the historical narrative in dominant discourse often aligns with the regime's interests rather than unbiased historiography expected in free societies. While in *Beijing Coma*, the narrative draws a lengthy connection of how historical memory influences the change in behaviours among characters, *The Republic of Wine* explores how such thought control leads to public silencing. As political activist Ai Weiwei argues, memory forms the basis of an individual's humanity: the state denies the citizens their identities by forcing them to conform to their version of history. Against the larger political apparatus that employs violent intimidation and political education campaigns to obliterate mentions of their crimes in public memory, the authors employ the disjointed unreliable narrators as a means of resisting amnesia.

In *Beijing Coma*, the narrator Dai Wei's comatose condition automatically places him outside public discourse. As he lies immobile on his bed, he has the freedom to travel through his memories that those around him do not have (644). Moreover, the narrator himself recognises that his condition has rendered him immune to the brainwashing that others succumb to as he concludes that his condition is a "protective cloak" that allows him the freedom to remember (586). Public silencing manifests in the narrative as Dai Wei's neighbours who had

initially supported the protests turn against him after the crackdown along with his friend's complaint about being treated as a "leper" by his colleagues on admitting that he was a part of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests (98). As Perry Link argues, self-censorship can only be induced through the threat of violence: it is not that the people have forgotten the Tiananmen Square Massacre; instead, their sense of self-preservation has led to a nationwide amnesia (6-8). Parallelising it with Jiang Zemin's insistence that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is "the firmest, the most thoroughgoing patriot" in his speech at the 6th Plenary Session (Wang 169) places the complete control of public narratives within the hands of the Party. Dai Wei argues the history of such continuing brutality has forced the Chinese people to adapt to such silencing as a "survival skill developed over the millennia" (557). The unreliable narrator acts as the medium to highlight public silencing as his compromised consciousness enables him to realise that emerging materialism has replaced the demand for political reform.

*The Republic of Wine* exhibits the two-fold relationship between consumption and social structures: exotic foods provided by the lower classes are consumed by the elite while in turn the political narrative set by the elite is consumed by the lower classes. Two events in the course of the narrative highlight this: Ding Gou'er's comment about "the plump, fair-skinned toddler" for consumption results in "a look of dejection" on the lowly gate-keeper's face in the omniscient third-person narration (11) while Li Yidou's question to a woman asking if she plans on selling her babies to the Gourmet Section leads her to mutter her disdain for "cannibalistic beasts" in Li Yidou's intradiegetic narrative (219). As Gang Yue argues, the "unwritten rules" of consumption delineate the society's relation to its institutions. The discourse on food has larger political implications rooted in social and historical discourses; he traces the use of alimentary metaphors in Daoist literature, namely in order to normalise pacifism as a socially acceptable response to political turmoil (30-46). This manifests in the present narrative as the characters from lower classes offer no alternate possibilities of resistance against the cannibalistic power structures. The narrative tone is eerily matter-of-fact and the readers are conscious of the unreliability of both narrators; the unreliable narrators

while critiquing the larger power structure also underhandedly (through their elite positions) reflect their biases as they ultimately argue in favour of maintaining the larger power structure. In other words, by blaming others for not standing up to power, the narrators extricate themselves from their political responsibilities. To a degree, the readers fail to realise that the biases reflected in the text are also the narrator's own: the narrator is not a mere spectator but situated at the top of the power structure. Here, the satire rises from the voluntary relinquishment of the opportunity to catalyse change.

The manipulation of memory in the two novels is also a result of the political education campaigns of the past. At the beginning of the narrative, Dai Wei resents his father as he longs to free himself of his label of 'son of a capitalist dog'. It is only much later when he reads his father's journal that he learns about the violent history of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution along with his skirmishes with the police in his youth. This enables him to recognise the gaps in public memory: the protestors holding pictures of Mao and hailing the revolution as the State closes upon them or their ignorance about the past of Deng Xiaoping's repressive tendencies. At another point, Dai Wei declares that his generation "had little understanding of Chinese history" (307). As Fang Lizhi argues, the CCP rules through the "Technique of Forgetting History." Until the very end, the protestors ridicule the idea that the regime may order a violent crackdown. The unreliable narrator presents the bewilderment and indignation of the people in the moment of the massacre despite himself being conscious of the possibility of a violent crackdown throughout the protests.

On the other hand, Mo Yan speaks through his silences: his position as a mainland Chinese writer forces him to carefully navigate through state censorship. In his Nobel Lecture, Mo Yan claims that his politics makes itself known in his works: in *The Republic of Wine*, gourmet history (from the invention of liquor to the butchering of donkeys) is traced back to prehistoric dynasties, but it carefully leaves out the events of the past half-century of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Gourmandism is employed as an allegory for political commentary by the narrators. The lack of political history combined with the gap of the PRC

years in the other histories emerges as a stealthy commentary on the lack of historical awareness about the present regime. Moreover, Diamond Jin, the chief cannibal in Liquorland weaponises stories of his deprivation during the Great Leap Forward (although he does not explicitly name the famine) through the sympathetic narration of Li Yidou; this event is an allegory for the elite's monopolisation of historical narratives in order to serve their own ends. Diamond Jin's journey from that of a starving child to a cannibal also symbolises the insignificance of morality: it implies that the poor do not overindulge because they cannot afford to do so instead of their inherent moral beliefs hinting at the breakdown of binaries. Li Yidou's admiration of Diamond Jin hinders "Mo Yan" (the other narrator to whom Li Yidou's stories are addressed) from typecasting him as a corrupt cannibal; this ignorance ultimately leads to "Mo Yan's" death. Through these gaps, the narrator influences the perception of history and leaders; by claiming their insignificance in the larger political framework, the novel critiques the lack of historical and political awareness among state subjects.

### **Instability of accepted political discourse:**

The novels are set against the changing political landscape of the PRC in the last decade of the twentieth century. With the advent of economic reforms, the political narrative changed from Mao's "Never Forget Class Struggle" (Dikotter 18) to Deng Xiaoping's famous remark "To get rich is glorious" (Wang 234). To assert their political legitimacy in the post socialist nation, the state must ensure that the larger narrative is in accordance with their policies; as it does so, it invokes the same violent language of the earlier Mao era. Within the novels, this manifests in the general anxiety of being accused as 'counterrevolutionary'. Through the shifts in structures and temporal and spatial disruptions, the unreliable narrator critiques the instability of accepted ideas in political discourse.

Complete control over public discourse enables the state to erase any mention of their crimes. In *Beijing Coma*, this results in disillusionment regarding the state's repressive capabilities. The unreliable narrator is equipped to highlight this split given the use of narrative



analepsis. The insistence by multiple characters that the government will not resort to violence is contrasted with descriptions of various crackdowns: Donsheng's wife being forced to undergo abortion despite the law forbidding "the officers to use force" (61), the claim that "a person's portrait" cannot be regarded as the "symbol of the nation" and would not extract heavy punishment at the incident of ink being thrown on Mao's portrait followed by the mention of the decades of imprisonment the ink-throwers suffered due to that act (419) along with the repeated insistence that the CCP cannot launch a crackdown against the protestors contrasted with the image of Dai Wei realising that protestors singing "the national anthem beneath the national flag" had not hindered the one-party state from murdering them in the past (648). Ma's novel stands as a testimony that global capital has not annihilated the possibility of authoritarian violence (Kong 273-4). This highlights the importance of memory and the role of the archive: had there been an awareness among the citizens about the Party's past actions, they would not have been disillusioned to believe in their own bodily autonomy. State biopower refashions itself to maintain control despite transforming political structures (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 136). In the present novel, the transformation is from socialist to capitalist. The breakdown of historical subjectivity highlights this split as the narrator largely remains outside public discourse.

*The Republic of Wine* demonstrates how official language is used to rationalise human rights violations. Political language is endowed with "an intrinsic instrumental value" which allows it "to codify" and "convey" the state's ideology (Marinelli 26). State policies are upheld to mask their crimes, viz. "the nationwide craze over getting rich" (139), "the four modernizations and the constant upping of people's living standards" (220) and "the era of reforms and liberalization" are used to justify cannibalism and overindulgence (315). The general obscurity or unsound claims made by the unreliable narrator pits itself against this discourse that boasts of being rational but is truly unreasonable, if not violent. Ultimately, it highlights how power exploits officially sanctioned language to maintain its political legitimacy.

*Beijing Coma* highlights how state power creates binaries and fully retains the authority to classify an individual as either of the binaries, situating itself as the political phallus. Thinking back to cannibalism during the Guangxi Cultural Revolution Massacre, Dai Wei concludes that the Party had “told” the perpetrators that, “If you do not eat the enemy, you are the enemy” (290). Relating it with Ma Jian’s claim that “there are only two options open to people: either to be a slave, or to be an outcast” (qtd in Tonkin) as well as Jiang Zemin’s division of the mainland Chinese population into the “ardent patriots” and the “scum of a nation” in his speech at the 6th Plenary session of the Fourteenth CCP National Congress in October 1996 (Wang 170) is in accordance with Dai Wei’s conclusion. The narrator demonstrates how by drawing binaries but keeping the exact rules of such divisions vague the state retains the full authority to classify people as either according to their convenience: when matters come to a head the government denounces the student movement as “a planned conspiracy to overthrow the government” in the state newspaper (236). Paired with the mother’s repeated pleas of reading the newspapers to keep up with this changing political climate, the narrative recognises the inherent power vested in the state. The unreliable narrator outlines how such confrontational language forces the citizenry to pick sides crushing any possibilities of resistance.

On the other hand, *The Republic of Wine* explores the internalisation of power structures. Ding Gou’er is forced to perform actions that lead him to his doom while being fully conscious that his actions are self-destructive: the split in his identity makes such contradictions seem natural. He overindulges despite being unsure in order to avoid the label of “traitor” or being accused of being “counter-revolutionary” (245, 304). These events demonstrate the point where “power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself” into their most mundane daily events (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 39). On the surface level, one expects such irrational behaviour from the narrator but through the use of over-exaggeration and ridiculousness, the narrator draws alarming parallels between the unsound narrator and the larger seemingly rational population. In other words, when faced with the

possibility of danger every character chooses to conform either due to conditioning or as a deliberate choice: the target of satire is not the failure of well-organised resistance but the overall lack of resistance.

The novels demonstrate how the all-pervading political discourse in conflict with the individual's political inclinations creates a split within the protagonists; they vacillate between who they are and who are they expected to be. The italicised narration in *Beijing Coma* where the narrator talks about himself in second-person represents this literal split. On the allegorical level, this is demonstrated by Dai Wei's surviving friends ultimately abandoning their democratic aspirations for capitalistic gains. Interestingly, Dai Wei too has realised that public discourse has shifted and expresses that if given a second chance, he too would pursue personal interests and try to lead "a happy life" (375). The joint forces of the market economy and state apparatus unite to dismantle any alternate possibilities, viz. capitalism values simplicity which is achieved through a thorough depoliticisation of the population (Zhang 406-7). Despite existing outside public discourse, this split within the protagonist indicates the extent of the state's reach to the deepest corners of an individual's consciousness.

