

Portfolio of Bachelor's Theses Graded Very Good and Good

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A Feminist and Postcolonial Approach to Charlotte Brontë's Novel *Jane Eyre* (1847)

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1. Introduction

“It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism [...] was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English”, claims Gayatri Spivak in her famous essay “Three Women’s Text and a Critique of Imperialism” in which she analyses Charlotte Brontë’s bildungsroman *Jane Eyre* (243). Indeed, simultaneously with the growing British Empire, the topics of imperialism, race, and slavery became increasingly conspicuous in British novels (David 86). The reason for that may be the awareness of those issues in the British society and the preferred genre of novels in the nineteenth century. According to Deirdre David, in the Victorian age, “novels were valued for being a fictitious meditation on and mediation of reality” (388). Since everyone seemed to be involved in the affairs of the Empire either through family members in the colonies or through their own participation in the flourishing plantation business (Brantlinger “Postcolonial” 2), consequently this found entrance in literature as well.

Jane Eyre, as a realist novel of the mid-Victorian period, is no exception of this phenomenon. Even though, at first sight, it solely deals with the coming of age of its heroine Jane, imperial motifs run through the whole book. The arguably most overt evidence of them is Mr Rochester’s wife Bertha. Her construction by Jane as Other, which would be considered as deeply racist today, will be the central focus of this thesis. However, Bertha’s Otherness is not reasoned by race and heritage alone but also by her being a woman. Since “the default human in Anglo-American Victorian culture is the white [...] male” (Heiniger 7), Bertha is already Other because of her gender. Moreover, the patriarchal society of the mid-Victorian age allocates specific expectations of femininity to women which they need to fulfil to appertain. Through Jane’s construction, the figure of Bertha does not remotely do this which contributes to the impression that her representation in the novel is problematic.

I chose the novel *Jane Eyre* for my bachelor thesis because it offers a rich amount of complex relations between race, gender and class which seem to be rewarding to analyse. Furthermore, though there already exists plenty of secondary material, there are still gaps concerning Bertha, her construction and the influence of the narrative situation on that, which I would like to fill.

Due to that, my aim is to ascertain how Jane’s narration of the story and Bertha’s representation correlate. Additionally, I want to observe how the perception of Bertha as being Other is constructed and which impact that has on the characters and on the novel itself. Concurrently with this, my goal is to determine the possible reasons for Bertha’s representation as Other and the influence which the attitude of the white middle-class Britons in the mid-Victorian age may have on that.

Since *Jane Eyre* is considered as Charlotte Brontë's best-known and most successful novel, there exist numerous – often contradicting – readings and interpretations of it. As it is a bildungsroman by and about a middle-class woman, it especially attracted feminist approaches with Gilbert and Gubar as two of its most prominent representatives. Their construction of the Jamaican Creole Bertha Mason as Jane's "dark double" (Gilbert 492) has been widely discussed and has later been challenged by the emergence of postcolonial readings. Other feminist critics, like Adrienne Rich, Elaine Showalter and Pat Macpherson, emulate Gilbert and Gubar's deeds in that they mainly focus on Jane, her development, and the role of the middle-class woman in a patriarchal society while ignoring "the complicity between the female or feminist voice and imperial processes and motifs in the novel" (Azim 173). Bertha, on the other hand, gets deprived "of any independent textual significance by confining her to the privatistic cell of Jane's psyche" (Donaldson 16). She is only relevant to smooth the way for Jane while her own character is usually neglected. In order to fill this gap, postcolonial critics as Spivak, Azim, Brantlinger and Meyer concentrate on Bertha's construction as Other, and on the colonial motifs in the novel. However, though they follow the same approach, their opinions about Bertha differ significantly. While Carl Plasa, for example, compares her to a "revolted slave" (90), Jenny Sharpe labels her "a female version of the 'immoral West Indian planter'" (qtd. in Sharpe 45) Nevertheless, an aspect which both feminist and postcolonial critics have in common is that they mostly disregard the narrative situation and its influences. Only few critics, like Kevin Stevens and Carolyn Williams, focus on the narration, and they agree that Bertha's representation by Jane cannot be trustworthy (Stevens 209-213, Williams 12-14).

To find out more about the construction of Bertha Mason and her functions in the text, I will use a feminist and a postcolonial approach. The latter will allow for an analysis of the imperial motifs and unfold the meaning of the Other in the Victorian era and for the novel itself. Central concepts for that will be those of being Other, the meaning of race, and that of colonialism. On the other hand, the feminist approach will serve for an analysis of Bertha's (lacking) femininity, gendered hierarchies and the relationship between Jane and Bertha. For that, the terms of patriarchy, gender, gender construction, and femininity will be used.

With the aid of those approaches, I will prove the following thesis: I argue that Charlotte Brontë's bildungsroman *Jane Eyre* offers a particularly ambiguous representation of the Caribbean Creole character Bertha Mason. This serves the construction of the female protagonist and first-person narrator Jane Eyre as well as that of the central male character Mr Rochester. Jane Eyre's characterisation of her opponent presents Bertha Mason as the inferior racial and sexual Other demonstrating an attitude which is deeply embedded in white middle-class thinking of mid-Victorian Britain.

The thesis will begin with a presentation of the feminist and postcolonial approach, as well as with the definition of the key concepts which I mentioned above. Thereafter, I will

analyse some important imperialist tropes in chapter three. The tropes chosen will illustrate the attitude of the white English middle-class towards the Empire and due to that, towards Otherness and the role of the Victorian woman. Subsequently, the main part of the thesis will focus on the character construction of Bertha Mason. In order to fill the gap of the missing analysis of the narrative situation, the fourth chapter of my thesis will begin with the very same thing. The aim here is to ascertain the reliability of the narrator and how it influences the perception of the character Bertha. Afterwards, I will analyse the character conception and characterisation to show how exactly Bertha is represented and which facts about her are available at all. Furthermore, the chapter will reveal the racist undertone with which Bertha is depicted as the inferior Other, and additionally, the intentions that Jane may have for representing her opponent in the way she does. With the latter, I will continue in the last chapter of my thesis. There, I will focus on the overall plot construction, how the plot serves to portray Jane and Rochester as superior, and Bertha's specific functions in that.

2. Theories and Methods

2.1 The Feminist Approach

Feminist Criticism as it is known today emerged in the 1960s as a result of the "women's movement" in which women's inequality in society was once again proclaimed and represented in literature (Barry 123). One of the main aims of Feminist Criticism is to "attend to women's marginalised and often silenced voices" (Kiguwa 225). Thereby, it is explicitly political, deems patriarchy and gender "organising principle[s] in society" and frequently takes intersectionality into account (226-7). In my bachelor thesis, I will predominantly use it with regard to Bertha and her standing in society as a marginalised and silenced woman. For that, I will apply certain terms and concepts, namely that of gender, gender construction, femininity, and patriarchy, which I will define in this chapter.

The first central concept is that of gender. For my thesis, I will use the definition of Edwin Segal who claims that gender is a "culturally based complex of norms, values, and behaviors that a particular culture assigns to one biological sex or another" (3). Thus, there is an important distinction between the terms 'sex' which is biological and 'gender' which is social. In different cultures, people would probably ascribe the same defining attributes to the biological sex, whereas their understanding of miscellaneous genders would likely be more varied. In order to analyse *Jane Eyre*, it should be kept in mind that the concept of gender as we know it today certainly did not exist in the Victorian period. Therefore, it is assumable that the Victorians valued gender, as a social construct, to be just as natural as the biological sex. This attitude can also be observed in the novel's treatment of men and women and in the characteristics, which are attributed to different genders there.

Gender construction, as the second concept, is intrinsically linked to that of gender and also to that of femininity. According to Sophie Freud, gender construction “postulates that our understanding of the world is based not on objective facts, truths, or realities, but on more or less consensual social constructions” (38). Hence, it shows how gender is constructed through aspects which are “not dependent on biological realities” (Segal 3) but which are a result of cultural agreement. In my analysis, I will use that concept to explore how Bertha is represented as a sexual Other.

The third concept is that of femininity. Just as gender and gender construction, it is not based on biological facts but on constructs which a specific society creates and which differ among cultures. In my thesis, I will deploy the definition of Sarah Gamble who states that femininity is “a set of rules governing female behaviour and appearance, the ultimate aim of which is to make women conform to a male ideal of sexual attractiveness” (230). However, in the Victorian period, the sexual attraction was mostly not the overt reason for adapting to standards of femininity because feminine women should be too innocent to seek for that kind of affirmation (Steinbach 135). Instead, femininity was generally represented as „something to be admired and cultivated” (Heilmann 290). In *Jane Eyre*, it is evident that a large part of Jane’s and Bertha’s representation is the result of the novel’s aim to let them please or not please the male characters and especially Rochester. This happens through constructing them as more or less female which, in turn, should make them more or less appealing.

The focus on the aims of men, which becomes apparent in the meaning of terms like femininity, leads to the last concept which I will concentrate on within the feminist approach: patriarchy. Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (214), and this is also how I will use the term during my analysis. In *Jane Eyre*, patriarchy is visible in the treatment of Jane, Bertha, and other women and in the way that men naturally consider themselves as superior. Especially Bertha is an object of Rochester’s constant demonstration of power.

2.2 The Postcolonial Approach

The Postcolonial Approach emerged “as a distinct category” in the 1990s (Barry 194). According to Peter Barry, one main characteristic of postcolonial criticism is that it focuses on the depiction of non-Europeans as Other (196), whereby ‘Otherness’ is one of the concepts which I will define in this subchapter. A second consideration of postcolonialism is language which reveals “colonial structures” in literature (197). Moreover, a postcolonial perspective is used to discuss topics of identity and how it may be “doubled, or hybrid, or unstable” due to the Othering of different groups (197). All those aspects will support me in analysing Bertha’s depiction as a racial Other and in exploring why the novel represents her as that. Central

concepts which I will deploy for that purpose are the meaning of race, Otherness, and colonialism.

Race is a term which seems to have several different meanings that vary depending on time and perspective. From a biological point of view, race is a synonym for subspecies (Templeton 263). However, genetic data sets prove that the variations in the DNA of people around the world are so small that one cannot speak of subspecies among homo sapiens (262). Features which are regularly used to refer to races, like the skin colour, are only “adaptive traits” and cannot justify a splitting of humans into distinct races (262). Nevertheless, in literature as well as in life, the term ‘race’ is often applied to humans of different origin or appearance. According to Susan Meyer, the categorisation of humans into races happens because of “historically specific economic and political conditions” (12). One example of that could be slavery, in consequence of which Africans were categorised as an inferior race by the colonisers to legitimise their treatment (12-3). Since those categories depend on the mentioned social conditions, the notion of race can change over time. Thus, race can be defined as “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (13). In my thesis, I will refer to the term of race as it was used in the Victorian period and especially in *Jane Eyre*. In that time of history, “scientists agreed that humankind was divided into discrete races, that race was a crucial determinant of physical, intellectual, and moral character, and that white Europeans were of the superior race” (15). This attitude is also overt in *Jane Eyre* and a main reason for the representation of Bertha as Other.

Otherness, then, as the second central concept, is defined as “the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us,” the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (“Them,” Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (Staszak 2). Whereby, a difference emerges from facts while Otherness is the result of discourse (2). This principle can be applied to several areas, so that the creation of a racial as well as that of a sexual Other is possible. Due to that, Otherness is also a central term for feminist criticism. Nevertheless, I chose to define it in the postcolonial section because in my thesis, I will focus more on Bertha’s representation as a racial Other. In both cases, however, an imbalance in power between the Self and the Other is essential for the creation of Otherness (2). Only the dominant group can “impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and [...] devalue the particularity of others” (2). Hence, a black man can be interpreted as the Other of a white man, and a woman as the Other of a man but not the other way around (2). In the Victorian period, the process of racial Othering was reinforced by colonialism which made it easy to define an Other as opposed to the Western self. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha takes that part as the racial (and sexual) Other.

The last concept for my thesis within postcolonial criticism is that of colonialism. For that, I will deploy Osterhammel’s definition which is the following:

[Kolonialismus ist] eine Herrschaftsbeziehung zwischen Kollektiven, bei welcher die fundamentalen Entscheidungen über die Lebensführung der Kolonisierten durch eine kulturell andersartige und kaum anpassungswillige Minderheit von Kolonialherren unter vorrangiger Berücksichtigung externer Interessen getroffen und tatsächlich durchgesetzt werden. (21)

In the case of *Jane Eyre*, this means the relationship between the colonists in Britain and its colonies in the West Indies. Since Bertha Mason is from Jamaica, a British colony at that time, colonialism is an essential concept to understand her meaning in the novel's plot.

3. The English vs. the Other: Imperialist Tropes

In order to discern what it means that Bertha Mason is constantly constructed as the Other, it is necessary to analyse the attitude towards the Empire and the colonies that predominated in society during the time the novel was published. Considering that *Jane Eyre* is a realist novel, whose task it is to "represent nothing less than life itself" (D'Albertis 119), it is very likely that it suggests a mindset common in a middle-class woman in the mid-Victorian era which it exemplifies with its narrator Jane. That it really did so is supported by the novel's "immediate popular success" (Langland 393) after its publication in 1847, showing that *Jane Eyre* accomplished the objective of representing life in a way in that it pleased its Victorian readers. This was essential because novel-readers preferred narratives which had a "basis of shared human experiences and emotions" (Azim 98). Like many novels of that period, *Jane Eyre* rarely, if ever, addresses the Empire directly (Brantlinger "Postcolonial" 106), but it alludes to it through different imperialist tropes in "masked words" (148). Thus, an analysis of those tropes will lead to an improved understanding of the meaning of Otherness to the Victorian society, and due to that, of the reasons of Bertha's construction as Other.

First, it is vital to comprehend what imperialism meant to the British. According to Brantlinger, an imperialist ideology had three ingredients: "loyalty to the existing Empire", a belief in the "racial superiority of white Europeans" and "a belief in the civilizing mission of Britain" ("Rule" 8). All of those aspects can be found in differing manifestations in *Jane Eyre*.

Loyalty to the empire is most evident through patriotic statements of the characters in the novel and also through a clear outward demarcation. For example, Mr Rochester simultaneously demonises Jamaica and glorifies Europe when he reveals his personal past with Bertha to Jane. He describes the "sulphur-steams" and the mosquitos in Jamaica (*JE* 370) which are both associated with biblical elements: the sulphurous smell with hell and the mosquitos with the ten plagues – both obviously negatively connoted. At the end of his tirade, Rochester even mentions hell specifically in declaring that his whole life in Jamaica was hell and adds that "this is the air – those are the sounds of the bottomless pit" (371). Moreover, his

detailed report of a storm with its “black clouds”, the noises of the sea which he compares to an earthquake, and the moon that appears as “a hot cannon-ball” (371) contribute to his imagery of Jamaica as a dark and dangerous place. The storm functions as a gothic element here that “permeates the novel by turning commonplace phenomena (the weather) into symbolic realities” (Smith 82). Constructing Jamaica as a threat to the white man could also allude to the slave rebellions of the 1820s and 1830s, as Sue Thomas suggests (46). All in all, Rochester entirely excoriates Bertha’s home country, which is so different from England, and whereby does the same to Bertha herself.