In *The Republic of Wine*, the lack of clear demarcations between the omniscient third-person narrator detailing "Mo Yan's" fictional novel and the real events narrated by Mo Yan in first-person interspersed with the use of first-person pronouns rather than third-person ones and vice versa highlight this split on the literary level. Furthermore, within the "fictional" narrative of Ding Gou'er, he is constantly in conflict between his desire to overindulge and his duty as a Party official: this conflict is marked by lack of bodily control where his body and consciousness file for "for divorce" and move in "opposite directions" (49, 52). The split between the real and symbolic self is reduces the so-called hero to a mere "accessory to the crime" where Ding Gou'er "never functions as he should" (Yang 213). It marks the journey from lack of resistance towards participation. Eventually, this split within becomes apparent to the extent that it cannot be concealed as it leads to the narrator's doom. In other words, Ding Gou'er is conscious of the gravity of his role as an official investigator but is easily tempted to

indulge in gourmet temptations.

### **Subjectivity as a tool against collective power:**

By placing itself at the center of public discourse the state asserts its monopoly over rationality. Understanding its inadequacy at countering “truths” the narrative voice employs irrationality. This is heightened through descriptions of its own inadequacies and self-mockery: to distinguish itself from the state which presents the dominant political narrative as historical truth, the narrative voice emphasises that the truth of the narrative is not historical truth (Inge 502). In other words, although it highlights the irrationality of public discourse, it scoffs at the very idea that rational discourse is possible in such tumultuous times. By doing so, it rejects the notion of national unity and objectivity.

The narrative subject in *Beijing Coma* is defined by its sweeping estrangement: not only at the discourse level but Dai Wei also lies outside his consciousness. His trauma, which lies outside conscious perception, is an allegory for the nation in a schizoid condition. In order to cope with traumatic assault on the consciousness, the self repeatedly expresses disbelief at the events unfolding in real time, which later results in a permanent split between the self and the other (Liang 78-93). As a result, trauma is defined by the incomprehensibility of the event as a shield against its wide-ranging onslaught on individual consciousness (Caruth 152-3). At the moment of the massacre, Dai Wei repeatedly articulates his disbelief along with the temporal shifts that articulate the incomprehensibility of trauma. To put it simply, his trauma, even within the safe confines of his mind, due to its deformative impact on his consciousness, never finds full articulation. Such narrative is at once personal and unreliable.

Yun- Chu Tsai argues that the narrative of cannibalism in *The Republic of Wine* represents the deconstruction of Ding Gou'er's individuality as well as his position as the writing subject to the written object. Furthering this argument, the change in pronoun usage from third-person to first-person represents a schizoid state along with highlighting the subject's inadequacies. In other words, although such disentanglement is an obvious effect of

trauma, Mo Yan simplifies it to present it as the subject's inadequacies. Such representation of trauma resists state censorship. The narrators in the novels trivialise themselves in the larger discourse as their traumatic renderings are disregarded as disjointed ramblings. As a result, it exhibits the ability to breach and subvert the master discourse. It presents itself as posing no threats to the status quo but in actuality, it exhibits the ability to breach and subvert official history and discourse or what may be referred to as "the abruptive, evocative intrusion into history" (Yang 53). The subject's disjointedness then, becomes the tool to enable multiplicity of narratives against the master discourse.

The fast-paced economic liberalisation and the rise in living standards are central to the regime's political legitimacy. Furthering Belinda Kong's analysis of the pre-massacre years in *Beijing Coma* as the assertion of the Foucault's biopower, the post-massacre years are a testimony of this continuing regime of biopower. The discourse of life (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 135-43) is Deng's narrative of economic liberalisation in the 1990s in the text. This is demonstrated through two events: Dai Wei's kidney being harvested and the sale of his urine as a magic tonic to meet medical expenses. However, the split in the narration highlights this biopolitical control: the executed prisoner's organs have evolved to Dai Wei's illegal kidney harvestation given the fast-paced capitalism in the 1990s. Dr Huang's utilitarian outlook that it would be a "waste" to not make use of the executed prisoners organs (despite it being against medical ethics) takes a sinister humorous turn with the sale of Dai Wei's literal bodily waste. Here, the obvious repeated bodily invasion of the individual is mollified by biocapitalistic discourse. Moreover, the use of words like "prison" and a "trap...with no escape routes" for Dai Wei's body as well as public spaces and the nation, further highlight this breach into the body (553, 582, 303, 406). Here, the capitalistic narrative of economic freedom becomes both the cause as well as the effect of the state's far-reaching control, highlighting the lack of bodily autonomy within the population.

On the other hand, the narrative voice of Ding Gou'er is easily swayed by political language. As established earlier, Ding Gou'er is forced to overindulge in order to prove his

patriotism. In all instances, his drunkenness proves destructive as he loses bodily control: it turns him from an upstanding Party official to just another participant in the crimes around him. He is conscious of this predicament as he thinks to himself that drinking might hinder him from carrying out his investigation. He has internalised the obvious self-destructive discourse; this represents the point where power exercises itself from within the social body rather than from above it (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 39). Ding Gou'er is equally the victim and the victimiser: his lack of bodily control which ultimately results in his doom is at once voluntary yet forced.

Suspended in the changing political landscape, the narrators in the present texts are themselves confused; this leads to moral ambiguity within where the narrator is both the self-deceived and self-deceiving (Booth 342-4). The unreliable narrators are both at once hyper-aware yet detached from their surroundings due to their trauma. Ironically, while Dai Wei returns to his father's experiences in the reform-through-labour camps, he is unable to identify how his economic obsessions allow the government to shirk responsibility. Similarly, he is too preoccupied with his grievances against the government that the much larger massacre in Lhasa is merely skimmed over. Here, he fails to realise how his position as a young adult in the era of economic reforms as well as his Han Chinese identity contribute to the oppression around him. As a defense mechanism, the narrator purposely ignores the possibility of barbarity within himself.

On the other hand, the lack of self-awareness manifests in Ding Gou'er narrative as he associates children with gourmand consumption: his morally superior air breaks down when a close reading of his ramblings prove that Ding Gou'er desires their flesh. The omniscient narrator "Mo Yan" insists Ding Gou'er was tricked into consuming braised babies. However, Ding Gou'er is a participant in the same cannibalistic society where flesh has been normalised to meat (Yue 266-74). Just as the unreliable narrator highlights how negation evolves into participation on the individual level, it marks how on the national level, the desire for change has degraded to consumerist desires.

The characters in the novels are complicit in the events that unfold. As Gang Yue argues through the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalesque, in the postsocialist nation, the people have become a tool in the service of cultural nationalism where exaggeration has reduced the individual to a piece of meat (282-7). Unreliable narration represents the window through which Bakhtin's "grotesque realism" has evolved into Mo Yan's "demonic realism" and Ma Jian's "comatose crowds." While discussing cannibalism during the Guangxi Cultural Revolution Massacre, Dai Wei asks who the cannibals were to which Dr Song replies,

"You could argue that the only real murderer was Chairman Mao, But the fact is, everyone was involved...You ask me who the murderers were. The answer is everyone! Our neighbours, our friends across the street." (63)

This is an image Dai Wei will return to after the massacre as he elaborates how his friends and family had turned against him. Analepsis allows the narrator to shift through two separate events and connect them. The connection he is not able to draw at the moment is made possible in his hyper-aware mental state later. Similarly, having tricked Ding Gou'er into consuming the braised baby, Diamond Jin asserts, "[i]f we are cannibalistic beasts, then you are too" (172). At another point, although he has never consumed human meat, Li Yidou wonders if he is a "cannibalistic beast" too (219). The binary has been merged and there is a sense of half awareness of their complicity within the citizenry. The narrators represent the futility of the individual's fight against such state-sponsored objectification. The unreliable narration functions to highlight their abjection to the point that their ultimate merger into the collective is the only foreseeable end: it demarcates the merging of the binaries of the state and the people.

### **Conclusion:**

Placing novels set in a contemporary rising Asian economy at the center, the paper explores the possibilities of democratisation processes in Third World nations and the hindrances it faces, namely in the form of political discourses enabled by the political elite.

Mainstream neoliberal voices grounded in developed western countries emphasise the

importance of reason and patience to counter state-sponsored narratives. By using unreliable narration, the authors raise issues about the feasibility of so-called “rationality” against the postsocialist cannibalistic state. Such narration also carefully mingles the social, cultural and political to further highlight the misplaced idea of the political and personal as separate entities. The body remembers even when all the forces around it have turned into amnesiac subjects serving the elite. In popular discourses, the glitz of industrial cities has camouflaged the structural violence that underlies it. As against this, unreliable narration explores how the political elite has ravished individual mentality and lead to the breakdown of the psyche. Such disjointed subjectivity emerges as the tool to critique public amnesia, political discourses and the relationship between the individual and the state.

Further researches can be conducted in areas of physicality and public spaces and disabilities as seen in the novels.

### Works Cited

- Ai, Weiwei. “The west is complicit in the 30-year cover-up of Tiananmen.” *The Guardian*. June. 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/04/china-tiananmen-square-beijing>.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Dikötter, Frank. *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-976*. London, Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Fang, Lizhi. “The Chinese Amnesia.” Translated by Perry Link. *The New York Review of Books*. 27 Sept. 1990. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/09/27/the-chinese-amnesia/>.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York, Vintage, 1990.



---*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*.

Translated by Colin Gordon et al., New York, Pantheon, 1980.

Inge, M. Thomas. "Mo Yan: Through Western Eyes." *World Literature Today*, vol. 74, no. 3, 2000, pp. 501–506. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/40155816](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40155816). Accessed 25 November 2021.

Kong, Belinda. *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square: The Chinese Literary Diaspora and the Politics of Global Culture*. Temple University Press, 2012.

Laing, Ronald David. *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London, Tavistock, 1960.

Link, Perry. "June Fourth: Memory and Ethics." *China Perspectives*, no. 2 (78), 2009, pp. 4-16. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/24054218](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24054218). Accessed 25 November 2021.

Marinelli, Maurizio. "Disembodied Words: The Ritualistic Quality of Political Discourse in the Era of Jiang Zemin." *Discourse, Politics and Media in Contemporary China*, by Qing Cao et al., John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014.

Ma, Jian. *Beijing Coma*. Translated by Flora Drew, Vintage, 2009.

Mo Yan. Nobel Lecture. Translated by Howard Goldblatt, [nobelprize.org](http://nobelprize.org), Nobel Media AB 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2012/yan/25452-mo-yan-nobel-lecture-2012/>. Accessed 25 November 2021.

---*The Republic of Wine: A Novel*. Translated by Howard Goldblatt, New York, Arcade Publishing, 2000.

Phelan, James. "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of 'Lolita.'" *Narrative*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2007, pp. 222-238. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/30219252](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30219252). Accessed 25 November 2021.

Tonkin, Boyd. "Ma Jian: Slaughter and Forgetting." *The Independent*, 23 Oct. 2011. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/ma-jian-slaughter-and-forgetting-819385.html>.

Tsai, Yun-Chu. *You are Whom You Eat: Cannibalism in Contemporary Chinese*

*Fiction and Film*. PhD dissertation. *UC Irvine*, 2016. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7nk4v18m>. Accessed 25 November 2021.

Wang, Zheng. *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*. Columbia University Press, 2012.

Yang, Xiaobin. *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-garde Fiction*. University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Yue, Gang. *The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China*. Duke University Press, 1999.

Zhang, Xudong. “Epilogue: Postmodernism and Postsocialist Society— Historicizing the Present.” *Postmodernism and China*, by Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, Duke University Press, 2000.

ETKI:	ETKİ:
<i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>	<i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>
e-ISSN: 0000-0000 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021	e-ISSN: 0000-0000 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

## Memory storytelling: structural aspects in *O dribble*

Pedro Penhoca da Silva | PHD Student | Mackenzie Presbiteriyen University  
ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br

Camila Concato | PHD Student | Mackenzie Presbiteriyen University

### Abstract

This work uses the stream of consciousness of narrators Murilo Neto and Murilo Filho, son and father, from *O dribble* (2013), a novel written by Sérgio Rodrigues, in order to highlight the importance of storytelling in this text. The context of national soccer after the 1950s is the scenario where particular issues of the characters are addressed, as if they were in the middle of a match of this sport. The use of this collective game shows itself to be an opportunity to bring to light human dilemmas and feelings. There is also the use of a variety of truthful elements concerning the history of soccer allied to free literary creation, alternating aspects of reality and fiction. The narrative mirror in abyss makes explicit the degrees of similitude transposed to the sphere of orality. Faced with the concept of reminiscent memory, telling establishes parallels that provide a comparison with the tradition of African storytellers, more specifically from Angola, for the denomination of characteristic types of telling. Theoretical texts by Walter Benjamin (2012), referring to the figure of the narrator; Lucien Dallenbach (1977), referring to the concept of mise en abyme; Jeane Marie Gagnebin (2006), on the study of memory and Harry Garuba (2012), referring to the concept of animist realism, will be used as references. It is noticeable that in the narrative of *O dribble* storyteller and text are hybrids, because both are endowed with *makas* and *missossos* that become a narrative voice, leading the reader through reminiscence, since rescue and revenge are the objectives sought by the characters.

### Keywords:

*O dribble*,  
storytelling,  
memory,  
Nâzım Hikmet,  
animist realism,  
human dilemma.

### Article History:

Received: 01.10.2021

Accepted: 27.11.2021

### Citation Guide:

Da Silva, Pedro Penhoca and Camila Concato. "Memory Storytelling: structural aspects in O Dribble." *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 69-81.

<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 0000-0000 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 0000-0000 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## Hatıra Anlatıcılığı: *O driblé*'de Yapısal Yönler

Pedro Penhoca da Silva | Doktora Öğrencisi | Mackenzie Presbiteryen  
University

ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br

Camila Concato | Doktora Öğrencisi | Mackenzie Presbiteryen University

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

*O driblé*,  
hikâye anlatıcılığı,  
bellek,  
animist gerçekçilik,  
insani ikilem.

### Makale Bilgileri:

*Geliş* : 01.10.2021

*Kabul* : 27.11.2021

### Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Da Silva, Pedro Penhoca and  
Camila Concato. "Memory  
Storytelling: structural  
aspects in *O Driblé*." *ETKI:  
Journal of Literature, Theatre and  
Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1,  
2021, pp. 69-81.

Bu makale, hikâye anlatıcılığının önemini vurgulamak üzere Sérgio Rodrigues'ın *O driblé* (2013) eserinin anlatıcıları baba ve oğul Murilo Neto ile Murilo Filho'nun bilinç akışını ele almaktadır. 1950ler sonrası futbol bağlamı; karakterlerin özel sorunlarının, adeta bir futbol maçının tam ortasındaymışlar gibi ele alındığı senaryoyu oluşturur. Bu kolektif oyunu kullanmak, insani ikilemleri ve duyguları gün yüzüne çıkarma fırsatı sunmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, hakikat ve kurguyu çarpıtan özgür edebi üretkenlikle bağlantılı futbol tarihi ile ilgili hayatın gerçekliğiyle uyuşan çeşitli öğelerin kullanımı da mevcuttur. Olay içinde olay şeklindeki anlatı, söz katmanına aktarılan teşbihleri açıklığa kavuşturur. Hatırlatıcı bellek kavramıyla karşı karşıya kalan anlatıcılık, hikâye anlatıcılığının ana niteliklerinin adlandırılması için özellikle Angolalı olanlar başta olmak üzere Afrikalı hikâye anlatıcılığı geleneğiyle karşılaştırılmalar yapmayı sağlayan koşutluklar kurar. Anlatıcının şahsına atıfta bulunan Walter Benjamin'in (2012), olay içinde olay kavramına atıfta bulunan Lucien Dallenbach'in (1977), bellek üzerinde çalışan Jeane Marie Gagnebin'in (2006), animist realizme atıfta bulunan Harry Garuba'nın (2012) kuramsal metinleri referans kaynaklar olarak kullanılacaktır. *O driblé*'in hikâye anlatıcısının anlatısı ile metnin melez olması dikkate değerdir, çünkü her ikisi de *makas* ve *missossos*'larla bezelidir ki bunlar, okuyucuya anılar vasıtasıyla rehberlik eden anlatısal sese dönüşürler zira kurtuluş ve intikam karakterlerin peşinde koştukları gayelerdir.

## Introduction

This study intends to highlight the importance of storytelling in the stream of consciousness of the narrators of *O drible*,<sup>1</sup> by Sérgio Rodrigues. This novel brings as scenario the Brazilian football environment from the 1950s, determining individual issues of the characters as if they were playing a football match. However, the collective advent of the game is an artifice to infer intrinsic human dilemmas such as abandonment, revenge, love, and hate. Thus, true elements from the history of football are mixed with fiction, so that the reader enters a duplicate environment that alternates and collates reality and fiction.

The text *O drible* is the third book by author Sérgio Rodrigues, winner of the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Portugal Telecom Prize for Literature in Portuguese Language in the category “Novel” (Cofina), and has been translated into Spanish and French.

Among the many reviews known in digital media, we highlight three that have been published in Brazilian scientific journals, such as an untitled one (Abreu), Sérgio Rodrigues: *O Drible* (Valente) and *Futebol e identidade nacional: resenha da obra de “O drible”*<sup>2</sup> (Lis and Capraro). This book, besides greatly contributing to contemporary Brazilian literature, has also been the object of research in scientific papers such as *Memórias a passos e passes em O Drible*<sup>3</sup> (Effting) and *Racismo, futebol e sociedade em O Drible, de Sérgio Rodrigues*<sup>4</sup> (Chagas), a paper published in conference proceedings entitled *Em tempos de ditadura brasileira: analisando O Drible sob uma perspectiva de gênero*<sup>5</sup> (Rosalen), a monograph whose title is *O futebol a serviço da tradição literária*<sup>6</sup> (Cantilo) and an undergraduate thesis called *A potência poética do drible: reflexões sobre futebol-literatura*<sup>7</sup> (Brochado), as well as being mentioned in many others, among which we highlight *A ‘tabelinha’ entre o futebol e a poesia*<sup>8</sup> (Guimarães), *O enigma da literatura brasileira contemporânea na França: recepção, visibilidade e legitimação*<sup>9</sup> (Rissardo), *Masculinidades em foco: A (des)construção da paternidade a partir de crônicas de Rogério Pereira*<sup>10</sup> (Munsberg and Rocha), *O romance brasileiro contemporâneo conforme os prêmios literários (2010-2014)*<sup>11</sup> (Zilberman), *Relações literárias México-Brasil: notas de trabalho*<sup>12</sup> (Carvalho), *“Toda Rigidez é Condenável”: os dois Brasis das crônicas sobre futebol de Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessoa*<sup>13</sup> (Mattar and Schwartz) and *O modo de organização enunciativo no gênero artigo de opinião*<sup>14</sup> (Pauliukonis and Bastos).

<sup>1</sup> “O Drible” translated as The Dribble (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>2</sup> Football and national identity: review of the work of “O drible” (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>3</sup> Memories to steps and passes in O Drible.

<sup>4</sup> Racism, football and society in O Drible, by Sérgio Rodrigues.

<sup>5</sup> In times of Brazilian dictatorship: Analysing O Drible from a gender perspective.

<sup>6</sup> Football at the service of literary tradition.

<sup>7</sup> The poetic power of dribbling: reflections on football-literature.

<sup>8</sup> The ‘one-two’ between football and poetry.

<sup>9</sup> The enigma of contemporary Brazilian literature in France: reception, visibility and legitimation.

<sup>10</sup> Masculinities in focus: The (un)construction of fatherhood from chronicles by Rogério Pereira

<sup>11</sup> The contemporary Brazilian novel according to literary awards (2010-2014).

<sup>12</sup> Mexico-Brazil literary relations: working notes.

<sup>13</sup> “All Rigidity is Condemnable”: the two Brasis of Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessoa's football chronicles.

<sup>14</sup> The mode of enunciative organization in the opinion article genre.

In *O dribble*, Murilo Neto is the son of the sports chronicler Murilo Filho, who is already eighty years old and has been disillusioned by doctors. Father and son have not spoken with each other for twenty-six years and, with the chronicler's imminent death, Murilo Neto is invited by his father to spend Sundays together. This is a troubled relationship, with a history of events of dispute, cruelty and suffering between both. Faced with the father's invitation and, consequently, acceptance, a reflective soliloquy is established in Murilo Neto, setting up a stream of consciousness in which stories are told.

The orality has strands, beyond the traditional ones, which are not made in a usual structure. Walter Benjamin, an important German philosopher, and literary critic, proposes in his text *O narrador* that the art of narrating is in extinction: “*É como se estivéssemos privados de uma faculdade que nos parecia segura e inalienável: a faculdade de intercambiar experiências*”<sup>15</sup> (Benjamin 213). In the chosen corpus, the experience of narrating subverts this assumption and finds in the contemporary novelesque structure insurgencies that analogously are of oral substance, like telling a story to oneself while this self unfolds into a listening reader. Sérgio Rodrigues' narrative crosses the threshold of individual reflection, moulding it with stories told through recollection. The storyteller has the primordial function of oral transmission – which is to appropriate the circumstances and transmit them. Now when Murilo Neto narrates in third person the events of his life with his father, an atmosphere of storytelling is established in the story and he becomes a narrator in abyss, transmitting small stories that contribute to the construction of the whole novel, that is, a storyteller that fits the structural model named *mise en abyme*.<sup>16</sup>

### A complex dribble: storytelling in Sérgio Rodrigues' text

The theorist Lucien Dallenbach studied and conceptualized *mise en abyme*, specifying its nuances and classifying them. For *mise en abyme* to occur, the secondary story must work as a reflection within a game of mirrors with different degrees of analogy, as long as it maintains at least some link of connection with the first one, that is, to be a “*narrativa dentro de outra que apresente alguma relação de similitude com aquela que a contém*”<sup>17</sup> (Dallenbach 18). The narrative mirror in abyss has three forms of reflection : the simple one, which can be defined only as a story within the other; the reflection to infinity, “*que toma como base o efeito produzido quando dois espelhos são colocados um na frente do outro*”<sup>18</sup> (Pino 161), and which in literature is characterized by a corresponding story within another corresponding story, and so on; and the paradoxical reflection, in which the narrated stories, one

<sup>15</sup> “It is as if we were deprived of a faculty that seemed secure and inalienable to us: the faculty of exchanging experiences”.