In contrast to this depiction, Europe functions as the voice of reason. Rochester tells Jane how “a wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean” and how after that “the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure” (*JE* 371). This metaphor illustrates how European Englishness takes control over the colony which is thus perceived as an uncivilized non-Western culture although the colonisers are whites themselves (Steinbach 62). Europe breaks the storm and with it, it does not only suppress the slave unrests, but also the insecurities of Rochester who suddenly knows what he has to do. “‘Go,’ said Hope, ‘and live again in Europe’” he recites to Jane and remembers how his heart “filled with living blood” (*JE* 372). The thought of his English home revives him, and he makes it sound as if it even kept him from committing suicide. Thereby, Rochester’s patriotism and at the same time, his rejection of the tropical colony is obvious in the scene.

Nevertheless, it is not Rochester alone who displays patriotism and shows national pride. Jane, for instance, reflects that it would be better to be “free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England” than to live “in a fool’s paradise at Marseilles” (434). Later, she claims that in leaving England, she would “leave a loved [...] land” and would “go to premature death” (488). In those quotes, the same trope of a simultaneous celebration of England and rejection of non-Western countries as displayed by Rochester is visible. This attitude seems to be characteristic of novels in the Victorian period and therefore, of middle-class society, as Brantlinger mentions in his essay “Empire and Nationalism” (252-253). There, he declares that in general, “British writers either assumed or asserted that Great Britain was the greatest nation the world had ever seen” (265). Although this is rather subtle in *Jane Eyre* because the actual topic of the British Empire is not discussed overtly, the quotes above show that patriotism pervades the story.

Moreover, it is not only important what is in the novel but also what is lacking. Therefore, it is noticeable that although Rochester married a plantation owner’s daughter and Jane inherited a fortune from her uncle in Madeira who probably traded in slave-produced goods, the topic of slavery does not explicitly occur in *Jane Eyre*. St John, who wants to go to India as a missionary, tries to convince Jane to accept the inheritance without mentioning that the practices his uncle used to gain this money may have been indefensible: “The entire fortune

is your right: my uncle gained it by his own efforts; he was free to leave it to whom he would”, he declares (*JE* 467). Instead of making “real” slaves a subject of discussion then, it is Jane who represents herself as a slave several times in the novel, especially as a child. There, she calls her bullying cousin John Reed a “slave-driver” (6) and compares herself to a “rebel slave” (7) and a “revolted slave” (10) when she resists the seemingly unfair punishment. Though this choice of words suggests that they solely serve the construction of Jane’s character as being an especially passionate child who perceives an unfair treatment more severely than other children her age, it must be remembered that Jane narrates the story from a distance of several years. However, there is no evidence that she reflects upon her feelings as a child and is retrospectively disapproving of them. Instead, she uses the slave metaphor again as an adult when Rochester tries to persuade her of accepting expensive clothes and jewellery as his future wife. In this situation, she likens Rochester to a sultan and herself to a slave whom the sultan’s “gold and gems had enriched” (322). Afterwards, Rochester becomes the “Grand Turk” in their discussion who participates in “extensive slave-purchases” (322).

In both situations, Jane uses the slave metaphor to refer to her own life of “marginality and disempowerment” (Meyer 72) and “to represent class and gender inequality in England” (75). Certainly, her position as an educated white middle-class woman who works for a salary in a house that she has chosen cannot be compared to that of a slave in the West Indies on a plantation. In this sense, the metaphors “empty slavery of its racial signification”, as Jenny Sharpe correctly argues (32). On the other hand, the representation of patriarchy should be shocking and show the severity of the situation for women in England (Plasa 82). So, in fact, “the concern is not with ‘the horrors of slavery’ in the West Indies, but with suffering much closer to home” (99), namely the unequal treatment of men and women in a patriarchal society. At the same time, due to the loyalty to the Empire and to the social norms of femininity, this is rarely addressed directly but rather through “transferences of metaphor” (85). Additionally, it is never the English man who oppresses someone in those metaphors but always a non-white person. For example, in the paragraph in which Jane feels like Rochester’s “favourite slave” (82), he is compared to a sultan and not to an English emperor. The same is true for the following dialogue between the two in which Rochester depicts himself as a “Grand Turk” with his “seraglio” (*JE* 322) even though he, as a white Englishman, committed bigamy himself and thus, cannot claim that to be a typical Eastern transgression. This way of dealing with – or rather ignoring – the topic of slavery presents the belief in the nation and its English inhabitants to not be involved in cruel practices even though “a vague notion exists that there is something disgraceful in [the] tenure of India; that the native population has been somehow sacrificed to [...] ambition and cupidity” (Martineau 55).

The second aspect of imperial ideology, that is believing white Europeans to be racially superior, is also visible in *Jane Eyre*, though it is expanded by a belief in the racial superiority

of white English people not only over non-white and non-Western cultures but also over other Europeans. The general feeling of superiority can already be found in the examples of slave metaphors mentioned above. In “marking all aspects of oppression ‘other’ – non-British, non-white, the result of besmirching contact with ‘dark races’” (Thomas 42), other cultures are degraded whereas English supremacy is emphasised. Even the most white and most English element of the colonies, the plantation owner, is “othered” through constructing its representative Bertha Mason as the daughter of a Creole woman (*JE* 349). Thereby, the villain is no prototypical Englishman but a woman of an allegedly dubious origin. Since “the British often did not consider white colonials British” (Steinbach 71), it becomes clear that the imagined superiority did not originate from skin colour alone but also from the ancestry which results in labelling even a white Creole Other. The main point is that a real English man is better than other men. He restrains his “physical aggression” (133) and thus, cannot be officially involved in punishing slaves. Due to that, other, ostensibly less civilised races (62), undertake this part.

Additionally, the feeling of racial superiority can be seen in several encounters with people of other “races” in *Jane Eyre*. Most obvious are certainly the ones concerning Bertha Mason and her brother Richard, however, those will be analysed more profoundly in the following chapter. Another representative of a supposedly subordinate “race” is Adèle, Jane’s pupil, who is the illegitimate daughter of the French dancer Céline Varens (*JE* 167). Though Jane likes Adèle (127), and apparently identifies herself with her because they both share the experience of being abandoned by their relatives, Jane still displays her disapproval of her pupil’s home country and of her “French defects” (546). In her opinion, those involve dancing, singing, and recitation which are represented as theatrical/performative capabilities typically ‘French’ and as “opposed to Jane’s quiet, inward-gazing Englishness” as possible (McCarron 86). Therefore, they urgently need to be “corrected” by a “sound English education” (*JE* 546) before Jane can allow Adèle to live with her and Rochester as a family member. After this English education, Jane calls the French girl “docile, good-tempered, and well-principled” (546) while before, she deplored her “superficiality of character [...] hardly congenial to an English mind” (173). Jane’s attempts to cure Adèle from her continental flaws demonstrate her strong belief in the superiority of Englishness and result in representing Adèle as a national and colonial Other almost similar to Bertha. Rochester supports this isolation of the child in that he frequently reminds everyone around him that she is only a “French dancer’s bastard” (363) and that they are nothing alike (172). He has no proof that Adèle is not his own illegitimate child, but she is too French, too non-English and too Other to make her acceptable as his daughter. Hence, he underlines that it is solely because of his magnanimity that he “took the poor thing out of the slime and mud of Paris” so that she can “grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden”, and no feeling of affection (172). The only reason is that a

country other than England is not good for a child to live in which again illustrates the superiority of the English “race” as well as the established patriotism.

A further aspect of racial superiority was the belief that “the English were ‘the imperial race’, whose destiny was to rule other races for their benefit” (Brantlinger “Empire” 252) which is also present in *Jane Eyre*. For instance, Rochester’s dominant behaviour towards Richard Mason shows that it feels natural to Rochester to bully the Creole. When Jane contrasts and compares the two, she describes Mason as a “meek sheep” and Rochester as a “keen-eyed dog, its guardian” (*JE* 227). This animal metaphor supports Brantlinger’s thesis in that Rochester does not oppress Mason but allegedly protects him from a possible predator, thus from the real villains who are not English. Consequently, the belief in racial superiority resulted in a “mission to rule the supposedly inferior races of the world” (Brantlinger “Postcolonial” 2).

This mission is also part of the third aspect of imperialist ideology, in which the English view it as their duty to civilise non-white colonial peoples. Especially after the abolishment of the slave trade and of slavery in 1807 and 1833, respectively, the British “felt as liberators” (18) and aimed at sharing their moral superiority with the rest of the world. This idea alone reinforces the aspects of patriotism and racial superiority because in fact, the English upper and middle classes in particular benefitted from slavery for so long that they basically cannot claim to be able to teach others about moralities. According to Spivak, those projects of “soul-making” only served to justify imperialism “through the assumption that ‘heathens’ need to be ‘humanised’ so that they, too, can be treated as individual ends in themselves” (112). St John Rivers follows this mission of soul-making without questioning it and by repeatedly emphasising that it is for “bettering their race” (*JE* 452, 427). Still, missionaries were widely seen as heroes and celebrated for their good deeds on behalf of Christianity and the Anglo-Saxon race (Brantlinger “Postcolonial” 23-4). Even Jane values it as a respectable task in saying that she wants to “go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved” (*JE* 322). The only reason which restrains her from that in the end is that she could not endure the thought of being married to St John. Nevertheless, she sees him as “a stiff-necked fanatic and a hero” (Brantlinger “Postcolonial” 22) which simultaneously expresses her assumption that St John will probably die in the dangerous non-Western country and that she still evaluates it as being for a good cause. Eventually, his heroism is especially valued because he is the very last character about whose life the novel reports in the last chapter (*JE* 548). This attributes a special meaning to him and his mission, even though he dies in the end.

One reason for Jane’s belief in the social mission of England is probably the practice of sati which she mentions when Rochester claims that Jane would have to die together with him. Jane refuses this idea and says that she will “not be hurried away in a suttee” (327). The campaigns against sati were popular in England (Mana 2) because they “were seen as evidence that British rule in India could civilize instead of corrupt” and because sati allegedly

proved that the colonies clearly needed the British to save them (Brantlinger "Empire" 254). Furthermore, sati reworked "the doctrine of woman's mission" (Sharpe 30) which once more linked the English women to the 'inferior races' in the colonies. At the same time, it degraded the colonised people even more because it constructed them as being cruel Others again.

Eventually, the three aspects of imperialist ideology answered the purpose of maintaining, justifying, and expanding the British Empire. In order to achieve that, it was not only necessary to represent the English as superior and unassailable in their moralities but also to construct an enemy image. In this case, it was simply everything non-English which was viewed as Other and thus, as inferior. Whereby, with the aim of legitimising their social mission, it was especially important to degrade the "dark races" in the colonies. From a present-day perspective, to speak bluntly, the mid-Victorians were racist. Though English women were also seen as inferior and Other to men and hence, often compared their own lives with those of the colonised, they nevertheless took part in racial Othering. They used the anguish of the colonised "to encourage British men to give them some female emancipation by associating female repression with 'backward' and 'foreign' Eastern societies and cultures", as Joyce Zonana argues (qtd. in Lodge 115). In *Jane Eyre*, all those aspects are present, and all are interconnected. English patriotism is particularly distinct and "often indistinguishable from racial chauvinism" (Brantlinger "Postcolonial" 2) which leads to the other two aspects. All of them can be observed in Bertha's construction as Other, as I will show in the next chapter.

4. Character Construction of the Female Colonial Other Bertha Mason

4.1 The Narrative Situation and its Functions

"Bertha has no narrative", states Nicole Plyler Fisk (220) and refers with that to a central aspect of Bertha Mason's construction in the novel. Indeed, before beginning to characterise Bertha, it is inevitable to analyse the narrative situation of the novel in order to find out about the reliability of her representation. For that purpose, I will use Gérard Genette's terminology and systematisation, as it is described by Nünning and Nünning (118-123). Afterwards, I will explore the functions of the narrative situation regarding Bertha and the impact this has on her construction as a character.

First, since the novel is written like an autobiography¹, the narrator of *Jane Eyre* is Jane herself. As the protagonist of the narration, she tells the story of her own life. This makes her

¹ *Jane Eyre* is obviously no autobiography because it does not recount the life story of its author, Charlotte Brontë. However, it initially was released as one; allegedly edited by Currer Bell which is the pseudonym of Charlotte Brontë.

an intradiegetic as well as an autodiegetic narrator (119). Due to that, she appears as an overt narrator who exposes personal traits and characteristics (119). In terms of focalisation, Jane is the only figure from whose point of view the story is perceived, so the focaliser is internal, and the focalisation is fixed (122).

The fact that all narrational aspects are focused on Jane, is certainly accounted for by the construction of the novel as an autobiography. By and large, her story follows the typical plot of a bildungsroman “in which the hero moves teleologically, and the story usually ends with the completion (or failure) of the heroic task” (Feng 2). Thus, the narrator tells the reader about Jane’s coming of age and the obstacles she must overcome before she finally obtains her happy ending in an ostensibly equal marriage with Mr Rochester. Basically, it appears as if she publicises her entire life and all emotions, she ever felt, which unavoidably generates intimacy between her as the overt narrator and the implied reader. This effect is reinforced by Jane directly addressing the reader which “implies a high degree of intimacy” again (Fludernik 26). In turn, this raises the problem that “readers become so familiar with her point of view that they can more easily go along with her character and her version of events” (Pond 206) than with that of a secondary character. Jane’s rendering of the story is rarely questioned, especially because, due to the narrative situation, everything is coloured by her perceptions, persuasions, and aims. Moreover, the form of an autobiography, which comes along with a quite chronological way of telling, naturalises her story (Eagleton 91). In consequence of the generated trust between Jane and the readers, the latter “find themselves responding to narratives empathetically” (Smith and Watson 361) and hence, they largely accept Jane’s version of the story which can be inferred by the small number of critics who take the narrative situation into account. This means that even seemingly neutral descriptions and recitations of others can never be entirely objective because they are already interpreted and valued by Jane before they are represented to the reader. Since the faux autobiography is “clearly a mode which would invite editing and revision of certain elements for an eventual audience” (Williams 12), it must be assumed that the narrative situation serves Jane’s figure to manipulate her story in a way that it suits her.

An aspect that should not be neglected here is Jane’s narrative distance. She allegedly writes her autobiography ten years after her marriage to Rochester (*JE* 546) and, quite naturally, “it is impossible to construct a single unchanging self capable of remembering and reciting the totality of the past” because “an ‘I’ is never unified nor stable” (Smith and Watson 357). Certainly, this allows for retrospective alterations as well because the heroine and her story should be constructed in a way that fits the final outcome; in this case a “feminist fairy tale” (Williams 14) which leads to an seemingly independent woman who wastes no thought about the first wife of her husband. To succeed in that, Jane particularly manipulates her depiction of Bertha. Her manner of narration is severely affected by subjectivity and emotional

involvement and thus, cannot be regarded as reliable. This becomes apparent through Jane's assuring that she is trustworthy, her underreporting of critical scenes, and her detached attitude concerning Bertha's appearance.

The first demeanour which hints at Jane's unreliability then is her repeated affirmation of her honesty. After Bertha's first appearance, Jane announces in close succession that she is "merely telling the truth" (*JE* 127) and that the reader should forgive her "for telling the plain truth" (129). According to Vera Nünning, this way of directly addressing the readers to persuade them from the own trustworthiness, is common for homodiegetic unreliable narrators (10) because "from the narrator's point of view, the most important function [of narration] is to convince others of the truth of their stories" (13). The closeness of those assertions to the debut of Bertha in the novel suggests that Jane's character changes some aspects concerning Bertha's story which would damage the novel's picture-perfect presentation of a dramatic love story of Jane and Mr Rochester.