<sup>16</sup> “*Mise en abyme*” translated as Narrative in abyss (all foreign words translated by authors). It means a narrative within another narrative.

<sup>17</sup> “Narrative within another one that presents some relation of similitude with the one that contains it” (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>18</sup> “Which takes as its basis the effect produced when two mirrors are placed one in front of the other” (all foreign words translated by authors).

within the other, get confused.

In the novel *O drible*, the degrees of similarity between the great story and the digressions of the character Murilo Neto are subtle in what concerns the reflection to infinity, but it is in the paradoxical reflection, where the father's, the son's and the football's story get mixed that the narrative in abyss is configured. There is an interweaving between the three, even though each one is unique and individual, overlapping one another to compose the main one. Inside the abyss narrative, in which Murilo Neto is the narrator, the reader becomes a kind of listener of the resigned memories of the character, that is, of the reminiscences listed by Murilo Neto. He invokes the question of memory as reminiscence, as mnemonic image – image that comes without a kind of a permission or consent of the individual who is remembering and starts from an external stimulus, i.e., from an external component with some similar feature to the original complex of stimuli, to an original memory:

*Estava distraído, observando a boca da menina se mexer sem som, quando se deu conta com um violento baque interno – alguma coisa se espatifando, acordes maiores fazendo eco – de que havia muito na lourinha de farmácia, da cor do cabelo ao corpo mignon, que lembrava certa moça do passado longínquo, uma das vinte mil namoradas do pai. A primeira mulher da sua vida. Aquilo o atordoou. O túnel do tempo tinha se instalado na boca bicudinha de Gleyce<sup>19</sup>. (Rodrigues 38)*

Awakening or not an image, in this case, does not depend on conscious activity, but on an uncontrollable reverie that radiates and finds strength in a memory or affection already experienced. In the excerpt above, when Murilo Neto became aware of it, the memory of the past was already coated in memory related to the present, re-signified from the reunion with his father, a latent event of the now.

According to the philosopher Jeane Marie Gagnebin, memory is studied in three aspects: the faculty of memory, which is a more comprehensive and psychic concept, because it encompasses a memory competence; the ability to remember, which is a more intellectual concept, because it is an intellectual activity, the activity of remembering; the images that return to memory, for example the reminiscences, also called remembrance, the mnemonic images (Gagnebin). In the perspective that understands the narrator Murilo Neto, it can be said that his memories are the mnemonic memories of his relationship with his father, once the reunion recreates such memories according to his current perception. It is noticed that Murilo Neto appropriates these memories *en abyme*, and that, although the three narrative perspectives – Murilo Filho, Murilo Neto and football

<sup>19</sup> He was distracted, watching the girl's mouth move soundlessly, when he realised with a violent internal thud – something shattering, larger chords echoing – that there was much about the pharmacy blonde, from the colour of her hair to her mignon body, that reminded him of a certain girl from the distant past, one of his father's twenty thousand girlfriends. The first woman of his life. That stunned him. The time tunnel had installed itself in Gleyce's peckish mouth (all foreign words translated by authors).

stories – run parallel, they are intertwined, since the remembrance of the chronicler's son is not only a memory of the past, but also a rescue of identity understanding. In this rescue of understanding, memory works as a road – it takes the walker to the awakening of an individual archive of affections.

Resorting to characteristics conceived in the African oral tradition, two categories of storytellers stand out: the *Doma* and the *Griot*. The *Doma* comes from a traditionalist tradition, where commitment to truth is paramount. It is called the *Knower* and appears as a scholar and intellectual. Its transmission is faithful to the knowledge it has acquired, and it is not free to expand or reinvent any transfer of knowledge. Its life is guided by journeys for improvement and it generally takes part in meetings and gatherings wherever it goes, listening to stories and reports and acquiring as much knowledge as possible. *Knowers* are great bearers of news and are characterized as a spokesperson within the local culture. The *Griot*, more popular, already has great freedom to speak and in this way can manifest himself at will, since it has no commitment to the truth. It can tell a story according to what suits it at a moment, it is performative, sings and dances while narrating. It is usually connected to a single family, becoming aware of all its genealogy.

Both are intrinsic voices of general African culture and figure differently as storytellers and knowers. In *O dribble*, *Doma* and *Griot* merge into a hybrid storyteller. *Doma* could not conduct the storytelling, as it could not use the transforming power of the story according to the context. It needs to be faithful to the truth he narrates. However, the various insertions of true occurrences during the narrative, mainly concerning events related to the history of football, place the figure of the *Doma* as a conductor, even if to alienate truth to fiction the *Griot* is the main bearer.

At the very beginning of the book:

*O que você vê primeiro é uma imagem parada que logo identifica como da Copa de 1970 pelo short da seleção brasileira, que é de um azul mais claro que o habitual, além de escandalosamente curto para os padrões de hoje. Tostão, cabeçudo inconfundível, número 9 às costas, conduz a bola observado a certa distância por um sujeito de camisa azul-clara e calção preto*<sup>20</sup>. (Rodrigues 9)

The storyteller here is committed to the truth, since it makes available a real fact, – the detailed physical description of the uniforms worn by the players of the Brazilian national football team, highlighting the measurements of the shorts and the color in comparison with uniforms of previous participations, as well as the figure of the centre-forward Tostão (1947-), owner of shirt number 9 –, it configures itself as *Doma*. However, the construction of the novel starts from truths leading them performative to something that relativizes according to the narrator's intention. The

<sup>20</sup> What you see first is a still image that soon identifies as from the 1970 World Cup by the shorts of the Brazilian team, which are of a lighter blue than usual, besides being outrageously short by today's standards. Tostão, unmistakable big-headed, number 9 on his back, handles the ball watched from a distance by a guy wearing a light blue shirt and black shorts (all foreign words translated by authors).



transformative power of the intention is allied to the context and to what it aims at for the future, and the figure of the narrator ends up being substantiated of intonation in the art of telling. At the end of the novel, the commitment to truth loses its meaning while bringing the revelation that only a meticulous performance could create. Murilo Filho is the *Griot* of Murilo Neto, and Murilo Neto is the *Doma* of himself.

*O velho detém o vídeo. Pousa o controle remoto no braço do sofá, olha nos olhos outra vez e diz, o que houve aqui, Neto, foi simples: Pelé desafiou Deus e perdeu. Imagine se não perdesse. Se não perdesse, nunca mais que a humanidade dormia tranquila. Pelé desafiou Deus e perdeu, mas que desafio soberbo*<sup>21</sup>. (Rodrigues 13)

The *Griot* is universally allowed to conduct the story according to what he wishes to awaken, as occurs in the passage above when Murilo Filho makes use of his personal observations to induce understanding, referring to a supposed affront to the Catholic version of God by the famous football player Edson Arantes do Nascimento (1940-), globally known as Pelé.

Continuing the analyses that converge with the advent of storytelling, a more specific parallel can be drawn with definitions coined in Angola, a country on the west coast of Africa. The terms *maka* and *missosso* belong to Angola and stand out as pertinent designations for the remembrances told. In African culture, *maka* is configured as a true narrative or as such. It is based on something that really happened, as for example when Murilo Filho or Murilo Neto talks about sports, politics, or entertainment:

*Tinha se tornado fã de um garoto chamado Michael Jackson, cabelo afro, calça boca de sino e voz de anjo, que emplacava no rádio ao lado dos irmãos mais espigados uma balada linda de morrer atrás de outra:*<sup>22</sup> “Ben”, “Music and me”, “One day in your life”. (Rodrigues 25-26)

The singer mentioned, Michael Jackson (1958-2009), was an icon of entertainment and really hit the spot with such songs. Moreover, the king of pop had, in fact, the characteristics that the excerpt mentions. *Makas* are recurrently told in the novel, for as much as one experiences a reminiscence, a more logical thought narration is established there, which was born true. *Maka* works in this way and is therefore characterized as a fictionalization of the ways of life of an original true story.

*Missosso*, on the other hand, represents a fiction or fable, because it is something that did

<sup>21</sup> The old man stops the video. He puts the remote control down on the arm of the sofa, looks into his eyes again and says, what happened here, Neto, was simple: Pelé defied God and lost. Imagine if he didn't lose. If he didn't lose, never again would humanity sleep peacefully. Pelé challenged God and lost, but what a proud challenge (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>22</sup> He had become a fan of a boy called Michael Jackson, with afro hair, bell-bottoms and voice of an angel, who, together with his more spindly brothers, used to play one gorgeous ballad after another on the radio (all foreign words translated by authors).

not happen in the empirical reality, but rather an imaginary product that is part of the order of fantasy. The system of the *missosso* “[...] *tem dois pilares de sustentação: o animismo e a certeza de que tudo se liga à força vital*”<sup>23</sup> (Padilha 44). When a *missosso* is told there is a fusion of individual aspirations with the primordial needs of a group, for this reason the universe is always portrayed by ordinary beings, of the earth, who play everyday roles, even though they are integrated into the magical-animistic thought where everything has life and is connected in a cyclical way. Faced with the concept of *missosso*, it can be deduced that the character Peralvo is a fable told in the empirical real. His connection with the animist cycle of conception of the world portrays fundamentals coming from cultural traditions, such as his religious background of African matrix and his sensitive and anticipated perception of current events. When the story of Peralvo is introduced into the narrative, it is a *missosso* that arises with the intention of awakening feelings that concern the motivation of the *Griot* who tells it. In the book *O dribble*, a narrative that is urban and contemporary, when a *missosso* is told, magical realism is consummated. However, relating the specificity of magical realism with African cultural aspects, attributes characteristics of an animist realism as literary structure, constitutes a fusion where animism becomes of more relevant importance in the classification. The fable-like atmosphere in Peralvo *missosso* abstains from the urban format and transmutes itself to the animist conception. Some examples of this sub-genre can be found in works by African authors who produce texts in Portuguese language, such as Boaventura Cardoso (1944-), Luandino Vieira (1935-), Mia Couto (1955-), Paulina Chiziane (1955-), Odete Semedo (1959-) and Pepetela (1941-), just to name a few.

Animist realism draws a parallel with the magic or marvelous realism studied in Latin America, however, it is more appropriate to relate it to African culture, because it corresponds in a very particular way with the close, harmonious bonds established between individuals and the elements of nature, the universe as creation. It comes from a strand in which cultural precepts of African tradition are enshrined. Inscribed in the fictional matter of this culture, it shapes the reality that structures the narrative, giving a concrete aspect to abstract ideas and a spiritual dimension to material objects. As it is an aesthetic-ideological manifestation, and because it is committed to cultural values, it ends up encompassing a very comprehensive concept. Magic realism, on the other hand, carries an intrinsic irony and has a more urban and cosmopolitan slant, a kind of provocation, while the representational technique of animist realism figures as an explanation of an axiological framework of African culture. Harry Garuba argues that animist culture enables a constant re-enchantment of the world and that the name magical realism is not sufficient to encompass such a conception when used to structure a narrative: “[...] *‘realismo’ mágico é um conceito demasiado estreito para descrever a multiplicidade das práticas de representação que o animismo autoriza*”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Has two pillars of support: animism and the certainty that everything is connected to the vital force (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>24</sup> Magical ‘realism’ is too narrow a concept to describe the multiplicity of representational practices that animism authorizes (all foreign words translated by authors).

(Garuba 244). Garuba also argues that magical realism can be considered a sub-genre of animist realism and that the governing range of this relationship would be animist materialism.

In animist realism, the real and the imaginary condense since the imaginary is conceived as real by a breath of life that animates objects and ideas. It unveils a hierarchy of value inscribed in a cultural community. When it is reported to literature it is dialogued with the universe of the narrative, favouring a fusion of the past (primordial animist time) with the fictional present. Peralvo can see everything that will happen seconds before it happens, besides being able (without much awareness of it) to describe a person by the color he sees of his aura – the energy field that surrounds human beings. His connection with the nature of movement and with the anticipation of the next moment makes him part of a chain of life, in which he pulsates by intuition. Murilo Filho introduces the story of Peralvo and, in doing so, according to the extraordinary facts which he describes as being part of the player's essence, extends that existence to the impalpable instance of animism.

### Concluding remarks

Having established the characteristics of the two types of storytelling, in *O dribble* not only the storyteller is hybrid, but also the text, as it has both *makas* and *missossos*, and both are inscribed as narrative voice through their due aspect. In the context of football, the *maka* is tied to a physical world, of the events of a historical and linear time and the *missosso* to a spiritual and cyclical world. Therefore, in the weaving of the novel, *maka* and *missosso* have the function of leading the reader through reminiscence, since in the journey of the main characters is the rescue, at first, and the revenge, *a posteriori*, that is sought. This mix of facts that occurred in the last century – like some elements of pop culture from the 70s and 80s – with others that are purely fictional brings to the reader a fictional reality of the time. Rodrigues thus intends to move his creation away from historical fiction to create a kind of alternative historical fiction, a strategy widely used by authors of autofiction or contemporary historical novelists.

In relation to other storytelling elements, Sérgio Rodrigues' novel gives us a tree, in Peralvo's conversation with his mother, and the radio, a primordial device of a so-called golden age in football. The radio is the fire in which the listeners stay around for the pleasure of the storytelling; the narrator of the match, in a time when television was not a constituent artifact of a home, is the storyteller himself, is the *Griot* who excels in performance to narrate a throw, is the one who gives life to something common, making it full of meaning. Murilo Filho appropriates these meanings that he has stored up during his life and transforms them into the leading thread of his final dribble: a revenge, a dribble on the son that life imposed on him. In the construction of

the characters, the author establishes from the beginning the route traced, a logic according to what was previously programmed, but the path is fluid, since the reception of the work is what determines whether the structure is matter or reverie:

*A nossa interpretação dos seres vivos é mais fluida, variando com o tempo ou as condições da conduta. No romance, podemos variar relativamente a nossa interpretação da personagem; mas o escritor lhe deu, desde logo, uma linha de coerência fixada para sempre, delimitando a curva da sua existência e a natureza do seu modo-de-ser.* <sup>25</sup> (Candido 58-59)

The novel *O dribble* carries already formed and constituted characters, but each one of them unfolds in accountants, *Doma* and *Griot* telling *makas* and *missossos*. The end is set, so is the path, but the path is intrinsic to each listener/reader, whether the storyteller is imbricated in a colloquy or in a soliloquy.

The reasons presented do not exhaust the analysis of a work of great complexity as *O dribble*, and perhaps that is why it has received so many positive reviews from the mainstream Brazilian media – as, for example, the text published by the Moreira Salles Institute, an important non-profit cultural organization, which considers this book as a novel about football of the highest quality (Máximo) –, reflected in its awards, translations into other languages and ability to be the object of academic studies by various strands. It is not possible, however, to confirm whether a trend in contemporary Brazilian literature will be to address part of its culture that has sometimes been left aside by writers, but the word known as diversity seems to be increasingly one of the keys to what is to come in the literary production of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With this, it is necessary disclosure and analysis of the new literary production of Brazil as much as its production considered classic, so that past and contemporary tread an innovative path in this part of the history of literature that is being built.

---

<sup>25</sup> Our interpretation of living beings is more fluid, varying with time or the conditions of conduct. In the novel, we may vary relatively our interpretation of the character; but the writer has given him, from the outset, a line of coherence fixed forever, delimiting the curve of his existence and the nature of his mode-of-being (all foreign words translated by authors).

### Works cited

- Abreu, Wagner Coriolano de. “O drible’s review”. *Brasil/Brazil: A Journal of Brazilian Literature*. 28. 52 (2015): pp. 118-121.  
<https://seer.ufrgs.br/brasilbrazil/article/view/61482/36353>
- Benjamin, Walter. “O narrador: considerações sobre a obra de Nikolai Leskov”. *Magia e técnica, arte e política: ensaios sobre a literatura e história da cultura*, edited by Walter Benjamin, translation by Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, Brasiliense, 2012, pp. 213-240.
- Brochado, Giovanni Carús. *A potência poética do drible: reflexões sobre futebol-literatura*. 2015. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Undergraduate thesis.  
<https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/134570/TCC%20Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- Candido, Antonio. “A personagem do romance”. *A personagem da ficção*, Perspectiva, 2014, pp. 51-80.
- Cantilo, Amanda Cristina Guedes. *O futebol a serviço da tradição literária*. 2019. Universidade de Brasília. Monograph  
[https://bdm.unb.br/bitstream/10483/23178/1/2019\\_AmandaCristinaGuedesCantilo\\_tcc.pdf](https://bdm.unb.br/bitstream/10483/23178/1/2019_AmandaCristinaGuedesCantilo_tcc.pdf).
- Carvalho, Erivelto da Rocha. “Relações literárias México-Brasil: notas de trabalho”. *Cerrados*. 50. (2019): pp. 109-127.  
<https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/cerrados/article/view/25123/24648>
- Chagas, Eduardo Lopez. “Racismo, futebol e sociedade em O Drible, de Sérgio Rodrigues”. *Revista Memento*. 10. 2. (2019): pp. 1-13.  
[http://periodicos.unincor.br/index.php/memento/article/view/5885/pdf\\_163](http://periodicos.unincor.br/index.php/memento/article/view/5885/pdf_163).
- Dallenbach, Lucien. *Le récit spéculaire: essai sur la mise-en-abyme*. Seuil, 1977.
- Effting, Marilda Aparecida de Oliveira. “Memórias a passos e passes em *O Drible*”. *Criação & Crítica*. 22. (2018): pp. 132-142.  
<https://www.revistas.usp.br/criacaoecritica/article/view/145772/149661>.
- Gagnebin, Jeanne Marie. *Lembrar escrever esquecer*. Editora 34, 2006.
- Garuba, Harry. “Explorações no realismo animista: notas sobre a leitura e a escrita da literatura, cultura e sociedade africana”. *Nonada Letras em Revista*. 15.19 (2012): pp. 235-256.  
Redalyc. Web. 21 Dec. 2021.

Guimarães, Guatavo Cerqueira. “A ‘tabelinha’ entre o futebol e a poesia”. Em tese. 20. 1 (2014): pp. 51-62.

<http://www.periodicos.letras.ufmg.br/index.php/emtese/article/view/5922/5161>.

Lis, Natasha Santos and André Mendes Capraro. “Futebol e identidade nacional: resenha da obra de “O drible””. Pensar a Prática. 21. 2 (2018): pp. 495-498.

<https://www.revistas.ufg.br/fef/article/view/44239/pdf>.

Mattar, Guilherme and Christian Schwartz. ““Toda Rigidez é Condenável”: os dois Brasis das crônicas sobre futebol de Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessoa”. Universidade Positivo. (2019): pp. 1-11.

<https://ludopedio.org.br/wp-content/uploads/>

[Toda Rigidez Condenavel revisado final PDF.pdf](#).

Máximo, João. “O melhor romance já escrito sobre futebol”. BlogIMS. (2013).

<https://blogdoims.com.br/o-melhor-romance-ja-escrito-sobre-futebol-por-joao-maximo>.

Munsberg, Gabriel Felipe Pautz and Virginea Novach Santos da Rocha. “Masculinidades em foco: A (des)construção da paternidade a partir de crônicas de Rogério Pereira”. Ipotesi. 20. 2 (2016): pp. 126-136.

<https://periodicos.ufjf.br/index.php/ipotesi/article/view/19401>.

Padilha, Laura Cavalcante. *Entre voz e letra: o lugar da ancestralidade na ficção angolana do século XX*. EdUFF, Pallas Editora, 2011.

Pauliukonis, Maria Aparecida Lino and Maria Cristina Vieira Bastos. “O modo de organização enunciativo no gênero artigo de opinião”. Confluência. 60 (2021). pp. 81-104

<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:pUeB17TFJx4J:https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/7831419.pdf+&cd=2&hl=pt-PT&ct=clnk&gl=pt>.

Pino, Claudia Amigo. *A ficção da escrita*. Ateliê Editorial, 2004.

Rissardo, Agnes. “O enigma da literatura brasileira contemporânea na França: recepção, visibilidade e legitimação”. ABRALIC XIV Congresso Internacional - Fluxos e correntes: trânsitos e traduções literárias. (2015).

[https://abralic.org.br/anais/arquivos/2015\\_1455906791.pdf](https://abralic.org.br/anais/arquivos/2015_1455906791.pdf).

Rodrigues, Sérgio. *O drible*. Companhia das Letras, 2013.

Rosalen, Eloisa. “Em tempos de ditadura brasileira: analisando O Drible sob uma perspectiva de gênero”. Seminário Internacional Fazendo Gênero 11 & 13th Women’s Worlds Congress. (2017): p. 1-11.

[http://www.wwc2017.eventos.dype.com.br/resources/anais/1498663106\\_ARQUIVO\\_fazendogenero11.pdf](http://www.wwc2017.eventos.dype.com.br/resources/anais/1498663106_ARQUIVO_fazendogenero11.pdf).

Valente, Valdemar. “Sérgio Rodrigues – O drible”. Revista Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea. 45. (2015): pp. 479-483. <https://www.scielo.br/j/elbc/a/GYbtkRjcCHbZPQfhFsmGWgs/?format=pdf&lang=pt>.