A second indication is Jane's "underreporting" of intricate affairs that could disturb her careful construction of her own female development (Stevens 211). For example, when Rochester explains his liaison with Céline to Jane in chapter fifteen, Jane completely ignores his allusions to Bertha. In this scene, Rochester reflects upon his past and how he likes Thornfield now, even though, for a very long time, he "abhorred the very thought of it" and "shunned it like a great plague-house" (*JE* 169). Later, after the revelation of Bertha's existence, he asserts forcefully that he will "shut up Thornfield Hall" and "nail up the front windows door and board the lower windows" (362) to keep Jane safe and with him. This parallelism should be effortlessly detectable for Jane in retrospective; however, she does not comment on it. Even after Rochester adds "How I do still abhor-", she does not question him and his thoughts (169). The same thing happens only a few sentences after that, when Rochester seems to wander off the initial topic entirely. "She stood there, by that beech-trunk – a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth", he declares to Jane (169). It is obvious that he is no longer talking about Céline here because he never mentions in his story about her that she once visited Thornfield. Their whole affair takes place in Paris. Moreover, Rochester's quotes of the woman who accompanied him ("Like it if you can! Like it if you dare!" 169) resemble the "lunatic" Bertha (373) more than the French opera dancer who is described as promiscuous but not as mad or aggressive. Furthermore, he calls the woman a hag; a word he uses for Bertha when he also promises to shut up the entire building ("*my wife*, as you term that fearful hag" 362) which interconnects both scenes again. Nevertheless, Jane "shows no interest in pursuing this inquiry" (Stevens 211) and rather leads the conversation back to Céline. However, it appears unlikely that the figure of Jane would not scrutinise Rochester's incoherent memories since she is depicted as a character who normally does not mind challenging him and his speeches (*JE* 158, 241, 362). Once again, this gives rise to doubts

about her credibility because she apparently leaves out some information. As a result, the reader who does not know about Bertha yet, becomes vaguely aware of a dark secret at Thornfield without entirely grasping its topic. If Bertha had become a subject already in this early phase of their relationship, it would have casted an entirely different light on Jane and Rochester and maybe could have discredited Rochester before Jane's narration could transform him into her equal counterpart. Additionally, the novel aims at constructing Rochester as a Byronic hero (McCarron 85). As that, he needs this kind of a dark secret which Jane grants him with her style of narration. Consequently, Jane's underreporting serves her own construction as well as that of her husband.

The same process is also visible in Jane's reaction when the mystery of Bertha is finally solved. The whole time, from the disruption of her wedding until Rochester's presentation of his wife, there are rarely any emotions visible in her report. After Briggs proclaims Rochester's crime, Jane describes her shock but instantly subjoins that she was "collected, and in no danger of swooning" (*JE* 348) and later, that she was "too calm" for crying (355), in order to emphasise her reliability. "An open admission of truth had been uttered by my master; then the living proof had been seen; the intruders were gone, and all was over" (355), Jane summarises the events quite prosaically and disperses all possible doubts about her being too emotional to remember the occurrences correctly with that. Likewise, her depiction of Bertha is "strangely detached" (Williams 29). She does not show jealousy as at the thought of Rochester marrying Miss Ingram (*JE* 190, 220), no sympathy as for Adèle, and no other nameable emotion. According to Stevens, this is an effective technique of storytelling which she discovers through Miss Temple (214). At Lowood, Jane ascertains that "restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me" (*JE* 81). As a former overly passionate child, now that she is an adult, she understands the power of remaining calm and uses it to make her readers accept her characterisation of others. In referring to that meta level of Jane's style of narration, the novel hints at her being not entirely trustworthy. That her discovered technique emerges just when Bertha is officially introduced, shows her need to sound credible, and thus, the possibility that she is not.

Concerning possible functions, the main function of the narrative situation is clear: through assailing the implied reader with details about the daily routine, childhood, first love, and several emotional outbursts of its protagonist Jane, and through combining those insights with a constructed emotional bond between reader and main character, the novel attempts to win the reader over to Jane's side. Though the examples above indicate that Jane's story is not entirely coherent, this is rarely perceived by the reader because the autobiographic style and the fixed focalisation bestow all attention on Jane. I will show next, how, in order to keep it that way, the novel actively silences Bertha, the Gothic enemy image of the novel. This happens by means of taking advantage of the narrative situation.

During the whole novel, Bertha does not speak a single word directly. Instead, Jane frequently describes different kinds of “murmurs” (126, 129, 175) and the “demoniac laugh” (175) of Rochester’s first wife. When the two women meet in the attic, Bertha is again only represented as crying, bellowing, and yelling without uttering an intelligible word (352-3). Even Rochester, who seems to understand Bertha, judging from his complaint about her “foul vocabulary” (371), advises Mason not to “mind her gibberish” (254). With that, he reduces her language to something untranslatable, as Jane does with referring to her words with murmurs. Nevertheless, in the same scene, Bertha’s speech appears indirectly. Mason, still in shock, recites his sister who apparently “said she’d drain my heart” (253). Hence, her ability to speak did not degenerate over time but continues to be recognisable. The question is then, why Jane does not translate it. As the daughter of an affluent plantation owner from Jamaica, it is likely that Bertha speaks French or English, “perhaps inflected with an accent or an influence of Creolized French or English” (Stevens 207). Since Jane’s French is quite well (*JE* 119), she should have been able to at least recognise that it is a language that Bertha utters.

According to the feminist critic Pat MacPherson, the reason for Jane’s unwillingness to decipher Bertha’s words is that “the ‘pure’ must stop her ears to the siren song of the ‘fallen’; reason is only tempted into darkness by desire” (19). Thus, she interprets Bertha’s ostensible inability to speak as Jane’s success in remaining on the right path – the path of pure and passionless femininity which would be in danger if she listened to the “dark” woman. Like other feminist critics, for example Elaine Showalter (qtd. in Lodge 73), she believes that Bertha must be destroyed before Jane can fully unfold her individuality. However, McPherson’s perception of Bertha as “that hungry, angry solitary woman vengefully haunting the two lovers who dream of their escape into the world of romantic love” (23) merely displays what the narrative situation aims for. McPherson interprets the story as the autodiegetic narrator presents it and echoes Jane’s perspective without challenging it. Since I have already explained why Jane is not trustworthy as a narrator, I would not agree with that. It is not the character of Jane who simply ignores Bertha’s speech in order to save herself from the bad influence, but the novel which consciously silences Bertha’s voice with it (Stevens 208). With stealing her voice, then, the novel ensures that the reader maintains to empathise with Jane and is not distracted by a different perspective of the events. Yet, Bertha’s noises which are typical of “characters, whose voices are [...] marginalized by controlling and manipulative narrators” (203) are not entirely concealed. They serve to express the power dynamics between the narrator and the source of those noises by interrupting Jane’s conscientiously constructed narrative. As a result, suppressed as she may be, the character of Bertha still constitutes a threat to the superior couple which needs to be further demeaned. I will revisit this topic and elaborate on the question how silencing Bertha influences her character construction in the subchapter about her characterisation.

Altogether, “Jane’s perspective remains largely unchallenged” (Pond 206) due to her dominant position throughout the novel. Her way of presenting unpleasant events – and people – to the reader, clearly leads straight to the accomplishment of her own aims, namely a suspenseful love story and her growing as a woman. Since Bertha stands in her way, it is likely that the novel neglects important information concerning her opponent’s appearance and background story. Moreover, Jane manipulates the reader through her choice of words and focus. Considering that Bertha can never defend herself and has no possibility to challenge Jane’s version, Jane’s construction of her rival can under no circumstances be regarded as trustworthy. Nevertheless, I will use Jane’s words for the following analysis of Bertha for the simple reason that there exist no other in the novel. However, it is important to keep the narrative situation and its manipulative impact in mind.

4.2 Character Conception of Bertha Mason

Due to the narrative situation, Jane is in control about everything that the reader may learn about the Caribbean Creole Bertha Mason. In this chapter, I will show that Bertha is not conceived to be a lifelike character as Jane and Rochester are. Instead, she exists to fulfil certain functions as the inferior racial and sexual Other and with that, affects the other figures as well as the plot level. To prove this, I will analyse Bertha and her construction through a character conception which will be supplemented and expanded by a characterisation of Bertha in the following subchapter.

According to Manfred Pfister, a figure conception “refers to the anthropological model that the dramatic figure is based on and the conventions involved in turning this anthropological model into fiction” (170). In order to examine the conception, he provides the categories of dynamic, dimension, individuality, and openness which I will use (170-180).

First of all, Bertha displays more features of a static than of a dynamic character. Through the major part of Jane’s stay at Thornfield, she is the uncanny; “that which is concealed from others” (Azim 183). Her presence transforms Mr Rochester in a “man of mystery” (DeLamotte 208) because he wants to hide her from Jane and the society. In the period until her revelation, Bertha is not even a separate character. Her whole existence is denied by the inhabitants of Thornfield who try to persuade Jane that “the curious laugh” (*JE* 125) she perceives several times has its origin in the servant Grace Poole (126). Even after Jane saw Bertha in her room in the night before her wedding, Rochester adheres to his statement that it must have been the “strange being” (342) Grace. Nevertheless, the novel continually hints at Bertha’s presence. The gothic setting of Thornfield and Rochester’s secret-mongering demonstrate that “the central mystery of [the] gothic plot” (MacPherson 25) still needs to be discovered and that Rochester’s unconvincing explanation of the affairs cannot be the solution. Moreover, the inmates of Thornfield whisper behind Jane’s back about

something she does not know (*JE* 195). Due to that, Jane discerns that “there was a mystery at Thornfield” from which she is “purposely excluded” (195). This process builds up suspense which is only dissolved when the marriage is interrupted, and Rochester confesses committing bigamy. It is not until then that Bertha becomes officially recognised as an own character with a name and a detailed description of appearance without Jane deeming her a ghost. Yet, after her scene of revelation, and thus, with the awareness that it is Bertha and not Grace who is the gothic mystery, the narrative does not concede many more actions to Bertha. Her last active participation in the narrative is burning Thornfield and committing suicide, and even that spectacular ending of her imprisonment is only exposed retrospectively through the voice of “the late Mr Rochester’s butler” (515). Consequently, Bertha is not allowed to go through dynamic changes and remains static. Whereby, she is consequently portrayed as the mad and mysterious woman who needs to be concealed in the attic.

The only little development that can be detected is granted her through tales of the past. However, those are mainly told by her abusive husband and displayed by the woman who should supplant her which raises doubts about the credibility of the figures. In contrasting Rochester’s story and Jane’s later description and representation of the Creole, then, a difference between the Bertha in Jamaica and the Bertha in the attic becomes visible. When Rochester recounts his past with Bertha in Jamaica, he severely criticises her unfeminine behaviour and her “cast of mind” (368). Nevertheless, he also displays her as the woman that every man, including him, “seemed to admire” for her beauty (368). Moreover, she provided him with thirty thousand pounds as her fortune (367) which allegedly makes her a good choice to marry in Rochester’s situation. Later in Jane’s room and in the attic, Bertha is no longer recognisable as that woman. No reader would mistake her for a rich beauty in that scenario. Consequently, it seems like Bertha actually changed fundamentally. However, this development constitutes only a small part of Bertha’s conception, and Rochester summarises this retrospective image of his first wife in very few words. The current condition of Bertha, on the other hand, is vividly described by Jane and does not shift into another direction throughout the novel. Bertha remains the “madwoman” (362) who keeps attacking people and stands in the way of Jane and Rochester until she finally dies. Since this picture of her is the most prominent in the novel, and it is not significantly altered during the story, Bertha can better be labelled a static character.

The second distinction of characters is that between mono- and multidimensional ones (Pfister 178). Matching her stableness, at least at the first sight, Bertha is more of a monodimensional figure which is “defined by a small set of distinguishing features” (178). Even though her background story is partly uncovered by Rochester, it does not add new characteristics but merely emphasises those traits of her which are already focused on. For example, Rochester tells Jane about Bertha’s mother but only to prove that his wife is as mad

as “her mother, the Creole, [...] a madwoman and a drunkard” (*JE* 351). Everything that Bertha does during the whole novel can be ascribed to her mental state which in turn is an expression of her Otherness, so that the reasons for her deeds are not questioned. Her relations with the other figures are also shaped by her madness. Since she does not speak – or at least not in a language, that Jane seems to be capable of translating – she cannot explain why she visited Jane at night, set Rochester’s bed on fire, and attacked her own brother. This reduces her again to her malady and with that, to an aggressive lunatic who barely resembles a human being like Rochester and Jane are.

Attributable to her being monodimensional, Bertha’s depiction can rather be described as a personification than as a representation of an individual. The reader gets to know numerous details about Jane’s appearance, behaviour, speech, and biography. Certainly, this is accounted for by the novel being written as an autobiography, so that it seems natural to learn about the main character and narrator of the story. However, also Mr Rochester is depicted as an individual who has a particularised past, a way of speaking which is typical of his figure, and a mostly coherent manner that makes the reader feel as if he was an autonomous, individual ‘person’ (Wenzel 51). This situation is different with Bertha. Since the facts which are revealed about her all lead to the same main premise – Bertha as mad, aggressive, and Other – she cannot be recognised as an individual character. Instead, her representation is “designed in its totality to illustrate an abstract concept with all its implications” (Pfister 179). In her case, this is the concept of a racial and sexual Other which is inferior to the main characters Jane and Rochester and which fulfils the function of representing them as a superior and successful couple. Bertha’s appearance, her actions, her family, and all that Rochester exposes about his marriage with her is subordinate to this function.

Nevertheless, Bertha remains an open figure instead of a closed one. Even though Jane’s representation constantly forces Bertha to discharge her duty of embodying the sharp contrast to the superordinate English couple, her character is still shaped by an “irreducible ambiguity”, as Eric Bentley terms a crucial component of an open figure construction (qtd. in Pfister 180). Due to the narrative situation and Jane’s unreliability as a narrator, as it is shown in the previous subchapter, Bertha becomes not only enigmatic because of the structure of the story which marks her as the gothic mystery. Another reason for it is that the information about Bertha seem incomplete and too biased by Jane’s own aims to regard her as a completely defined character. Her conception as the personification of a specific function shows that Bertha should not be perceived as an own character but rather as a construct that emanates from Jane’s mind.

All in all, the application of Pfister’s categories proves that Bertha is solely constructed to serve two main functions: she is the gothic mystery which is instrumental in creating suspense, and she serves as a racial and sexual Other whose existence allows Jane to

distinguish herself and Rochester as superior and thus, to depict them as more promising as a couple than Rochester and Bertha were. Making her an individual through personal traits and complexity would not strengthen those functions and hence, they are neglected in Jane's narration. However, it is not alone due to omitting characteristics that Bertha becomes a monodimensional construct. In the following characterisation, I will demonstrate how the novel actively describes the role of being Other to Jane's opponent, and how this again strengthens her function as the enemy image.

4.3 Characterisation: Bertha as the Other

As I already mentioned earlier, characterising Bertha is impossible without drawing on Jane's perception and her choice of words which bears several challenges. Jane's characterisation of Bertha consists in great part of "explicit-figural" and "implicit-authorial characterisation techniques" (Pfister 183-195). The former refers especially to Bertha's appearance, behaviour, and context which is normally part of an implicit characterisation (190). However, the narrator of the story is also a character in the novel which makes all named aspects subjective. On top of that, I have already shown that Jane is not reliable as a narrator and that the novel is constructed to serve her aims and not Bertha's. Consequently, I will refer to those descriptions as explicit because they fulfil functions which go beyond the mere representation of reality. The latter technique, on the other hand, expresses how the figure of Bertha is used to compare her with other characters, especially with the heroine, Jane. Even though the figure of Jane also manipulates that part in using her might as the narrator to emphasise the contrast between her and Bertha, this is not as superficial as with the explicit-figural technique. Hence, I will continue to call it implicit. In the first part of the characterisation, I will demonstrate how Jane dehumanises Bertha and marks her as inferior due to her race and sex. In the second part, I will focus on the implicit-authorial characterisation technique to analyse how Jane harnesses her construct of Bertha to define her own character in contrast to the created Otherness of the Creole. In the end of the characterisation, I will show which functions Bertha has and how that affects the interpretation of her character as a whole.

The probably most overt expression of dehumanisation in representing Bertha is that Jane constantly likens her to non-human creatures and particularly to animals. For example, after the captive attacked Mason, Jane relates Bertha's noises with "a dog quarrelling" (*JE* 249), and later refers to her as a "wild beast" (251), while her own brother participates in this process in comparing Bertha to "a tigress" (253). Subsequently, Rochester terms Bertha's speech "wolfish cries" (371), whereas Jane calls them "dog howling" (338). Whereby, it becomes already visible that Jane does not objectively describe Bertha's noises, but that she chooses her words after a pattern which makes her characterisation explicit. Additionally, it

illustrates that Bertha is not coincidentally deprived from her humanity but that this is a direction that the novel targets. Due to that, it is not only Bertha's voice which seems to resemble animals but also her behaviour and appearance as Jane allegedly memorises it. Thus, Jane remembers that at their first encounter, she could not tell whether Bertha was "beast or human being" (352). She refers to the woman with "it" and "the figure" to emphasise her confusion about the demeanour. Apparently, she only recognises her as human in the end because "it was covered with clothing" (352). Otherwise, Jane seems merely able to see something else than the "wild animal" in Bertha which "grovelled [...] on all fours" at one time and "stood tall on its hind-feet" at another.

According to Shuttleworth, linking people to animals is a "common representation of the 'savage', the working classes and the insane" in novels of the Victorian period (165). All three attributes have in common that they are regarded as less worth than counterparts: a savage is inferior to a gentleman or a lady in the emerging "culture of sensibility" (Thomas 41), members of the working-class to those of the middle-classes and the gentry, and the insane to the lucid ones. In case of Bertha, two of those attributes – allegedly she is savage and insane – match her character. Consequently, Jane's description labels her as subordinate because when she can be mistaken for an animal, she apparently lost the "very essence of humanity" (Goodwin 650) and simultaneously her human dignity. Concurrently with this, the simile "renders the human/animal frontier as acceptable indeterminate", as Spivak rightly argues (247). Due to that, Jane seems to legalise how Bertha is treated in her prison. If she appeared more than a normal human, to be confined in a "room without a window" (*JE* 352) and without contact to her environment would have seemed considerably more outrageous to the reader of Jane's narrative. Presenting her as an animal instead, is the first step in persuading the readers that confining Bertha was in fact inevitable for Rochester.

In addition to the animal simile, the Creole is compared with supernatural beings on several occasions which contributes to her dehumanisation. The most used term here is "goblin" (176, 249, 342, 372) which both Jane and Rochester deploy frequently to refer to Bertha and her laughter. The Cambridge Dictionary defines a goblin as "a small, ugly creature that is harmful to humans" which expresses quite aptly how Bertha should be perceived: she is not solely non-human but actively damages others. This adds a malicious intent to her character which would not be as severely as an animal which may only follow its instincts. Furthermore, she is termed a "vampire" (341) after she materialised in Jane's room. Mason picks up on this perception of Bertha's character after she attacked him and apparently "sucked the blood" out of his heart (253). Consequently, her depiction as a vampire and as a goblin both demonise her as supernatural. The varying non-human creatures exhibit that Bertha should not be discerned as a regular human but rather as a Gothic and dangerous monster.

Simultaneously to the process of dehumanisation, which is only the tip of the iceberg in presenting Bertha as inferior, Bertha is actively depicted as the sexual and racial Other, as I will demonstrate in the next part of the chapter. In order to achieve that, Jane delineates her opponent as unfeminine, black, and mad, and uses the prejudices towards white Creoles that are widespread in the Victorian society to discredit her even further.

The first aspect of portraying Bertha as unfeminine is representing her as highly sexual. This is visible through linking her to a vampire again. According to Robert Mighall, the monster “symbolizes an erotic threat” to the “orthodox sexuality” of the Victorian era (211) which sexualises Bertha as well. Another important manifestation of the “dangerous” sexuality is her passion which is shown through her outward appearance – one more explicit characterisation of Jane. The heroine continually illustrates Bertha as a dark figure. For example, she mentions the “discoloured face” (*JE* 340) and the “fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments” (341) in her room and remembers the “purple face” and the “dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane” (352) at their second encounter. Anna Wöckinger interprets this darkness as “a sign of passion in ladies” (54) which is certainly true. Bertha is definitely passionate which is expressed through her incapability to tame herself. She attacks her brother who visits her, “gaze[s] wildly” at the spectators on the failed wedding day and goes at Rochester’s throat (*JE* 353). Even at the time before she was confined in the attic, Rochester describes her as “intemperate and unchaste” and emphasises her “violent and unreasonable temper” (369). However, the darkness does not only serve to show how passionate Bertha is but also that she is unfeminine. The “big” and “corpulent” woman, “in stature almost equalling her husband” (353) does not at all resemble the ideal image of a Victorian lady who should be “pure, innocent, and relatively passive” (Flint 275). None of those aspects match a dark and tall woman who, on top of that, is “perverse and imbecile” (*JE* 369). Obviously, she should also not be passionate because that would interfere with the ideology that women are “sexually ignorant” (Vicinus ix) and due to that “morally superior to men” (xiv). In all other areas, of course, they should be dependent on their husband or father (Steinbach 133). Bertha, however, with her manly and strong appearance who nearly wins her fight with Rochester, does not seem to tolerate her dependence which makes her unfeminine again. Consequently, Bertha is presented as a sexual Other. Though women themselves are already othered in the Victorian patriarchal society consisting of “systematic masculine dominance” (Newman 462), Bertha even differs from those women due to her sexuality which does not match the ideal image of “naturally passionless” women (Wood 24).

Another reason for Bertha’s Otherness which is closely linked to her presentation as a dark figure and a sexual Other is the blackness attributed to her. Bertha has a Creole mother and a father who is a “West India planter and merchant” in Jamaica (*JE* 349), and since she is born in the West Indies, Bertha is a Creole as well (Plasa 80). A Creole, by definition, does not necessarily have a connotation of colour, so “there may be white Creoles, coloured Creoles,

or black Creoles”, as Anthony Trollope summarises it (qtd. in Thomas 32). However, in England, Creole was a pejorative name for the owners of West Indian sugar plantations (Sharpe 45) and since those were mostly white, Bertha can be considered white or “passing for white” (Thomas 37) as well. Nevertheless, in Jane’s narrative, she appears dark or even black which the preceding examples prove, and which beguiled some critics like Goodwin to mistake Bertha for “the black woman in the attic” (607). One reason for this is that it is a quite common historical trait to sexualise and demonise black women in literature (638). Consequently, it may have seemed more natural to the readers of a realist novel to see this done to a dark person instead of a white. As the white British in the Victorian period were racist and firmly convinced that white Europeans were superior to other races, this process of making Bertha black can also be considered as racist. Through changing Bertha’s appearance, Jane transfers all prejudices which exist in middle-class society towards dark people of other races on Bertha. Those are, for example, that Caribbean women are “hypersexual” (Steinbach 62), so in fact, Bertha’s racial Otherness underlines her sexual one as both are connected. Moreover, the character of Bertha shows how non-Western cultures were perceived as “simultaneously exotic and uncivilized” (Steinbach 62). When Rochester explains to Jane why he married Bertha, he not only mentions the money that she brought him but also her beauty. He describes how he was “dazzled” and “stimulated” (*JE* 368) by the “tall, dark, and majestic” woman (367) he met there. Yet, right after that, he begins to lament over all her threats which illustrates the duality of evaluating non-Western people.

A further “stereotypical attribute [...] of blackness” (Thomas 40) that Bertha takes on through her darkening is her madness which is probably her most defining trait and an important factor in characterising her as Other. According to Azim, her madness and blackness are inextricably linked (183) which once again externalises the prevalent racism in the British society. Rochester claims that Bertha’s madness stems from her Creole mother (*JE* 351) and thereby evaluates it as something inheritable. Consequently, Bertha’s mother, and thus, her heritage, are to blame for her mental condition. This corresponds to the common belief of the time that “madness specifically passes from mother to daughter” (Vrettos 77). The assumption is supported by the fact that Bertha Antoinetta Mason is named after her mother, Antoinetta Mason (*JE* 349). Antoinetta, then, is an interpretative name and an implicit-authorial technique (Pfister 194) to characterise Bertha in the way that it transfers the madness of Bertha’s mother to Bertha, exactly as it has been done with the name. As a result, madness is attributed to origin as well as to femininity because only women were involved in transmitting the ailment. Whereby, racial and sexual Otherness are again interconnected in Bertha’s character.

Furthermore, madness and femininity not only correlate in Bertha in the Victorian period. Elaine Showalter argues that “madness came to be understood as a ‘female malady’ in Victorian culture” (qtd. in Vrettos 77). It was often connected with hysteria which gained new

prominence in the nineteenth century (Wood 12) and was used for women who did not conform to Victorian ideals of womanhood. Hence, the criteria for diagnosing hysteria were nebulous and could either be applied to women with weak and women with too strong wills (45). Moreover, hysteria was regularly linked to an untameable, female desire (Schößler 39). Since Bertha occupies sexual passion and apparently has a strong will which becomes visible in her several outbreaks, it is hardly surprising that she is represented as mad, too. Thus, it is not coincidental that Bertha is mad but an expression of her racial and sexual Otherness.

Even though the process of darkening Bertha and the interconnected stereotypes of blackness are ever-present in *Jane Eyre*, it must be remembered that Bertha is not black. Nevertheless, her whiteness as a Creole strongly contributes to representing Bertha as Other as well. White Creoles have a special position in the constructed racial hierarchy in the Victorian period because they may have been white like the typical English society, but were perhaps even “more threatening than a free person of color” because they indicate that “whiteness’ alone is not the sign of racial purity” (Sharpe 46). Hence, whiteness is no homogeneous category but has further gradations.

This attitude occurs in the novel as well and becomes apparent when Bertha’s brother – logically also a white Creole – speaks for the first time. In her narrative, Jane recounts his accent which she perceived as “not precisely foreign, but still not altogether English” (*JE* 226). Resulting from this implicit-authorial characterisation which parallels Mason and Bertha, Bertha is already Other because she is dislocated from her origin and is not entirely accepted by the British society. Moreover, she must cope with several prejudices described to white Creoles which are also detectable in the treatment of her brother Mason. For example, while Bertha is constantly depicted as manly, strong, and dark even though she should be passionless and pure, Mason is feminised. Through the means of physiognomy, “a science for reading character on the outward features of the body” (Taylor 188), Jane criticises that Mason is lacking power, firmness, thought, and command (*JE* 226). Since dominance and independence are key characteristics of Victorian manliness, Mason is presented as more female than his sister. This is also obvious when Jane compares Rochester, her prototype of manliness, and Mason, the “meek sheep” (227), his “passive disposition” and submission towards Rochester (251). The reason for this representation of the siblings may be that many British believed that Creoles degenerated because of the climate (Thomas 33), so that they could no longer reach English standards. Using physiognomy to analyse their inferiority supports this assumption because it facilitates an allegedly scientific proof of it. Through masculinising Bertha and feminising Mason, the novel displays their racial Otherness. On top of that, it legitimises the social mission of the Empire because apparently, they are uncivilised and hence, in need of the “soul-making and English character-building project” of English imperialism (Thomas 51).

A further essential factor in characterising Bertha is contrasting her with other characters and especially with Jane. With the aid of this implicit-authorial technique, both figures are characterised simultaneously, whereby Jane becomes the innocent and superior woman and Bertha the threatening and inferior Other. The function of this contrasting is aptly named by Peter Wenzel: "Durch den Kontrast zwischen Helden und bösem Gegenspieler wird der Held noch unschuldiger, der Bösewicht noch böser" (56).

The difference between Jane and Bertha that is emphasised the most in the novel is their appearance. After the revelation that Rochester is already married, he loses no opportunity to stress the strong distinctions between both women. "Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk" (*JE* 353-4), he requests the guests of his wedding. Thereby, Jane as Rochester's preferred wife, his "young girl" (353), is contrasted with "a demon" (353) who has balls instead of eyes, a mask instead of a face and an undefined bulk instead of a form. Consequently, Bertha is again dehumanised which is underlined by Rochester's wish for "something at least human" (351), like Jane is. Furthermore, "the interplay of light and dark, positive and negative" as it is typical of Gothic literature (Botting 3) can also be seen in the context of the scene. Jane still wears her white wedding dress and veil and enters the attic as Rochester's "girl-bride" (*JE* 309). Before their wedding, Rochester refers to Jane several times with variations of that term, and calls her, for example, his "good little girl", "little English girl" and "inexperienced girl" (315, 322, 170). Due to that, it is not only Jane's age that is emphasised but especially her purity. Jane herself describes her pupil Adèle as "so tranquil, so passionless, so innocent" (343) which are the same qualities which Rochester ascribes to her through linking her to a little child. On the other hand, there is Bertha, whose black hair and darkened skin contrast Jane's white dress and veil, and whose "lavishly display" of "her charms and accomplishments" (367-8) is opposed to Jane's restraint and inexperience. Consequently, Bertha is characterised as Other, while Jane gains the status of being "absolutely other to Bertha" (Plasa 88). Like Wenzel argued, through the contrast between the characters in the novel, Jane, the light, becomes "the epitome of modesty" whereas Bertha, the dark, is transformed into "a cautionary tale of female excess" (Williams 38). This is obviously the reason why Rochester's figure compares the two women this sharply because with that, the novel attempts to excuse his own behaviour. "Remember with what judgement ye judge ye shall be judged" (*JE* 354), he warns any person who may dare to condemn him for his bigamy and assumes whereby that nobody would earnestly blame him for choosing light over dark.

The second great difference between Jane and Bertha evolves from their similarities and supports Jane in constructing her story of success. Even though they seem like the exact opposite of one another when they meet in the attic of Thornfield, during Jane's childhood, in fact, there are many parallels between Jane and Bertha. Yet, in all cases, Jane's behaviour or

situation is not as severe as Bertha's and still offers her an escape through improving herself which is not granted Bertha. For example, the younger Jane is also treated as too passionate for a Victorian girl or woman and is called a "mad cat" (7) in this process. Like Bertha, she is compared with an animal in this scene. However, cats are not connotated with death like a hyena, or a tigress is. Instead, cats symbolise femininity (Park 43) which shows that even when Jane is depicted as an animal and thus, temporarily deprived from her humanity, she is not masculinised as Bertha is later. Moreover, even mad cats are normally not deadly and consequently, Jane's madness does not seem as severe as Bertha's. By comparing them to different animals, then, the novel indicates that they are on different stages of madness. While Bertha appears to have reached the point of no return, Jane still has the chance to develop in a supposedly more favourable direction, as the genre of the bildungsroman suggests it. She can still become feminine and docile and with that, accepted in society.