Zilberman, Regina. “O romance brasileiro contemporâneo conforme os prêmios literários (2010-2014)”. Revista Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea. 50. (2017): pp. 424-443. <https://www.scielo.br/j/elbc/a/wptLv3W9jzxgr5LfQQKpqcL/?format=pdf&lang=pt>.

ETKI	i
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>	ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021	e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021

## Memory storytelling: structural aspects in *O dribble*

Pedro Penhoca da Silva | PHD Student | Mackenzie Presbiterien University  
ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br

Camila Concato | PHD Student | Mackenzie Presbiterien University

### Abstract

This work uses the stream of consciousness of narrators Murilo Neto and Murilo Filho, son and father, from *O dribble* (2013), a novel written by Sérgio Rodrigues, in order to highlight the importance of storytelling in this text. The context of national soccer after the 1950s is the scenario where particular issues of the characters are addressed, as if they were in the middle of a match of this sport. The use of this collective game shows itself to be an opportunity to bring to light human dilemmas and feelings. There is also the use of a variety of truthful elements concerning the history of soccer allied to free literary creation, alternating aspects of reality and fiction. The narrative mirror in abyss makes explicit the degrees of similitude transposed to the sphere of orality. Faced with the concept of reminiscent memory, telling establishes parallels that provide a comparison with the tradition of African storytellers, more specifically from Angola, for the denomination of characteristic types of telling. Theoretical texts by Walter Benjamin (2012), referring to the figure of the narrator; Lucien Dallenbach (1977), referring to the concept of mise en abyme; Jeane Marie Gagnebin (2006), on the study of memory and Harry Garuba (2012), referring to the concept of animist realism, will be used as references. It is noticeable that in the narrative of *O dribble* storyteller and text are hybrids, because both are endowed with *makas* and *missossos* that become a narrative voice, leading the reader through reminiscence, since rescue and revenge are the objectives sought by the characters.

### Keywords:

*O dribble*,  
storytelling,  
memory,  
Nâzım Hikmet,  
animist realism,  
human dilemma.

### Article History:

Received: 01.10.2021

Accepted: 27.11.2021

### Citation Guide:

Da Silva, Pedro Penhoca and Camila Concato. "Memory Storytelling: structural aspects in O Dribble." *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, pp. 69-81.



<b>E</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>i</b>
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>		ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>	
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 1.1 ★ December 2021		e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 1.1 ★ Aralık 2021	

## Hatıra Anlatıcılığı: *O driblé*'de Yapısal Yönler

Pedro Penhoca da Silva | Doktora Öğrencisi | Mackenzie Presbiteryen  
University

ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br

Camila Concato | Doktora Öğrencisi | Mackenzie Presbiteryen University

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

*O driblé*,  
hikâye anlatıcılığı,  
bellek,  
animist gerçekçilik,  
insani ikilem.

### Makale Bilgileri:

*Geliş* : 01.10.2021

*Kabul* : 27.11.2021

### Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Da Silva, Pedro Penhoca and  
Camila Concato. "Memory  
Storytelling: structural  
aspects in *O Driblé*." *ETKI:  
Journal of Literature, Theatre and  
Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1,  
2021, pp. 69-81.

Bu makale, hikâye anlatıcılığının önemini vurgulamak üzere Sérgio Rodrigues'ın *O driblé* (2013) eserinin anlatıcıları baba ve oğul Murilo Neto ile Murilo Filho'nun bilinç akışını ele almaktadır. 1950ler sonrası futbol bağlamı; karakterlerin özel sorunlarının, adeta bir futbol maçının tam ortasındaymışlar gibi ele alındığı senaryoyu oluşturur. Bu kolektif oyunu kullanmak, insani ikilemleri ve duyguları gün yüzüne çıkarma fırsatı sunmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, hakikat ve kurguyu çarpıtan özgür edebi üretkenlikle bağlantılı futbol tarihi ile ilgili hayatın gerçekliğiyle uyuşan çeşitli öğelerin kullanımı da mevcuttur. Olay içinde olay şeklindeki anlatı, söz katmanına aktarılan teşbihleri açıklığa kavuşturur. Hatırlatıcı bellek kavramıyla karşı karşıya kalan anlatıcılık, hikâye anlatıcılığının ana niteliklerinin adlandırılması için özellikle Angolalı olanlar başta olmak üzere Afrikalı hikâye anlatıcılığı geleneğiyle karşılaştırılmalar yapmayı sağlayan koşutluklar kurar. Anlatımcının şahsına atıfta bulunan Walter Benjamin'in (2012), olay içinde olay kavramına atıfta bulunan Lucien Dallenbach'in (1977), bellek üzerinde çalışan Jeane Marie Gagnebin'in (2006), animist realizme atıfta bulunan Harry Garuba'nın (2012) kuramsal metinleri referans kaynaklar olarak kullanılacaktır. *O driblé*'in hikâye anlatıcısının anlatısı ile metnin melez olması dikkate değerdir, çünkü her ikisi de *makas* ve *missossos*'larla bezelidir ki bunlar, okuyucuya anılar vasıtasıyla rehberlik eden anlatısal sese dönüşürler zira kurtuluş ve intikam karakterlerin peşinde koştukları gayelerdir.

## Introduction

This study intends to highlight the importance of storytelling in the stream of consciousness of the narrators of *O drible*,<sup>1</sup> by Sérgio Rodrigues. This novel brings as scenario the Brazilian football environment from the 1950s, determining individual issues of the characters as if they were playing a football match. However, the collective advent of the game is an artifice to infer intrinsic human dilemmas such as abandonment, revenge, love, and hate. Thus, true elements from the history of football are mixed with fiction, so that the reader enters a duplicate environment that alternates and collates reality and fiction.

The text *O drible* is the third book by author Sérgio Rodrigues, winner of the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Portugal Telecom Prize for Literature in Portuguese Language in the category “Novel” (Cofina), and has been translated into Spanish and French.

Among the many reviews known in digital media, we highlight three that have been published in Brazilian scientific journals, such as an untitled one (Abreu), Sérgio Rodrigues: *O Drible* (Valente) and *Futebol e identidade nacional: resenha da obra de “O drible”*<sup>2</sup> (Lis and Capraro). This book, besides greatly contributing to contemporary Brazilian literature, has also been the object of research in scientific papers such as *Memórias a passos e passes em O Drible*<sup>3</sup> (Effting) and *Racismo, futebol e sociedade em O Drible, de Sérgio Rodrigues*<sup>4</sup> (Chagas), a paper published in conference proceedings entitled *Em tempos de ditadura brasileira: analisando O Drible sob uma perspectiva de gênero*<sup>5</sup> (Rosalen), a monograph whose title is *O futebol a serviço da tradição literária*<sup>6</sup> (Cantilo) and an undergraduate thesis called *A potência poética do drible: reflexões sobre futebol-literatura*<sup>7</sup> (Brochado), as well as being mentioned in many others, among which we highlight *A ‘tabelinha’ entre o futebol e a poesia*<sup>8</sup> (Guimarães), *O enigma da literatura brasileira contemporânea na França: recepção, visibilidade e legitimação*<sup>9</sup> (Rissardo), *Masculinidades em foco: A (des)construção da paternidade a partir de crônicas de Rogério Pereira*<sup>10</sup> (Munsberg and Rocha), *O romance brasileiro contemporâneo conforme os prêmios literários (2010-2014)*<sup>11</sup> (Zilberman), *Relações literárias México-Brasil: notas de trabalho*<sup>12</sup> (Carvalho), *“Toda Rigidez é Condenável”: os dois Brasis das crônicas sobre futebol de Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessoa*<sup>13</sup> (Mattar and Schwartz) and *O modo de organização enunciativo no gênero artigo de opinião*<sup>14</sup> (Pauliukonis and Bastos).

<sup>1</sup> “O Drible” translated as The Dribble (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>2</sup> Football and national identity: review of the work of “O drible” (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>3</sup> Memories to steps and passes in O Drible.

<sup>4</sup> Racism, football and society in O Drible, by Sérgio Rodrigues.

<sup>5</sup> In times of Brazilian dictatorship: Analysing O Drible from a gender perspective.

<sup>6</sup> Football at the service of literary tradition.

<sup>7</sup> The poetic power of dribbling: reflections on football-literature.

<sup>8</sup> The ‘one-two’ between football and poetry.

<sup>9</sup> The enigma of contemporary Brazilian literature in France: reception, visibility and legitimation.

<sup>10</sup> Masculinities in focus: The (un)construction of fatherhood from chronicles by Rogério Pereira

<sup>11</sup> The contemporary Brazilian novel according to literary awards (2010-2014).

<sup>12</sup> Mexico-Brazil literary relations: working notes.

<sup>13</sup> “All Rigidity is Condemnable”: the two Brasis of Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessoa's football chronicles.

<sup>14</sup> The mode of enunciative organization in the opinion article genre.

In *O dribble*, Murilo Neto is the son of the sports chronicler Murilo Filho, who is already eighty years old and has been disillusioned by doctors. Father and son have not spoken with each other for twenty-six years and, with the chronicler's imminent death, Murilo Neto is invited by his father to spend Sundays together. This is a troubled relationship, with a history of events of dispute, cruelty and suffering between both. Faced with the father's invitation and, consequently, acceptance, a reflective soliloquy is established in Murilo Neto, setting up a stream of consciousness in which stories are told.

The orality has strands, beyond the traditional ones, which are not made in a usual structure. Walter Benjamin, an important German philosopher, and literary critic, proposes in his text *O narrador* that the art of narrating is in extinction: “*É como se estivéssemos privados de uma faculdade que nos parecia segura e inalienável: a faculdade de intercambiar experiências*”<sup>15</sup> (Benjamin 213). In the chosen corpus, the experience of narrating subverts this assumption and finds in the contemporary novelesque structure insurgencies that analogously are of oral substance, like telling a story to oneself while this self unfolds into a listening reader. Sérgio Rodrigues' narrative crosses the threshold of individual reflection, moulding it with stories told through recollection. The storyteller has the primordial function of oral transmission – which is to appropriate the circumstances and transmit them. Now when Murilo Neto narrates in third person the events of his life with his father, an atmosphere of storytelling is established in the story and he becomes a narrator in abyss, transmitting small stories that contribute to the construction of the whole novel, that is, a storyteller that fits the structural model named *mise en abyme*.<sup>16</sup>

### A complex dribble: storytelling in Sérgio Rodrigues' text

The theorist Lucien Dallenbach studied and conceptualized *mise en abyme*, specifying its nuances and classifying them. For *mise en abyme* to occur, the secondary story must work as a reflection within a game of mirrors with different degrees of analogy, as long as it maintains at least some link of connection with the first one, that is, to be a “*narrativa dentro de outra que apresente alguma relação de similitude com aquela que a contém*”<sup>17</sup> (Dallenbach 18). The narrative mirror in abyss has three forms of reflection : the simple one, which can be defined only as a story within the other; the reflection to infinity, “*que toma como base o efeito produzido quando dois espelhos são colocados um na frente do outro*”<sup>18</sup> (Pino 161), and which in literature is characterized by a corresponding story within another corresponding story, and so on; and the paradoxical reflection, in which the narrated stories, one

<sup>15</sup> “It is as if we were deprived of a faculty that seemed secure and inalienable to us: the faculty of exchanging experiences”.

<sup>16</sup> “*Mise en abyme*” translated as Narrative in abyss (all foreign words translated by authors). It means a narrative within another narrative.

<sup>17</sup> “Narrative within another one that presents some relation of similitude with the one that contains it” (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>18</sup> “Which takes as its basis the effect produced when two mirrors are placed one in front of the other” (all foreign words translated by authors).

within the other, get confused.

In the novel *O dribble*, the degrees of similarity between the great story and the digressions of the character Murilo Neto are subtle in what concerns the reflection to infinity, but it is in the paradoxical reflection, where the father's, the son's and the football's story get mixed that the narrative in abyss is configured. There is an interweaving between the three, even though each one is unique and individual, overlapping one another to compose the main one. Inside the abyss narrative, in which Murilo Neto is the narrator, the reader becomes a kind of listener of the resigned memories of the character, that is, of the reminiscences listed by Murilo Neto. He invokes the question of memory as reminiscence, as mnemonic image – image that comes without a kind of a permission or consent of the individual who is remembering and starts from an external stimulus, i.e., from an external component with some similar feature to the original complex of stimuli, to an original memory:

*Estava distraído, observando a boca da menina se mexer sem som, quando se deu conta com um violento baque interno – alguma coisa se espatifando, acordes maiores fazendo eco – de que havia muito na lourinha de farmácia, da cor do cabelo ao corpo mignon, que lembrava certa moça do passado longínquo, uma das vinte mil namoradas do pai. A primeira mulher da sua vida. Aquilo o atordoou. O túnel do tempo tinha se instalado na boca bicudinha de Gleyce<sup>19</sup>. (Rodrigues 38)*

Awakening or not an image, in this case, does not depend on conscious activity, but on an uncontrollable reverie that radiates and finds strength in a memory or affection already experienced. In the excerpt above, when Murilo Neto became aware of it, the memory of the past was already coated in memory related to the present, re-signified from the reunion with his father, a latent event of the now.

According to the philosopher Jeane Marie Gagnebin, memory is studied in three aspects: the faculty of memory, which is a more comprehensive and psychic concept, because it encompasses a memory competence; the ability to remember, which is a more intellectual concept, because it is an intellectual activity, the activity of remembering; the images that return to memory, for example the reminiscences, also called remembrance, the mnemonic images (Gagnebin). In the perspective that understands the narrator Murilo Neto, it can be said that his memories are the mnemonic memories of his relationship with his father, once the reunion recreates such memories according to his current perception. It is noticed that Murilo Neto appropriates these memories *en abyme*, and that, although the three narrative perspectives – Murilo Filho, Murilo Neto and football

<sup>19</sup> He was distracted, watching the girl's mouth move soundlessly, when he realised with a violent internal thud – something shattering, larger chords echoing – that there was much about the pharmacy blonde, from the colour of her hair to her mignon body, that reminded him of a certain girl from the distant past, one of his father's twenty thousand girlfriends. The first woman of his life. That stunned him. The time tunnel had installed itself in Gleyce's peckish mouth (all foreign words translated by authors).

stories – run parallel, they are intertwined, since the remembrance of the chronicler's son is not only a memory of the past, but also a rescue of identity understanding. In this rescue of understanding, memory works as a road – it takes the walker to the awakening of an individual archive of affections.

Resorting to characteristics conceived in the African oral tradition, two categories of storytellers stand out: the *Doma* and the *Griot*. The *Doma* comes from a traditionalist tradition, where commitment to truth is paramount. It is called the *Knower* and appears as a scholar and intellectual. Its transmission is faithful to the knowledge it has acquired, and it is not free to expand or reinvent any transfer of knowledge. Its life is guided by journeys for improvement and it generally takes part in meetings and gatherings wherever it goes, listening to stories and reports and acquiring as much knowledge as possible. *Knowers* are great bearers of news and are characterized as a spokesperson within the local culture. The *Griot*, more popular, already has great freedom to speak and in this way can manifest himself at will, since it has no commitment to the truth. It can tell a story according to what suits it at a moment, it is performative, sings and dances while narrating. It is usually connected to a single family, becoming aware of all its genealogy.

Both are intrinsic voices of general African culture and figure differently as storytellers and knowers. In *O dribble*, *Doma* and *Griot* merge into a hybrid storyteller. *Doma* could not conduct the storytelling, as it could not use the transforming power of the story according to the context. It needs to be faithful to the truth he narrates. However, the various insertions of true occurrences during the narrative, mainly concerning events related to the history of football, place the figure of the *Doma* as a conductor, even if to alienate truth to fiction the *Griot* is the main bearer.

At the very beginning of the book:

*O que você vê primeiro é uma imagem parada que logo identifica como da Copa de 1970 pelo short da seleção brasileira, que é de um azul mais claro que o habitual, além de escandalosamente curto para os padrões de hoje. Tostão, cabeçudo inconfundível, número 9 às costas, conduz a bola observado a certa distância por um sujeito de camisa azul-clara e calção preto*<sup>20</sup>. (Rodrigues 9)

The storyteller here is committed to the truth, since it makes available a real fact, – the detailed physical description of the uniforms worn by the players of the Brazilian national football team, highlighting the measurements of the shorts and the color in comparison with uniforms of previous participations, as well as the figure of the centre-forward Tostão (1947-), owner of shirt number 9 –, it configures itself as *Doma*. However, the construction of the novel starts from truths leading them performative to something that relativizes according to the narrator's intention. The

<sup>20</sup> What you see first is a still image that soon identifies as from the 1970 World Cup by the shorts of the Brazilian team, which are of a lighter blue than usual, besides being outrageously short by today's standards. Tostão, unmistakable big-headed, number 9 on his back, handles the ball watched from a distance by a guy wearing a light blue shirt and black shorts (all foreign words translated by authors).

transformative power of the intention is allied to the context and to what it aims at for the future, and the figure of the narrator ends up being substantiated of intonation in the art of telling. At the end of the novel, the commitment to truth loses its meaning while bringing the revelation that only a meticulous performance could create. Murilo Filho is the *Griot* of Murilo Neto, and Murilo Neto is the *Doma* of himself.

*O velho detém o vídeo. Pousa o controle remoto no braço do sofá, olha nos olhos outra vez e diz, o que houve aqui, Neto, foi simples: Pelé desafiou Deus e perdeu. Imagine se não perdesse. Se não perdesse, nunca mais que a humanidade dormia tranquila. Pelé desafiou Deus e perdeu, mas que desafio soberbo*<sup>21</sup>. (Rodrigues 13)

The *Griot* is universally allowed to conduct the story according to what he wishes to awaken, as occurs in the passage above when Murilo Filho makes use of his personal observations to induce understanding, referring to a supposed affront to the Catholic version of God by the famous football player Edson Arantes do Nascimento (1940-), globally known as Pelé.

Continuing the analyses that converge with the advent of storytelling, a more specific parallel can be drawn with definitions coined in Angola, a country on the west coast of Africa. The terms *maka* and *missosso* belong to Angola and stand out as pertinent designations for the remembrances told. In African culture, *maka* is configured as a true narrative or as such. It is based on something that really happened, as for example when Murilo Filho or Murilo Neto talks about sports, politics, or entertainment:

*Tinha se tornado fã de um garoto chamado Michael Jackson, cabelo afro, calça boca de sino e voz de anjo, que emplacava no rádio ao lado dos irmãos mais espigados uma balada linda de morrer atrás de outra:*<sup>22</sup> “Ben”, “Music and me”, “One day in your life”. (Rodrigues 25-26)

The singer mentioned, Michael Jackson (1958-2009), was an icon of entertainment and really hit the spot with such songs. Moreover, the king of pop had, in fact, the characteristics that the excerpt mentions. *Makas* are recurrently told in the novel, for as much as one experiences a reminiscence, a more logical thought narration is established there, which was born true. *Maka* works in this way and is therefore characterized as a fictionalization of the ways of life of an original true story.

*Missosso*, on the other hand, represents a fiction or fable, because it is something that did

<sup>21</sup> The old man stops the video. He puts the remote control down on the arm of the sofa, looks into his eyes again and says, what happened here, Neto, was simple: Pelé defied God and lost. Imagine if he didn't lose. If he didn't lose, never again would humanity sleep peacefully. Pelé challenged God and lost, but what a proud challenge (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>22</sup> He had become a fan of a boy called Michael Jackson, with afro hair, bell-bottoms and voice of an angel, who, together with his more spindly brothers, used to play one gorgeous ballad after another on the radio (all foreign words translated by authors).

not happen in the empirical reality, but rather an imaginary product that is part of the order of fantasy. The system of the *missosso* “[...] *tem dois pilares de sustentação: o animismo e a certeza de que tudo se liga à força vital*”<sup>23</sup> (Padilha 44). When a *missosso* is told there is a fusion of individual aspirations with the primordial needs of a group, for this reason the universe is always portrayed by ordinary beings, of the earth, who play everyday roles, even though they are integrated into the magical-animistic thought where everything has life and is connected in a cyclical way. Faced with the concept of *missosso*, it can be deduced that the character Peralvo is a fable told in the empirical real. His connection with the animist cycle of conception of the world portrays fundamentals coming from cultural traditions, such as his religious background of African matrix and his sensitive and anticipated perception of current events. When the story of Peralvo is introduced into the narrative, it is a *missosso* that arises with the intention of awakening feelings that concern the motivation of the *Griot* who tells it. In the book *O dribble*, a narrative that is urban and contemporary, when a *missosso* is told, magical realism is consummated. However, relating the specificity of magical realism with African cultural aspects, attributes characteristics of an animist realism as literary structure, constitutes a fusion where animism becomes of more relevant importance in the classification. The fable-like atmosphere in Peralvo *missosso* abstains from the urban format and transmutes itself to the animist conception. Some examples of this sub-genre can be found in works by African authors who produce texts in Portuguese language, such as Boaventura Cardoso (1944-), Luandino Vieira (1935-), Mia Couto (1955-), Paulina Chiziane (1955-), Odete Semedo (1959-) and Pepetela (1941-), just to name a few.

Animist realism draws a parallel with the magic or marvelous realism studied in Latin America, however, it is more appropriate to relate it to African culture, because it corresponds in a very particular way with the close, harmonious bonds established between individuals and the elements of nature, the universe as creation. It comes from a strand in which cultural precepts of African tradition are enshrined. Inscribed in the fictional matter of this culture, it shapes the reality that structures the narrative, giving a concrete aspect to abstract ideas and a spiritual dimension to material objects. As it is an aesthetic-ideological manifestation, and because it is committed to cultural values, it ends up encompassing a very comprehensive concept. Magic realism, on the other hand, carries an intrinsic irony and has a more urban and cosmopolitan slant, a kind of provocation, while the representational technique of animist realism figures as an explanation of an axiological framework of African culture. Harry Garuba argues that animist culture enables a constant re-enchantment of the world and that the name magical realism is not sufficient to encompass such a conception when used to structure a narrative: “[...] *‘realismo’ mágico é um conceito demasiado estreito para descrever a multiplicidade das práticas de representação que o animismo autoriza*”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Has two pillars of support: animism and the certainty that everything is connected to the vital force (all foreign words translated by authors).