The same is true for the aspect of racial Otherness. At Gateshead, Jane declares herself "an uncongenial alien" (*JE* 12) and "a heterogeneous thing" (11) which could not be loved because she is an "interloper" (12) of the Reeds' race and thus, not really a member of their family. Sally Shuttleworth sees a link between Jane and Bertha here. According to her, a Creole is the "literal realization of Jane's self-depiction as a 'heterogeneous thing'" (164) because while Jane does not entirely fit in with her family, it is the same for Bertha and England. This is only partly correct because the decisive factor here is that Jane's heterogeneity emanates from class differences whereas Bertha's Otherness literally originates from her race. During Jane's fight with John Reed, he violently declares what makes her different: "You are a dependent [...]; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us" (*JE* 5). Later, Bessie takes the same line in warning Jane that she "ought not to think [herself] on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed" (8). At the end of the novel, however, Jane is a rich woman who is married to a man of the gentry. Bertha, on the other hand, cannot change her fate of being a white Creole. As a result, Jane is again only a weakened version of Bertha because she may perceive herself as racially Other at this moment in time, but she has the chance to save herself if she can attain a higher class through marriage or undiscovered family relations. For the character of Bertha, Jane's social advancement only puts emphasis on her own unsolvable Otherness.

The third thing the young Jane and Bertha have in common is their sexual Otherness. At Gateshead and later in Lowood, Jane is constantly told to "remain silent" (1), to be "useful and pleasant" (8) and to "endure patiently" (61) what she has to. Moreover, she is called passionate at different stages of her life and from different people (6, 38, 359) which always carries a negative connotation with it. Since women should be passionless, the more adapted women in her life, like Mrs Reed, Bessie, and Helen, regularly attempt to persuade her to conceal her emotions instead (8, 38, 64). The critic Jane Wood deplores that attitude because

she perceives that “cultural requirement of repression” is a reason for mental suffering (43). In the case of Bertha, whose constructed unfemininity I already explained, this means that her madness could represent the outcome if a woman fails in hiding her passions.

The consequences of that for Bertha are the treatment of her husband. When he understands that with Bertha, he would “never have a quiet or settled household” (*JE* 369), he decides to lock her away. He aims for the Victorian trope of the angel in the house which “spiritually refreshes” the husband when he returns from work (Shuttleworth 76) and cannot see this in Bertha with her “absurd, contradictory, exacting orders” (*JE* 369). Due to Bertha’s unwillingness to adapt, he finally confines her and with that makes sure that she can no longer sully his name and outrage his honour, as he calls it (372). This perspective makes clear that much of Bertha’s madness and dehumanisation stems from her imprisonment whereas the cause is not the madness but her refusal to act more like an ideal Victorian woman. Consequently, Bertha is depicted as the cautionary tale of what a woman should never become. Jane forms a sharp contrast to this image in the end of her story, even though she and Bertha both started as overly passionate women. However, Jane successfully manages to conceal her feelings and eventually fills the gap in Rochester’s life as his “good angel” (379). The extremely different endings – Jane happily married and Bertha who committed suicide – seem to indicate that women should rather choose Jane’s way of developing instead of Bertha’s who did not change her unfeminine behaviour. This fits a popular Victorian opinion that claims that “everyone can cure bad habits through self-help” (Vrettos 73) for which Jane could serve as a role model. By contrasting her with her failed rival then, Jane once again represents herself as superior.

Eventually, Bertha’s most defining trait is her Otherness. No matter if it is about her sexuality or her racial origin, the novel loses no opportunity to represent her as inferior to its heroine Jane. Whereby, the racist aspects that depict her as less worth than a white English person, explain why Rochester perceives “her nature wholly alien” to his (*JE* 368). They also imply that Gilbert’s and Gubar’s famous interpretation of Bertha as Jane’s “truest and darkest double” (492) is untenable in this way. One might argue that Bertha is “the secret self” (492) of Jane because it still costs her an effort to conceal her emotions as it is required by Victorian women. This becomes visible in her occasional outbreaks, for example when Rochester mocks her about his ostensible marriage with Miss Ingram, and Jane feels “the vehemence of emotion [...] was claiming mastery” (*JE* 302). Thus, it is comprehensible to view the wild and passionate Bertha who instantly acts out any emotion as the personification of Jane’s repressed anger. However, Gilbert and Gubar ignore the narrative situation which manipulates the story in a way that all attention is focused on Jane. Correspondingly, the two feminist critics miss how the novel renders the story so that it optimally depicts Jane. This results in romanticising Jane and in a “race-blind analysis” of Bertha, as Carl Plasa calls it (“Prefigurations” 10). In this

interpretation, Bertha is not considered as an own character in the story but only as a part of Jane. With that, they entirely disregard the racist intentions behind the construction of Bertha.

All in all, the character of Bertha Mason is shaped in large measure by Jane's aims and wishes. Since Jane is the heroine of a bildungsroman, she must develop during the narrative. The success of her progress is emphasised through depicting Bertha as failing the same task. Due to Jane's numerous explicit characterisations, she is represented as the sexual and racial Other that barely resembles a proper human being. Instead, she is reduced to serve several functions which differs her from Jane and Rochester who are more human-like figures. That her voice is silenced to an extent that she can solely catch attention through murmurs, significantly contributes to that. Bertha's main functions then are to make Jane appear superior and to justify her and Rochester's relationship by demonstrating that Bertha could never be an equal counterpart of Rochester. The latter aspect will be analysed more profoundly in the following chapter about the plot construction.

5. "Reader, I married him": Plot Construction in *Jane Eyre*

At first sight, the superordinate topic of *Jane Eyre* seems clear: it's a love story. Not only critics of the novel focus especially on that aspect of the plot, but also its adaptations are promoted with slogans like "A love story as fiercely intelligent as it is passionate" (*Jane Eyre* 2011) and "This year's most romantic love story" (*Jane Eyre* 1996). This impression emerges because, for the most part, the novel follows the typical marriage plot which is "the narrative of courtship culminating in a happy marriage that restores order and lays all tensions to rest", as Lau defines it (355). The marriage plot is highly popular today through several other novels and films, for example Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and its adaptation *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). However, *Jane Eyre's* plot cannot be entirely defined as a marriage plot because it shows significant variations of that pattern and contains aspects of other generic plots, like the Gothic tale. Since *Jane Eyre* is a realist novel and a bildungsroman, the plot is vital in understanding the characters and their development on the one hand, and the central concept and aim of the novel as the whole on the other. Thus, analysing the plot will also serve for an improved comprehension of Bertha's role, her construction, and her functions.

First, I will demonstrate how *Jane Eyre* is largely constructed as a marriage plot. According to Harrison, those plots typically deal with "the courtship between a heroine and hero and emphasize the perspective of the woman" (113). This is obviously true for *Jane Eyre*, with Jane and Rochester as the resulting couple and the narrative situation completely emanating from Jane. The next aspect, which are "conflicts, misunderstanding, and tension" which "threaten to derail the relationship" (113), is where Bertha comes into play. Though Jane and Rochester actually have several problems, like Miss Ingram, and their power struggles which originate from Rochester being the wealthy employer and Jane the dependent

governess, the conflict that finally leads to a temporal separation is Bertha being the wife of Rochester. This already makes her the central disturbance of the novel without needing further characterisation. Rochester likes to exploit that to blame his own sins on her and due to that, he represents her as “the aggressor in their relationship”, while victimising himself (Williams 39). The last part of the marriage plot is that the lovers express their feelings for one another and that the marriage, “projected to be a happy one”, completes the story (Harrison 113). This is the same in *Jane Eyre*, when Jane begins the concluding chapter of the novel with her famous declaration “Reader, I married him” (544). Afterwards, she only informs about some secondary characters like Adèle and St John, whereby the central assertion is that everything turned out all right.

A feature of the marriage plot that has nothing to do with the chronology of events is the emphasis that it is a marriage of love. According to Harrison, this concept is a new ideology of novels following this plot in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (114). In *Jane Eyre*, Jane frequently stresses the emotional attachment between her and Rochester, for example when she claims that “no woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” (*JE* 546). Simultaneously, her character attempts to make clear that she deploys a marriage for money, when Rochester wishes to dress her in expensive gowns, and she quite rigorously rejects him (82). Here, Bertha’s function is to underline the new ideology because her failed marriage with Rochester is based on an economic alliance. Rochester himself describes how he “never loved” and “never esteemed” her (368). Through the marriage plot then, in which an affective marriage is the ultimate goal, it seems natural that their relationship could not last. Hence, Bertha’s figure serves once again as the bad example which is needed to detect the contrast to Jane who is constructed to be the better choice for Rochester. Furthermore, this part of the plot absolves Rochester from his guilt because allegedly, he cannot be blamed for having no feelings for Bertha. This desired perception is supported by the novel’s construction of Bertha as Other.

The Otherness of Bertha is also essential for a further aspect of the marriage plot, namely its determination of gender roles. The sexual double standard of the Victorian period, which contains that sexual desire in men is normal while the same feelings ought to be seen as disgusting in women (Steinbach 135), is interconnected with the marriage plot. Jane, for instance, is warned by Mrs Fairfax to “try and keep Mr Rochester at a distance: distrust yourself as well as him” (*JE* 317) which expresses the women’s task of always being resistant. Rochester, on the other hand, as the man, should be the dominant part that initiates sexual contact (Harrison 118). In order to increase that dominance, men were “typically represented as older and more powerful” in novels of the nineteenth century (118) which matches him as well. Consequently, both main characters seem to show the behaviour which the marriage plot demands from them. As I have demonstrated in the characterisation, Bertha does not. As a

result, she serves as a sharp contrast to Jane again and emphasises Jane's and Rochester's alleged fate to be together.

Even though the novel's plot and the typical marriage plot have many things in common, there is a difference in the direction of the story. The plot is not always "driven forward in time by the promise of the plot's conclusion – the matrimonial denouement" (119) but is interrupted through untypical actions of the female protagonist. Those are that Jane has some requirements for her life after the wedding, namely that she wants to keep working as a governess to not be entirely dependent on her husband (*JE* 323). With that, she seems to showcase her progressive nature because it was highly unusual and regarded as inappropriate for middle- or upper-class women of that time to work (Steinbach 125). Additionally, she apparently supports more rights for women, which is also visible in her long monologue where she states that women can do more than "making puddings and knitting stockings" (*JE* 129). However, her demand for more rights for women obviously does not include non-English women, since she does nothing to aid Bertha. The reason for that is that Bertha's function in the marriage plot is not to be a woman but to be an unhuman obstacle in the way of Rochester and Jane. Thus, she does not need to be saved but only to be disposed of.

However, also Jane's other resolutions dissolve into thin air when the novel returns to the marriage plot in the end. Jane eventually marries Rochester and immediately gives up being a governess because her "time and cares were now required by another", her husband (545). The progress she attempted to live is no longer visible in this rendering of her situation. Instead, marrying, quitting work, and having a son as their successor seems to be *the* conservative solution. Nevertheless, the ending "offers an uncomfortable and unsure placement within society" (Azim 176) because everything is done to let Jane seem more autonomous than she is. The incredible amount of money she inherits from her uncle (the 20.000 pounds Jane inherits would equal approximately 1,4 million pounds today) should make her independent to maintain the progress for women in the plot. However, the doctrine of coverture in the Victorian period made sure that all possessions of the wife belonged to her husband after the wedding (Steinbach 136) which "reinforced the hideous practice of gender subordination and marginalization", as Goodwin rightly argues (633). In order to avoid that Mr Rochester exploits Jane like he did with Bertha who brought him even more money (today it would be about two million pounds), he becomes "a cripple" (*JE* 519) in the novel who can barely see and misses one hand. Regarding that, Jane proudly declares that she is "the apple of his eye" and that "he saw nature – he saw books" through her (546). Their constant power struggle appears to be resolved with Jane as its winner. Therewith, I would agree with Helen Moglen who explains that Rochester's mutilation is "the necessary counterpart of Jane's independence" (qtd. in Lodge 71). Rochester's character becomes so dependent on Jane's

that he cannot turn against her. Due to that, the novel precludes the history of Bertha from repeating itself with Jane.

On the marriage plot level, Bertha's main function is to be the obstacle in the way of Jane and Rochester which causes trouble but cannot restrain the superior couple from finding their happy ending. She exists to allow Jane a second thought about marriage and to grant her time to increase her might. Moreover, she is an important factor in two minor plots which the marriage plot involves: the bigamy and the failed marriage plot. With both, she "undermines the security of a wedding" (McAleavey, 919) because apparently not every story ends in a jubilant wedding. Thus, she obtains the suspense for the reader who should not be too sure about the ending of the novel. Nevertheless, Bertha's eventual destruction is short and unambiguous with her lying "smashed on the pavement" (*JE* 518). Apparently, her function for the marriage plot is fulfilled, so she does no longer occur in the novel.

Aside from the marriage plot, there are also numerous features of the generic Gothic tale traceable in *Jane Eyre*. Those features do not change Bertha's functions but add to them through their contrasting of the realism in the novel with the existence of "mystery, magic, wonder and monstrosity" (Botting 2). According to Botting, the Gothic plot normally displays two central figures: "a young female heroine and an older male villain" (4). While the young woman is obviously Jane, the villain in Rochester is harder to detect because he is already extremely romanticised through the marriage plot which constructs him as the predestined lover of Jane. However, he matches the description of the Gothic villain who desires body or money of a woman and "gives free reign to cruel, selfish desires and ambitions and violent moods and intentions" (5). This behaviour is most obvious in his treatment of Bertha whom he first marries for her beauty and wealth and then locks away because she does not fulfil his expectations. Nevertheless, he also threatens Jane to do the same to her and wants to attach her to a chain when he has "fairly seized" her (*JE* 324). Moreover, he severely manipulates Jane to trick her into marrying an already taken man.

Another feature of the gothic plot which directly points to the character of Bertha is the presence of one or several monsters in the text which should distinguish "norms and values from deviant and immoral figures and practices" (Botting 8-9). Due to the huge effort the novel makes to dehumanise Bertha, it is apparent that she represents this monster. Additionally, since Gothic responds to the "social and sexual, [but especially] racial, apprehensions of the literate middle and lower middle classes" in England (Malchow 4-5), Bertha's transformation into a monster expresses the imperialist social and political anxieties of the British. Thus, her construction as a white Creole who is mad and violent depicts "the colonial as a disturbing agent" (Paravisini-Gebert 249) who menaces the superior and white couple and needs to be destroyed to set them free. For the plot, this serves to Other Bertha while representing Jane and Rochester as superior, like I already mentioned in the characterisation. Additionally, her

presence as a mad and violent woman aids Rochester to represent himself as a hero instead of a villain which deviates it from the typical Gothic plot. Here, Rochester gets the chance to bravely protect Jane from the monstrous Bertha and to pretend that he only wants the best for his first wife. For example, in chapter 26, he flings Jane behind him when Bertha attacks him (*JE* 353). Later, he displays his alleged good character when he claims that “he would not use cruelty” against Bertha, even though only “cruelty could check” her (369). With that, the novel refers to the Victorian ideology which I mentioned in the chapter three, which implies that English men are not aggressive and would not harm their colonial subordinates.

Jane, on the other hand, is the “remarkably active and resourceful” protagonist as it is typical of Gothic plots (DeLamotte 221). For a Victorian middle-class woman, she travels a lot, takes walks to the town, and wanders through the moors. Hence, she disregards “the Victorian cult of domesticity” for women and the ideal of separated spheres (Dzelzainis 116) which once again makes her seem progressive. However, she returns to the formerly rejected domestic sphere in the end of the novel.

Returning to the introduction of the chapter, the question remains if *Jane Eyre* is truly a love story. Certainly, it fulfils most of the criteria of a marriage plot whose emphasis on an affective marriage should convince the reader of the couple’s love. Moreover, aspects of a Gothic plot indicate that Jane and Rochester are more suitable for one another than Rochester and “the monster”. Nevertheless, a vague feeling remains that the fairy tale ending is odd and exaggerated. Jane’s description of Rochester as “an ugly man” (*JE* 271) and his own discovery that he is “old enough to be [her] father” (158) could stand for unconditional love, but they also make a loving relationship quite unlikely. Additionally, there are Jane’s and Rochester’s different classes in society which create the impression that there must be other reasons for their union. To use Mrs Fairfax words, “gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses” (317). Thus, the love story is probably only an overlay of another, more hidden plot, like the upward mobility that Jane experiences through the novel and which could be a variation of a “rags to riches plot” (Booker 52). Jane’s story then, would not be directed towards marriage but towards permanently ascending into a higher class. This would also explain why she wants to marry an ugly, old man who not only manipulates her throughout the whole novel but also keeps his wife confined in a windowless attic. Bertha would represent a failed try to improve her life in this scenario because even though her family is already wealthy, she once wanted to marry Rochester because of his “good race” (*JE* 367) and hence, aims at moving up the social ladder as well. For this reason, I would agree with Goodwin who claims that “for both women, the novel is also about financial security – as one woman gains – the other loses” (659). Thereby, the whole plot could serve as a metaphor which represents the English exploitation of the colonies, since all money (Bertha’s and Jane’s inheritance from her uncle in Madeira) originate from plantations and possibly from slave trades.

6. Conclusion

My aim for my bachelor thesis was to ascertain how the character of Bertha Mason is constructed in *Jane Eyre* and which functions she fulfils in the novel. For that, I deployed a feminist and a postcolonial approach. Moreover, I analysed Bertha and her influence on several levels, including the narrative discourse, character and plot level.

The first thing I discovered is that an imperialist ideology may not be overtly displayed in *Jane Eyre*, but it still exists. Loyalty to the Empire, patriotism, racism, a belief in the racial superiority of the white English and a resulting conviction in social missions are all facets of imperialism which *Jane Eyre* demonstrates. Those aspects lay the foundation of Othering Bertha because they result in the creation of an enemy image which is represented by non-English and especially non-white people. Additionally, they already show that besides racially Other people, also women as sexually Other people were discriminated in the Victorian period. Both features are fundamental to understand the reasons of Bertha's depiction which is shaped by racism and a deeply patriarchal society.

Adding to that, the narrative situation is a decisive factor in the ambiguous representation of Bertha. The novel constructs Jane as the central figure of the story and does not allow different characters to interrupt her linear development. Even though Jane's narration is not reliable because, as the protagonist, she is too involved in the story to offer a trustworthy rendering of the story, she succeeds in manipulating the readers in a way that her version is widely accepted by them. In order to secure this blind confidence, the novel proceeds in actively silencing Bertha. Due to that, it is assumable that Bertha's character is represented to serve Jane's aims of displaying her love story and growth.

This is visible in the conception of her figure which differs significantly from that of Jane or Rochester as well. Bertha should not arouse an emotional response from the reader but support the novel's protagonists. Thus, she is represented as static, monodimensional and personified rather than individualised. The reader should not identify with Bertha but continue to believe in the love of Jane and Rochester as the superior couple. Bertha's only functions are to create suspense as the Gothic mystery at Thornfield and to increase the superiority of the protagonists by being racially and sexually Othered. However, she is not automatically Other but actively Othered by Jane. The heroine simultaneously characterises her opponent as black, even though her heritage shows that she must be white and uses Bertha's status as a Creole to apply several prejudices against Creoles and black people. The most significant one is Bertha's madness which seems to embrace her whole being and is the main reason why Bertha's confinement is not criticised more severely in the novel. This is reinforced by dehumanising Bertha which Jane does through linking Bertha to dangerous animals and supernatural beings. As a result, Rochester's treatment of his first wife seems to be sufficiently

legitimised which supports the construction of Rochester's allegedly noble character. Moreover, the topic of Creoles serves to depict him as especially manly and heroic when he is contrasted with Bertha's brother Mason who is considered to be deprived because of his origin in the novel.

For Jane, it is similar then she contrasts herself with Bertha in the course of events. The novel draws several parallels between her as a child and the Creole as she is now. At different times of her lives, both are too passionate to meet the strict criteria of femininity and both are, at least in some sense, dehumanised and Othered. Nevertheless, it is conspicuous that Jane is always offered a chance to escape and improve her life whereas Bertha has to accept her fate. Due to that, Bertha becomes the cautionary tale of untamed female desires while Jane serves as a good example of a developing woman who wants to adapt to the wishes of society. Again, this process also aids Rochester to defend his choice because the Victorian society would probably support his wish for an English woman instead of a colonial one.

Eventually, my analysis of the plot revealed that *Jane Eyre* mainly follows the generic marriage plot. The main topic is the progress of Jane who finds her true love in Rochester and whose happy ending is reached through a wedding. Her obstacle is the Othered Bertha who is removed through letting her commit suicide once she is no longer needed for the progress of the story. The marriage plot is supplemented by Gothic elements which particularly serve to represent Bertha as a monster, but which also indicate that Rochester could in fact be a villain. Ultimately, I discovered that the love story, and with it the entire wedding plot, are probably only an overlay for a rags to riches tale which the novel attempts to conceal.

This aspect could also be a starting point for further research. Since most feminist and postcolonial approaches seem to focus on the more obvious plots of marriage and Gothic, it would be interesting to find out about the role of women and especially that of Bertha in a more class-oriented approach. Certainly, this would contribute to an even more elaborate understanding of the "mad woman" and her functions.

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- Jane Eyre*. Created by Cary Fukunaga, performance by Mia Wasikowska (Jane Eyre) and Michael Fassbender (Mr Rochester), Universal Pictures, 2011.
- Jane Eyre*. Created by Franco Zeffirelli, performance by Charlotte Gainsbourg (Jane Eyre) and William Hurt (Mr Rochester), Miramax Films, 1996.

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit von Name (Matr.-Nr.) zum Thema „A Feminist and Postcolonial Approach to Charlotte Brontë’s Novel *Jane Eyre* (1847)“

09.02.2020

Die Verfasserin hat zum Abschluss ihres Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema „A Feminist and Postcolonial Approach to Charlotte Brontë’s Novel *Jane Eyre* (1847)“ vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen sehr gut erfüllt.

Die zielführend strukturierte und in idiomatischen Englisch geschriebene Arbeit überzeugt zum einen durch ihren souveränen Umgang mit einer Vielzahl einschlägiger Fachliteratur, die die Verf. immer wieder deutlich auf deren Leistungen und Grenzen hin befragt (bes. gelungen 15, 25f) und mit Hilfe derer sie ein historisch valides und komplexes eigenes Argument entwickelt. Zum anderen erlaubt ihr ihre ausgezeichnete Kenntnis des Romans eine ausgewogene Quellenarbeit, die ihre Interpretationen auf der Struktur- wie auf der Detailebene nachvollziehbar macht. Obwohl Brontës Roman zu den am häufigsten behandelten Kanontexten der englischen Literatur gehört, gelingt es der Verf. durch die Kombination der beiden gut gewählten Ansätze, dem Text neue Facetten abzugewinnen und bekannte Aspekte neu zu akzentuieren. Sie führt die Leser sehr gut durch ihre Überlegungen, in dem sie die Übergänge zwischen den Kapiteln immer mit einer Zusammenfassung und einer Vorausschau versieht (11, 14f, 19, 27).

Die **Introduction** präsentiert zunächst den Forschungsstand, für dessen Darstellung die Verf. sich angesichts der Materialfülle sinnvoll auf die Figur der Bertha Mason konzentriert und den sie so knapp und zielgerichtet beschreibt, dass sie daraus ihr Anliegen ableiten kann. Sie fällt ihr bei der Sichtung der feministischen und postkolonialen Sekundärliteratur zum Roman auf, dass diese die Implikationen der Erzählsituation nicht beachtet und daher oft zu vereinfachenden Schlüssen kommt. Daran schließt sie ihre komplexe These an, die die Funktion der Nebenfigur Bertha Mason für die beiden Hauptfiguren in den Blick nimmt und diese wiederum in die koloniale Denkungsart des bürgerlichen 19. Jahrhunderts einordnet (2), die sie später zutreffend als rassistisch bezeichnet (11).

Das gut lesbare, weil stringente **Theoriekapitel** definiert die zentralen Begriffe aus beiden Ansätzen, die die Verf. bereits hier auf den Roman bezieht und dessen

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Konstruktion der Bertha Mason als „sexual and racial Other“ (21, 27) die Verf. zurecht besonders interessiert. Für den problematischen Begriff „race“ orientiert sie sich passend an der zeitgenössischen Verwendung, weil diese dem Roman unterliegt (5).

Das **3. Kapitel** „The English vs. The Other“ widmet sich den imperialen Tropen, die den Roman durchziehen und deren Funktionen die Verf. anhand von drei Aspekten diskutiert, die sie einem Aufsatz von Brantlinger entnimmt. Ungewöhnlich für eine Bachelorarbeit gelingt es ihr hier zu zeigen, wie im Roman Ungesagtes dennoch nationalistisch und imperial aufgeladen ist (6ff) und wie sich diese Befunde deuten lassen (11).

Folgerichtig beginnt das **4. Kapitel** in **4.1.** mit der Analyse der Erzählsituation und deren Funktionen für die Konstruktion der Bertha Mason als Gegenpol zur Erzählerin. Die Arbeit bewegt sich durchgehend auf einem sehr hohen Abstraktionsniveau, das sich in der korrekten Verwendung der literaturwissenschaftlichen Begriffe mit besonderer Betonung des Funktionsaspekts zeigt (13ff, auch wenn Bertha mal richtig als „character“ und dann wieder als „figure“ bezeichnet wird). Die Verf. verweist zunächst auf die der Sekundärliteratur entlehnten Beobachtung, dass die Figur der Bertha Mason im Text keine eigene Stimme hat und verfolgt dann im Detail, wie die Ich-Erzählerin ihre Leser zu manipulieren sucht (16, 18, 26). Dann diskutiert die Verf. im Kapitel **4.2.** detailliert die Figurenkonzeption der Bertha Mason anhand der Kriterien aus Pfister (der leider in der Bibliographie fehlt) und der Genrekonventionen des Schauerromans. Das Unterkapitel **4.3.** zur Konstruktion des „Anderen“ belegt die historischen Kenntnisse der Verf. (zu den Kreolen in der kolonialen Karibik, zur den bürgerlichen Frauenrollen im 19. Jahrhundert, zur Konstruktion von Wahnsinn), die sie sowohl aus feministischer wie postkolonialer Sicht erfolgreich auf den Text anwendet. Sie kann die Charakterisierungstechniken und deren Ergebnisse erkennen und überzeugend interpretieren. Immer behält die Verf. die imperiale Verfasstheit Großbritanniens im Blick und verbindet diese Kenntnisse sinnfällig mit den formalen Befunden (25, 30). Auch besticht die Arbeit durch ihre genauen Formulierungen (z.B. 21, 23), die in dieser Art in Abschlussarbeiten selten sind.

Im **5. Kapitel** analysiert die Verf. die Handlungsführung und konzentriert sich dabei auf die Handlung und deren – in unzähligen Filmadaptionen (nicht „adaptions“, 27) immer wieder vermarktete – Liebesgeschichte zwischen der Protagonistin und der männlichen Hauptfigur. Dazu bietet die Figur der Bertha einen Kontrast, mit dem der Roman den imperialen Ängsten seiner potentiellen Leser Ausdruck gibt. Die **Conclusion** fasst die Ergebnisse der Arbeit noch einmal auf hohem Abstraktionsniveau zusammen.

Die vierseitige **Bibliographie** ist beeindruckend umfangreich und belegt, wie intensiv sich die Verf. mit den verschiedenen Aspekten von Theorie, Literaturgeschichte und Interpretation des gewählten Romans befasst hat. Sie enthält nur sehr wenige Fehler, wobei allerdings drei Texte fehlen (Eagleton 12, Pfister 16ff, McAleavey 30).

Die Arbeit ist technisch sehr sauber gestaltet und benutzt das MLA Style Sheet korrekt. Die wenigen sprachlichen Fehler betreffen den Genitiv mit „own“ (13 auch 17, 18, 27, 32), gelegentlich die Verwendung der Präpositionen und die uneinheitliche Schreibung von „G/gothic“. Stilistisch ist der Text

abwechslungsreich und verwendet ein sehr fortgeschrittenes akademisches Englisch, das sich flüssig liest.

Die ausgezeichnete Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,0 (sehr gut)** bewertet.

Prof. Dr. Jana Gohrisch

First supervisor: Prof. Dr. phil. Jana Gohrisch

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Submission date: 10th July 2024

Bachelor Thesis:

A Structuralist Approach to Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604)

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Degree course:

Subjects:

Semester:

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1. Introduction

The dramatic subgenre of tragedy dates back to Ancient Greece, with one of the first attempts at defining the core characteristics of tragedy being made by none other than Aristotle (Cuddon 926). As the genre persisted and changed over time, so did the various efforts at comprising and generalising its multifarious features. How much of a challenging task this truly poses becomes strikingly apparent when examining just how many scholars have sought to find succinct and functional definitions concerning the tragic works of singular dramatists. The so-called Shakespearean tragedy, named after English playwright William Shakespeare, continues to receive much scholarly attention and definitions of this particular approach to the subgenre are still being revised and challenged to this day. A.C. Bradley's claim that Shakespearean tragedy mainly deals with the concept of the "tragic flaw" (Burrow 2) remained highly influential throughout the 20th century (2), with scholars only recently beginning to criticise his somewhat reductive understanding of Shakespearean tragedy. Bradley's tragic flaw, though he never explicitly used the term himself (2), can best be described as originating within the same notion of literary criticism that harps on the ever popular idea of a supposedly universal human experience, distorting the works of many artists and writers "into timeless spiritual narratives" (Ryan 69). It attributes an irremediable error to all tragic protagonists which inevitably seals their tragic fate (Cuddon 933). While "Shakespearean tragedies after Bradley were often treated as dramas of emotion" (Burrow 4) prompting scholars to speak of the plays' moralistic intentions and inescapably doomed narratives (Ryan 68), more recent entries strongly put into question whether such short-sighted views on Shakespeare's tragic works can yield productive results (69). Ryan, for instance, demonstrates a much more grounded reading of Shakespearean tragedy, proposing a general adherence to causality. He maintains that "what happens in these plays results from a specific constellation of conditions and pressures" (72), thus surmounting the vast number of literary critics influenced by Bradley. Clearly, Ryan's propositions do not align with the "ultimate nature of things" (Charlton qtd. in Ryan 68) postulated by scholars like H.B. Charlton as "the fundamental note of tragedy" (68), but instead point towards the plays' "awareness of alternative potential" (Ryan 71). Throughout Shakespeare's various tragedies, paths are set into stone not by some "primary universal law" (Charlton qtd. in Ryan 68) inherent in the subgenre but are gradually and visibly etched into shape by the characters and the choices they make, be they based on sound judgement or deceitful manipulation. As such, Ryan's claims concerning "the plays' power to expose the alterable causes of injustice,

violence, and despair” (71) furthermore draw attention to the possible outcomes and tangible consequences of interactions between individual characters.