<sup>24</sup> Magical ‘realism’ is too narrow a concept to describe the multiplicity of representational practices that animism authorizes (all foreign words translated by authors).

(Garuba 244). Garuba also argues that magical realism can be considered a sub-genre of animist realism and that the governing range of this relationship would be animist materialism.

In animist realism, the real and the imaginary condense since the imaginary is conceived as real by a breath of life that animates objects and ideas. It unveils a hierarchy of value inscribed in a cultural community. When it is reported to literature it is dialogued with the universe of the narrative, favouring a fusion of the past (primordial animist time) with the fictional present. Peralvo can see everything that will happen seconds before it happens, besides being able (without much awareness of it) to describe a person by the color he sees of his aura – the energy field that surrounds human beings. His connection with the nature of movement and with the anticipation of the next moment makes him part of a chain of life, in which he pulsates by intuition. Murilo Filho introduces the story of Peralvo and, in doing so, according to the extraordinary facts which he describes as being part of the player's essence, extends that existence to the impalpable instance of animism.

### Concluding remarks

Having established the characteristics of the two types of storytelling, in *O dribble* not only the storyteller is hybrid, but also the text, as it has both *makas* and *missossos*, and both are inscribed as narrative voice through their due aspect. In the context of football, the *maka* is tied to a physical world, of the events of a historical and linear time and the *missosso* to a spiritual and cyclical world. Therefore, in the weaving of the novel, *maka* and *missosso* have the function of leading the reader through reminiscence, since in the journey of the main characters is the rescue, at first, and the revenge, *a posteriori*, that is sought. This mix of facts that occurred in the last century – like some elements of pop culture from the 70s and 80s – with others that are purely fictional brings to the reader a fictional reality of the time. Rodrigues thus intends to move his creation away from historical fiction to create a kind of alternative historical fiction, a strategy widely used by authors of autofiction or contemporary historical novelists.

In relation to other storytelling elements, Sérgio Rodrigues' novel gives us a tree, in Peralvo's conversation with his mother, and the radio, a primordial device of a so-called golden age in football. The radio is the fire in which the listeners stay around for the pleasure of the storytelling; the narrator of the match, in a time when television was not a constituent artifact of a home, is the storyteller himself, is the *Griot* who excels in performance to narrate a throw, is the one who gives life to something common, making it full of meaning. Murilo Filho appropriates these meanings that he has stored up during his life and transforms them into the leading thread of his final dribble: a revenge, a dribble on the son that life imposed on him. In the construction of



the characters, the author establishes from the beginning the route traced, a logic according to what was previously programmed, but the path is fluid, since the reception of the work is what determines whether the structure is matter or reverie:

*A nossa interpretação dos seres vivos é mais fluida, variando com o tempo ou as condições da conduta. No romance, podemos variar relativamente a nossa interpretação da personagem; mas o escritor lhe deu, desde logo, uma linha de coerência fixada para sempre, delimitando a curva da sua existência e a natureza do seu modo-de-ser.*<sup>25</sup> (Candido 58-59)

The novel *O dribble* carries already formed and constituted characters, but each one of them unfolds in accountants, *Doma* and *Griot* telling *makas* and *missossos*. The end is set, so is the path, but the path is intrinsic to each listener/reader, whether the storyteller is imbricated in a colloquy or in a soliloquy.

The reasons presented do not exhaust the analysis of a work of great complexity as *O dribble*, and perhaps that is why it has received so many positive reviews from the mainstream Brazilian media – as, for example, the text published by the Moreira Salles Institute, an important non-profit cultural organization, which considers this book as a novel about football of the highest quality (Máximo) –, reflected in its awards, translations into other languages and ability to be the object of academic studies by various strands. It is not possible, however, to confirm whether a trend in contemporary Brazilian literature will be to address part of its culture that has sometimes been left aside by writers, but the word known as diversity seems to be increasingly one of the keys to what is to come in the literary production of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With this, it is necessary disclosure and analysis of the new literary production of Brazil as much as its production considered classic, so that past and contemporary tread an innovative path in this part of the history of literature that is being built.

---

<sup>25</sup> Our interpretation of living beings is more fluid, varying with time or the conditions of conduct. In the novel, we may vary relatively our interpretation of the character; but the writer has given him, from the outset, a line of coherence fixed forever, delimiting the curve of his existence and the nature of his mode-of-being (all foreign words translated by authors).

### Works cited

- Abreu, Wagner Coriolano de. “O drible’s review”. *Brasil/Brazil: A Journal of Brazilian Literature*. 28. 52 (2015): pp. 118-121.  
<https://seer.ufrgs.br/brasilbrazil/article/view/61482/36353>
- Benjamin, Walter. “O narrador: considerações sobre a obra de Nikolai Leskov”. *Magia e técnica, arte e política: ensaios sobre a literatura e história da cultura*, edited by Walter Benjamin, translation by Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, Brasiliense, 2012, pp. 213-240.
- Brochado, Giovanni Carús. *A potência poética do drible: reflexões sobre futebol-literatura*. 2015. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Undergraduate thesis.  
<https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/134570/TCC%20Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- Candido, Antonio. “A personagem do romance”. *A personagem da ficção*, Perspectiva, 2014, pp. 51-80.
- Cantilo, Amanda Cristina Guedes. *O futebol a serviço da tradição literária*. 2019. Universidade de Brasília. Monograph  
[https://bdm.unb.br/bitstream/10483/23178/1/2019\\_AmandaCristinaGuedesCantilo\\_tcc.pdf](https://bdm.unb.br/bitstream/10483/23178/1/2019_AmandaCristinaGuedesCantilo_tcc.pdf).
- Carvalho, Erivelto da Rocha. “Relações literárias México-Brasil: notas de trabalho”. *Cerrados*. 50. (2019): pp. 109-127.  
<https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/cerrados/article/view/25123/24648>
- Chagas, Eduardo Lopez. “Racismo, futebol e sociedade em O Drible, de Sérgio Rodrigues”. *Revista Memento*. 10. 2. (2019): pp. 1-13.  
[http://periodicos.unincor.br/index.php/memento/article/view/5885/pdf\\_163](http://periodicos.unincor.br/index.php/memento/article/view/5885/pdf_163).
- Dallenbach, Lucien. *Le récit spéculaire: essai sur la mise-en-abyme*. Seuil, 1977.
- Effting, Marilda Aparecida de Oliveira. “Memórias a passos e passes em *O Drible*”. *Criação & Crítica*. 22. (2018): pp. 132-142.  
<https://www.revistas.usp.br/criacaoecritica/article/view/145772/149661>.
- Gagnebin, Jeanne Marie. *Lembrar escrever esquecer*. Editora 34, 2006.
- Garuba, Harry. “Explorações no realismo animista: notas sobre a leitura e a escrita da literatura, cultura e sociedade africana”. *Nonada Letras em Revista*. 15.19 (2012): pp. 235-256.  
Redalyc. Web. 21 Dec. 2021.

Guimarães, Guatavo Cerqueira. “A ‘tabelinha’ entre o futebol e a poesia”. Em tese. 20. 1 (2014): pp. 51-62.

<http://www.periodicos.letras.ufmg.br/index.php/emtese/article/view/5922/5161>.

Lis, Natasha Santos and André Mendes Capraro. “Futebol e identidade nacional: resenha da obra de “O drible””. Pensar a Prática. 21. 2 (2018): pp. 495-498.

<https://www.revistas.ufg.br/fef/article/view/44239/pdf>.

Mattar, Guilherme and Christian Schwartz. ““Toda Rigidez é Condenável”: os dois Brasis das crônicas sobre futebol de Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessoa”. Universidade Positivo. (2019): pp. 1-11.

<https://ludopedio.org.br/wp-content/uploads/>

[Toda Rigidez Condenavel revisado final PDF.pdf](#).

Máximo, João. “O melhor romance já escrito sobre futebol”. BlogIMS. (2013).

<https://blogdoims.com.br/o-melhor-romance-ja-escrito-sobre-futebol-por-joao-maximo>.

Munsberg, Gabriel Felipe Pautz and Virginea Novach Santos da Rocha. “Masculinidades em foco: A (des)construção da paternidade a partir de crônicas de Rogério Pereira”. Ipotesi. 20. 2 (2016): pp. 126-136.

<https://periodicos.ufjf.br/index.php/ipotesi/article/view/19401>.

Padilha, Laura Cavalcante. *Entre voz e letra: o lugar da ancestralidade na ficção angolana do século XX*. EdUFF, Pallas Editora, 2011.

Pauliukonis, Maria Aparecida Lino and Maria Cristina Vieira Bastos. “O modo de organização enunciativo no gênero artigo de opinião”. Confluência. 60 (2021). pp. 81-104

<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:pUeB17TFJx4J:https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/7831419.pdf+&cd=2&hl=pt-PT&ct=clnk&gl=pt>.

Pino, Claudia Amigo. *A ficção da escrita*. Ateliê Editorial, 2004.

Rissardo, Agnes. “O enigma da literatura brasileira contemporânea na França: recepção, visibilidade e legitimação”. ABRALIC XIV Congresso Internacional - Fluxos e correntes: trânsitos e traduções literárias. (2015).

[https://abralic.org.br/anais/arquivos/2015\\_1455906791.pdf](https://abralic.org.br/anais/arquivos/2015_1455906791.pdf).

Rodrigues, Sérgio. *O drible*. Companhia das Letras, 2013.

Rosalen, Eloisa. “Em tempos de ditadura brasileira: analisando O Drible sob uma perspectiva de gênero”. Seminário Internacional Fazendo Gênero 11 & 13th Women’s Worlds Congress. (2017): p. 1-11.

[http://www.wwc2017.eventos.dype.com.br/resources/anais/1498663106\\_ARQUIVO\\_fazendogenero11.pdf](http://www.wwc2017.eventos.dype.com.br/resources/anais/1498663106_ARQUIVO_fazendogenero11.pdf).

Valente, Valdemar. “Sérgio Rodrigues – O drible”. Revista Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea. 45. (2015): pp. 479-483. <https://www.scielo.br/j/elbc/a/GYbtkRjcCHbZPQfhFsmGWgs/?format=pdf&lang=pt>.

Zilberman, Regina. “O romance brasileiro contemporâneo conforme os prêmios literários (2010-2014)”. Revista Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea. 50. (2017): pp. 424-443. <https://www.scielo.br/j/elbc/a/wptLv3W9jzxgr5LfQQKpqcL/?format=pdf&lang=pt>.