One play in particular comes to mind at the mention of deceit, consequence, and a final tragic ending that represents the culmination of all the choices and actions that have come before it, more so than any other. *Othello*, first performed in 1604 (Döring, “KLL Othello” 1), has been analysed innumerable times by scholars with regard to its own distinctive kinds of “injustice, violence, and despair” (Ryan 71), most of which draw from the main character’s precarious social standing as “a black African of sub-Saharan origin” (Mason Vaughan 3) among the upper echelons of 16th century Venetian society. Hence, many interpretative approaches towards understanding the plot of *Othello* make use of more abstract critical concepts like race and gender that mainly draw from the presence of racial and misogynistic prejudice (MacDonald 188) or violence in real societies as opposed to fictional ones (189; Albanese 226). However, such approaches tend to be just as vague and mutable as the concepts they centre themselves around and allow for a vast range of interpretations. For example, the killing of Desdemona by Othello can, according to different literary critics, not only represent the play’s protagonist finally succumbing to the violent racist image other characters have fashioned of him (Adelman 126) but can also be interpreted as Othello fully entering into the gender roles of Venetian society as constructed in the play, rendering this final act of violence that of a Venetian misogynist (Hendricks 204; St. Rose 25). Elements of drama that do not pervade the emotional lives of real people, including the lives of critics, are those that are easily recognisable as fictitious and artificial. These elements include the overall dramatic structure, which is further dictated by differences in subgenre, as well as key features of the script that enable actors to stage the play according to specific instructions, such as the secondary text. Despite the fact that the aspects mentioned above can also be subject to cultural and societal negotiations (Neill 121), I do believe that they offer a more stable and reliable basis with regards to uncovering just how the play’s characters bring forth the conclusion of the final act through their actions and interactions. Detaching myself from notions of “injustice” (Ryan 71) and instead choosing to purely examine those “specific constellation of conditions and pressures” (72), that bring forth a play’s tragic ending, allows me to focus on the structural dimension of the play. While many scholars propose strongly context-oriented approaches to make sense of the various layers of deception woven by the central antagonist, Iago, that culminate in the death of Othello, I intend to opt for a seemingly simpler but nevertheless promising and productive route by

looking at the play as a purely structural exercise that positions and shifts its various characters around until their varying states of knowledge and beliefs all engender the play's tragic end. Consequently, I aim to steer clear of any approaches toward analysing *Othello* that go beyond its structural and generic dimensions. Here, the information characters possess or do not possess or the actions they witness or do not witness can be traced quite clearly and prevent my thesis from falling victim to cloudy speculations about whether a character was motivated by a specific conviction during a specific scene of the play or not.

Moreover, I intend to narrow the aforementioned framework of analysis down even further by establishing another Shakespearean tragedy as my comparative standard. *Othello*, of course, does not stand on its own, entirely independent from its generic predecessors, but instead negotiates its own position within the confines of its generic tradition (Danson 5). As such, the play draws from its surrounding influences and its subgenre plays a significant role in forming the overarching structure of the play, going so far as to partially determine its ending. One of *Othello*'s predecessors can be found among Shakespeare's history plays, which are also described as tragedies in their own right (Döring, "KLL Richard III" 1). *King Richard III* was first performed in 1592 (1), predating *Othello* by approximately a decade. Throughout the play, its protagonist, Richard of York, who simultaneously serves as the primary antagonist, schemes, plots, and murders his way to the throne of England in a manner not unlike that of *Othello*'s Iago (Legatt 34). *Othello*, however, still remains my main focus, with *King Richard III* merely providing an exemplary template of a tragedy that serves as a comparative counterpart. Evidently, both plays adhere to the same basic structure and conform to similar tragic conventions. However, the ways in which they differ from one another may offer deeper insights into just how important the structural make-up of *Othello* is when it comes to effectively establishing the final scenes of the play.

Hence, I contend that the plot progression of Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* (first performed ca. 1604) largely depends on the play's structural framework, especially with regard to the levels of character configuration and character constellation. Moreover, I shall argue that the subgenre of tragedy further enables the functionality of this structural framework, as the play renegotiates its position within the generic tradition of tragedies.

Following the theories and methods section of my thesis, I will first analyse the structural framework of *Othello* in detail by retracing the overall organisation of its plot and by explicitly pointing to impactful changes in character configuration and constellation. My examinations on the level of character constellation will additionally entail the careful

inspection of specific speech acts with regard to their implications and consequences. To maintain the causality and consistency of the play, my analysis omits only very few scenes, seeing as the consequences of Iago's plotting prove to be palpable throughout most of the play. Lastly, I intend to undertake a brief comparison in terms of generic tradition between *Othello* and the tragedy of *King Richard III* with the aim of uncovering how the negotiations of genre present in *Othello* further promote the effectiveness of its structural framework.

2. Theories and Methods

At this point of the introductory chapters to my bachelor's thesis, I wish to once more outline the particularities of my structuralist analysis. This I can achieve easily by providing a suitable definition of structuralism. Stephan Lieske defines the major characteristics of structuralism as follows:

ein Erklärungsmodell, welches die Autonomie von Lit. [sic] in Abgrenzung von der etablierten positivistischen Textanalyse und dem Biographismus ebenso wie von der marxistischen Lit.theorie [sic] postulierte. (722)

Or, alternatively:

[...] die Auffassung vom Kunstwerk als einem autonomen Zeichengebilde, das weder als Ausdruck der Persönlichkeit des Verfassers noch als Abbild einer außerliterar. [sic] Wirklichkeit zu verstehen ist. (722)

These concise definitions clearly demarcate purely structuralist approaches to literary texts from other scholarly approaches, such as context-oriented approaches like Marxist criticism and also from author-oriented approaches like psychoanalysis and biographical criticism and demonstrate exactly which perspectives I aim to avoid and which perspectives I intend to adapt.

In order to maintain the high level of specificity intrinsic to a structuralist approach, I will need to employ a number of helpful terms stemming from the metalanguage of literary theory. Without these terms, dramatic texts as well as other pieces of fictional literature may appear impenetrable and impervious to analysis. As such, these terms will serve as ways into the text that allow me to access its metalevel and, in turn, its structural make-up in a direct and purposeful manner. The first and most important among these terms are those of character configuration and character constellation. Character configuration denotes the set of characters "that is present on stage at any particular point in the course of the play" (Pfister 171) and constitutes the basic structural framework of any play, since characters' entrances and exits constantly engender new scenes and drive the plot forward. The concept of

character constellation is closely tied to that of character configuration, as it depends on the “dynamic structures of interaction” (170) within a play, through which “figures are characterised principally by their positive, neutral, or negative attitudes towards other figures” (170). Whether certain characters are meant to be on stage or not, are able to hear each other or not, are able to interact or not, is determined by “the verbal text segments that are not reproduced on stage in spoken form” (13), also known as the secondary text. In the form of stage directions, these text segments dictate which characters enter or exit the stage at different points in time throughout the play, usually at “the constitution of a new scene” (171), though entrances and exits of singular or characters or small groups of characters are possible within the confines of a single scene.

The plot, another essential element of the analysis of drama, constitutes the very foundation of each and every play, though its shape may vary considerably. Whereas the term story, commonly used in narrative contexts, merely describes the “purely chronologically arranged succession of events and occurrences” (Pfister 197), the descriptor of plot “already contains important structural elements” (197) highlighting the “causality” (197) of the various events that make up the chronology of the story (197). What I, in my thesis statement, call plot progression largely coincides with the general notion of plot. Still, I purposefully chose the slightly more elaborate term to stress the decisive moments that transpire between the events of the story, the plot points, and lead from one event to another. Here, in-between the central occurrences of that constitute the story’s “narrative line” (Bradbury 177), the “element of causality” (Pfister 197) becomes particularly visible. As characters choose between certain pathways, they determine the sequence of events that ultimately defines the outline of the play’s story. How their choices come to be I will then examine on the levels of character configuration, character constellation and also by tracking the various pieces of information characters have access to over the course of the play.

My intentions of tracking the presence, especially the simultaneous presence, of specific characters find their inspiration in an extensive quantitative study conducted by Hartmut Ilsemann using the thoroughly empirical method of “computerized drama analysis” (Ilsemann 11). With the help of a programme known as DRAMALYS, Ilsemann is able to interpret the entirety of Shakespeare’s dramatic works in terms of numbers and diagrams and pays special attention to “the configuration structure of the play” (11), “giving an impressive visual shape to the play’s structure” (11). Without access to DRAMALYS, I, of course, can neither replicate nor define the results of Ilsemann’s research more clearly. Despite this, I am

still able to profit immensely from his work, as it allows me to apply research methods and concepts similar to those extracted from the results provided by DRAMALYS on a smaller, more incremental scale. Drawing from Ilseman's methodology, I aim to underpin my analysis by creating a diagram which will help me keep track of changes in character configuration, while also taking into account the consequences of Iago's deceitful actions (see Fig. 1). The diagram in question illustrates the movement of those characters most essential to the success and eventual failure of Iago's plans over the course of the play, namely Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Emilia as well as Iago himself. In an attempt to visualise the subtle relations between the play's configuration changes and Iago's manipulation strategies, the diagram also provides an overview of the effects of Iago's actions alongside the configuration table. Characters' entrances and exits will only be explicitly marked as such when they pertain to my analysis and when they occur neither at the beginning nor at the end of a scene, but during the scene; characters will otherwise be treated as being either present or absent. Any stage entrances or exits not mentioned in my analysis will be omitted to avoid confusion.

The characters' respective states of knowledge constitute the primary investigative focus of my term paper and I will pay special attention to how they come to be and which changes in character configuration and constellation must be made in orders to engender them. These states of knowledge consist of information the characters have or believe to have about the current situation, the aims and personalities of other characters, as well as their attitudes towards the other characters and may change greatly over the course of the play.

Seeing as my structuralist analysis relies heavily on changes in character configuration and other stage directions, the question of the secondary text's authenticity and reliability inevitably arises. Rightly, Longstaffe mentions that "modern editions often elaborate upon the directions present in early plays and also 'invent' stage directions of their own" (65) with stage directions specifically being "supplied by editors" (Smith, *Cambridge Intro* 58). Despite this, I believe that the secondary text presented in current editions of Shakespeare plays can be viewed as sufficiently authentic, making it an appropriate point of reference throughout my analysis. The reason for this has to do with the fact that character configuration, one of the elements dictated by the secondary text, represents one of the fundamental components of drama, hence allowing for very little variation. Indeed, this cannot be understated with regard to plays such as *Othello* and *King Richard III* which

revolve around plots and intrigues and thus necessitate a straightforward structural framework in which villainous ploys appear not only possible but also believable.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge my somewhat unusual usage of the term speech act. While the term is commonly used in linguistics as part of speech act theory to denote an utterance that seeks to realise a specific intention (Cook 13), my usage partially strips the term of its linguistic implications and transfers it to the realm of literary criticism. I intend to utilise the term to refer to any instance of speech throughout the play that warrants further analysis and cannot be dismissed as a mere utterance without consequence.

3. A Structuralist Analysis of *Othello*

One of the most notable aspects of Shakespeare's play *Othello* is its introductory scene, with many scholars noting its fairly obvious particularity in terms of character configuration: "*Othello* famously begins not with Othello but with Iago" (Adelman 125). From the audience's perspective this means that "we hear of him before we see him on stage" (Dillon 78), which inadvertently prompts audience members to monitor the character of Othello closely over the coming scenes to determine whether Iago's denigrations hold true. But even without the added dimension of audience interaction, Dillon's statement still applies to the fictional perspectives characters have and develop within the context of the play itself. The first scene of the first act of *Othello* places its titular character at a structural disadvantage against the villain Iago whose structural advantage allows him to shape the beliefs other characters hold about Othello in his absence. During this scene as well as during later scenes in the play, Iago's structural advantage lies in the fact that he is able to direct the other characters according to his plans by either providing them with false information or by actively withholding information from them. By explicitly accentuating the presence or absence and occasionally the obfuscation of specific characters, the play continually points towards the importance of character configuration and character constellation, as a brief overview of notable moments throughout the first act will surely demonstrate.

Soon after entering and discussing their respective reasons for resenting Othello, Iago and Roderigo both begin to purposefully rouse the Venetian senator and father of Othello's future wife Desdemona, Brabantio, who then appears at his window (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.1.80.1). It soon becomes clear that Brabantio cannot see the two men on the streets and even though both Roderigo and Iago are speaking to him, he never attempts to uncover Iago's identity after calling out: "Not I, what are you?" (1.1.93). When Roderigo gives his name in

response (1.1.93), Brabantio recognises him but voices no surprise at being met with only one man's reply (1.1.94). Iago, despite there being no special instructions in the stage directions, remains somewhat hidden and avoids direct involvement (Fiorato 67). As a result, Roderigo takes on the role of reference witness in the upcoming trial scene while Iago remains unidentified (67). Even before the said trial scene, Brabantio's questioning of Roderigo, once he has descended onto the street (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.1.157.1), clearly shows that he is completely unaware of Iago's meddling, who, notably, has swiftly exited the stage during Brabantio's brief period of absence (1.1.157). Brabantio rapidly questions Roderigo and addresses only him, using the singular pronouns "thou" (1.1.161) and "you" (1.1.164) to emphasise both Roderigo's involvement and the fact that only he is able to give Brabantio the information he desperately requires. Though the actual character configuration has only now changed, the absence of Iago, who has managed to avoid detection, in combination with the continued presence of Roderigo, rob Brabantio of the ability to make an informed decision based on the circumstances he has found himself in. As a result, he believes Roderigo, a "former suitor" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 9) of his daughter, to be the only source of information available. Despite the fact that he has not been in favour of Roderigo's advances towards Desdemona (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.1.95), Roderigo's previous connection to Desdemona, though unwanted, now lends a certain degree of credibility to his words, since he could very well still be keeping an eye on her, naturally making him privy to information about her relationship to Othello. Roderigo, in a previous speech act, deliberately attempts to reveal his identity to Brabantio, when he covertly invokes their implied past points of contact that lie beyond the scope of the play by asking: "Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?" (1.1.93) Later on, Brabantio confirms the fact that he has now tied the name, voice, and statements made to the earlier knowledge he has of Roderigo as an undesirable suitor, when, after being insulted by the voice of Iago, he says: "This thou shalt answer. *I know thee, Roderigo*" (1.1.117; emphasis added). This change in Brabantio's current state of knowledge not only regarding Othello and Desdemona but also to some degree Roderigo has been carefully orchestrated by Iago, who incites Roderigo to be the first to call out in front of the senator's home (1.1.66). Had Iago been the one to reveal himself in front of Brabantio by name, he not only would have jeopardised his own plans by giving Othello a strong reason to distrust him, but his position as a direct subordinate of Othello could have also potentially undermined the impact of his words, given that Brabantio may be wary of him. Accordingly, Iago cunningly directs the position and presence of characters on stage, prompting an

encounter between only Roderigo and Brabantio, which maintains his structural advantage as the hidden contriver. Iago subtly puts the words he has uttered himself into Roderigo's mouth, merely by leaving him behind as the only character on stage. Over the course of only a number of speech acts and even fewer changes in character configuration, many significant choices have already been made in terms of character constellation, plainly illustrating why *Othello* can fittingly be described as "a tragedy of judgement" (Moschovakis 293). Characters constantly observe and monitor one another and act on the suspicions, motives, and insecurities (293) they have witnessed in other characters, with Iago being especially careful to put himself at a structural advantage at all times by exploiting the knowledge he has gained about others.

The rest of my analysis will transpire in a fashion similar to that found in the previous paragraph. Additionally, I will occasionally refer to my aforementioned diagram in order to provide guidance and promote comprehensibility.

Now that I have established the general pattern of Iago's modus operandi, I can direct my focus towards those characters who are essential to the success of Iago's plan to engender Othello's demise. Some of these characters, like Desdemona, Cassio, as well as Othello himself, need to be kept entirely in the dark about Iago's scheming. They need to remain convinced that Iago is an "honest man" (Muir 20) who is "plain, blunt, outspoken" (20) and above all "incapable of deception" (20), resulting in a positive attitude towards him. Only two characters among the play's entire cast gain a small degree of insight into Iago's duplicitous nature. The "gentleman" (Shakespeare, *Othello* 118) Roderigo, serves as the ensign's henchman and though he seems to be aware of Iago's penchant for deceit (1.1.3), he considers him an ally who will aid him in his pursuit of Desdemona. Iago's wife Emilia on the other hand knows little about her husband's ongoing efforts at ruining Othello and only learns a handful of small details. She is, however, of crucial importance in the theft of Desdemona's handkerchief as well as during the final exposure of Iago's devious plot. Thus, I will examine her involvement during the later stages of my thesis. Roderigo on the other hand becomes a useful tool in Iago's nefarious scheme right from the very beginning of the play. As such, the next subchapters of my thesis will also concern themselves with how exactly Iago is able to gain the trust of Roderigo, someone who already harbours doubts regarding his integrity, and simultaneously maintain the trust of characters like Othello and Desdemona. Despite the fact that I have already examined an excerpt from the first scene of the first act of the play fairly thoroughly, more still remains to be analysed.

3.1 Act 1 Scene 1

Not only is Roderigo Iago's first ally, he is also the first character to speak on stage (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.1.1). His speech act reveals a number of aspects concerning the relationship him and Iago have had up until this point and allows for a glimpse into the affairs implied to have transpired before the events of the play. Roderigo says the following:

RODERIGO. Tush, never, tell me, I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this. (1.1.1-3)

Here, Roderigo reveals a basic sense of distrust towards Iago, who apparently has meddled with his personal finances in a rather dubious manner. He also alludes to the fact that, much to his displeasure, Iago knows something of a particular concern of his – that concern being his continued pursuit of Desdemona as well as her elopement with Othello (Fiorato 64). Considering the central role Roderigo will play only moments later in their rousing of Brabantio, it appears somewhat inconvenient that the first words uttered during his first interaction with Iago should betray such dislike of the other man. In terms of character constellation, the relationship between Roderigo and Iago shifts rather quickly, as Iago reassures him of their mutually shared hatred for Othello (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.1.7), making Roderigo his accomplice. Notably, Iago proclaims in great detail his supposed reasons for despising Othello (1.1.8-38), demonstrating just how committed he is to drawing Roderigo to his side. Additionally, he employs his newly acquired knowledge of Roderigo's interest in Desdemona to further persuade him and paint him as a beneficiary of his plans (1.1.65-70).

The next noteworthy change in character configuration occurs shortly after Roderigo's conversation with Brabantio on the street, when the two men start looking for Othello, accompanied by Brabantio's entourage (1.1.181). Roderigo has now risen to "good Roderigo" (1.1.181) in the eyes of Brabantio, allowing him to aid in the search for Othello and rendering him a reliable source of information and assistance for Iago in various places without their connection being known. Iago, who has already left the area surrounding Brabantio's home, now seeks out Othello to warn him of the trouble he himself has created, granting him another opportunity at reinforcing the general's trust in him.

3.2 Act 1 Scene 2

Having left early, Iago reports to Othello about Brabantio's enraged state (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 23) before any of the senator's men have a chance to find him (Shakespeare,

Othello 1.2.1). Additionally, Iago slyly inserts a supposed physical altercation he involved himself in with the goal of defending Othello's honour into his report (1.2.5). Being able to warn Othello and profess his support of him is essential to proving his loyalty and Iago has cunningly created a chance for himself to do just that. Had he not provoked Brabantio with the help of Roderigo, there would be little reason to warn Othello and thus little opportunity to further gain his trust. Although the conversation between the two men does not allude to it, their shared past and Iago's service under Othello in the military have already been established in the previous scene, with Iago lamenting the fact that Michael Cassio's skills as an "arithmetician" (1.1.18) have gained him the lieutenantcy Iago had coveted (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 9). This indicates that Iago must have at the very least been up for consideration for the role of lieutenant, meaning that Othello likely views him as competent and capable despite his lack of mathematical education. Consequently, I am able to deduce that Iago has fostered a sense of trust in Othello within the military setting their interactions are usually confined to. Now, he aims to solidify Othello's opinion of him as a responsible associate in order to divert all suspicion and increase the influence he holds over his superior. Fittingly, another opportunity for Iago to flaunt his false allegiance presents itself when Brabantio and his men, joined by Roderigo, enter to arrest Othello. As weapons are drawn on both sides (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.2.57.1), Iago immediately singles out Roderigo as his opponent (1.2.58), outwardly displaying a willingness to defend Othello at a moment's notice while putting his physical well-being at risk. In reality, Iago merely faces his partner in crime and any semblance of danger fades as soon as Othello proposes to speak to the duke (1.2.87-91). While the aspects of Iago's seemingly valiant behaviour may only be partially linked to the play's character configuration, they are of substantial significance with regard to character constellation and offer concrete and traceable explanations for the decisions Othello makes over the course of the next couple of scenes.

3.3 Act 1 Scene 3

During the following trial scene, in which Brabantio accuses Othello of having stolen Desdemona from him against her will and nature (1.3.60-5), the events of the play temporarily elude Iago's control, as the trial itself is primarily led by the duke of Venice (1.3.49). Instead of allowing Iago more opportunities at manipulation, the scene serves to introduce the character of Desdemona, who has only been mentioned in the speech acts of other characters until this point in a manner similar to the introduction of Othello by Iago.

Othello orders Iago to find and convoy Desdemona to the duke, insinuating that he is among the few familiar with her whereabouts (1.3.123) and thus a trusted confidant of both Othello and Desdemona. Iago then returns with Desdemona (1.3.170.1; see Fig. 1). By giving her account of her relationship to Othello and revealing herself to have been “half the wooer” (1.3.176), Desdemona “vindicates Othello before the senate” (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 31), while also proving the strength of their mutual bond, even going so far as to endure the rejection of her own father, who remains firmly opposed to their marriage (Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.3.241). When the duke orders Othello to depart for Cyprus that very night to fend off the Turkish fleet that is fast approaching (1.3.277-80), Othello entrusts Iago with the task of escorting Desdemona to Cyprus once Othello himself has left. Othello’s choice of words happens to be particularly insightful:

OTHELLO. So please your grace, my ancient:
 A man he is of honesty and trust.
 To his conveyance I assign my wife,
 [...] (1.3.285-7)

Clearly, Othello holds Iago in high regard and is willing to place Desdemona in his care over the course of the voyage to Cyprus. Based on my previous observations of Iago’s small but significant actions of feigned protectiveness in the presence of Othello, I can safely assume that Iago’s purposefully dutiful conduct has successfully reinforced the basic level of trust already present as part of Othello’s current state of knowledge. After another change in character configuration takes place and the duke, Brabantio, as well as various senators and officers leave the stage (1.3.294.1), Othello once more reiterates his previous statement in front of Iago and Desdemona:

OTHELLO. My life upon her faith. Honest Iago,
 My Desdemona must I leave to thee:
 I prithee, let thy wife attend on her
 And bring them after in the best advantage. (1.3.295-8)

Here, Othello, stressing Iago’s supposed honesty yet again, not only places Desdemona in the hands of his ensign as previously declared, he also emphasises the importance of her person one more time. The first sentence of Othello’s speech act ties directly into a previous comment made by Brabantio before his exit, in which he claims that Desdemona may betray Othello just as readily as she has betrayed her own father (1.3.294). Othello refutes this statement by proclaiming his unwavering faith in Desdemona, thus exposing his current state of devotion to his wife to Iago. At this moment in time, Othello believes both Desdemona as well as Iago to be “incapable of deception” (Muir 20). Yet his opinion of Desdemona is soon

to change under Iago's influence, who by the end of the scene has definitively decided on a way to plunge both Othello and Cassio into misfortune (cf.1.3.395). Notably, Iago bases his decision on the information he has gained throughout the trial and during previous scenes. This becomes particularly evident in his characterisations of Cassio and Othello. Iago describes Cassio, whose character he was briefly able to assess during the previous scene (1.2.49-52; see Fig. 1), as "to be suspected, framed to make women false" (Shakespeare *Othello* 1.3.397) due to his "smooth dispose" (1.3.396) and thus suitable for involvement in his ruse. Conveniently, Othello has revealed to Iago that he "thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (1.3.399) on account of his "free and open nature" (1.3.398). Moreover, Othello's faith in Iago extends to his wife Emilia (1.3.297), granting Iago virtually direct access to Desdemona and the more intimate aspects of the couple's private life, with Emilia serving as her maid.

After Othello and Desdemona exit (1.3.300; see Fig. 1), Roderigo, who remains on stage, begins to contemplate suicide at the thought of Desdemona leaving his reach for good (1.3.306), but Iago swiftly dissuades him, suggesting that Othello's and Desdemona's relationship will not last (1.3.350-2). He, too, reassures Roderigo once more of his hatred of Othello as the motivating factor that binds them and ensures his continued support of Roderigo (1.3.366-8). As a result, Iago retains his henchman, who will now follow him to Cyprus under the impression that he stands to gain something from it. Roderigo then leaves the stage not having learned the specifics of Iago's plan (1.3.380). This pattern of maintaining Roderigo's lack of knowledge persists until his death in act five. Meanwhile, Iago keeps him in a perpetual state of suspension, restricting his autonomy and preventing him from deciding once and for all whether his new ally is to be trusted or not.

3.4 Act 2 Scene 1

During the first scene of the second act the central characters arrive at Cyprus one by one (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 61). The Turkish fleet has conveniently vanished in a storm (61), shifting the play's focus entirely towards the tensions unfolding between the members of its reduced cast of central characters. Before Othello arrives, Cassio exuberantly greets Desdemona in the presence of Roderigo, Iago, and Emilia (Shakespeare, *Othello* 2.1.85). Later on, when all the other characters have left and Roderigo and Iago remain on stage all alone yet again (see Fig. 1), Iago uses this observation to convince Roderigo of the claim that Desdemona is attracted to Cassio (Shakespeare, *Othello* 2.1.212-7), pitting him against

Cassio. Since Cassio will be on guard duty that night (2.1.216), Iago wants Roderigo, whom Cassio does not know and therefore cannot prosecute, to “provoke him” (2.1.271-2) in order to cause the “displanting of Cassio” (2.1.274-5), stripping him of his rank. Again, Iago denies Roderigo insight into the full extent of his scheming, only mentioning his intentions to frame Cassio as a lecher who seeks out Desdemona in secret, when Roderigo has already exited the stage (2.1.304).

3.5 Act 2 Scene 3

Whereas the third scene of the first act largely served to introduce the character of Desdemona, the deception of Michael Cassio by Iago, as announced in the first scene of the second act, now takes centre stage. At the beginning of the scene, Othello confirms the fact that Cassio will be on charge of guard duty (2.3.1) during the festivities mentioned in the previous scene (2.2.9), only for Cassio to point out that the necessary directions will be given to him by Iago (2.3.4) and not by Othello. Given the progression of the play’s plot up until this point, I can reasonably assume that Othello has assigned Iago the task of instructing Cassio or that he at the very least approves of Iago’s involvement, as he considers him “most honest” (2.3.6.). Once again, Othello’s trust in Iago’s person as well as his confidence in his ensign’s abilities, grants Iago the access and resources he needs in order to bring his plan to fruition. As expected, Iago enters the stage only after his superior, Othello, has already left, leaving him undisturbed in his efforts to persuade the reluctant Cassio to join the festivities and partake of the alcohol served there (2.3.26-40). Additionally, Iago appears to have invited a number of “Cyprus gallants” (2.3.28) whose numbers and presence only increase the pressure Iago now exerts upon Cassio. Once the now drunken Cassio has exited the stage, Iago strikes up a conversation with the former governor of Cyprus, Montano, (118) who was among the “Cyprus gallants” (2.3.28). Choosing his words carefully, Iago paints a picture of Cassio as a talented but ultimately irresponsible soldier, which later on justifies his seemingly spontaneous decision to send Roderigo after him (2.3.133) and also influences Montano’s behaviour during the upcoming brawl. When Cassio suddenly enters the stage chasing after Roderigo (2.3.141), Montano is quick to get himself involved, likely due to the fact that Iago’s talk of Cassio’s “vice” (2.1.119) has successfully grown into a negative bias towards the lieutenant in his mind. This grants Roderigo the chance to flee and, at Iago’s command (2.3.153), alert all of Cyprus to the altercation, thus severely damaging Cassio’s reputation (2.3.159). Now that Roderigo has left as well, all that remains for Othello to witness in terms

of character configuration when he enters is his lieutenant, Cassio, physically injuring a high-ranking official of Cyprus. After some back and forth, Othello demands an explanation from Iago, whom he clearly deems to be the most reliable source of information, stressing not only his concerned demeanour (2.3.173) but also the loyalty he believes Iago to have for him (2.3.174). At first, Iago pretends to be in such emotional turmoil that he cannot give a clear answer (2.3.175-183). Feigning hesitancy and devout allegiance to Cassio (2.3.217-218), Iago eventually describes the events of the night and goes so far as to defend Cassio by revealing the presence of “a fellow crying out for help” (2.3.222) who may have insulted him (2.3.241), skirting the edge of partiality towards Cassio throughout his account in a seemingly virtuous manner. Paradoxically, this adds more credibility to Iago’s obnoxiously virtuous performance, with Othello believing that the well-meaning ensign is attempting to mitigate Cassio’s fault in the matter (2.3.243). Just as Othello admonishes Cassio, Desdemona enters, expressing worry for her husband, which due to its ambiguous phrasing could also be understood as an inquiry into Cassio’s unfavourable situation (2.3.247, “What is the matter, dear?”). Though Iago could not have anticipated Desdemona’s arrival with certainty, it still may subtly contribute to the feelings of doubt Othello will soon begin to harbour regarding his wife’s fidelity. Another change in character configuration leaves the distraught and still drunken Cassio and Iago to be the only ones on stage (2.3.255) where Iago promptly sets into motion the next part of his scheme. Almost immediately, he starts to comfort Cassio, whose misfortune he again has caused, specifically by suggesting that Desdemona may be able to mend the newly formed rift between him and Othello (2.3.314). Creating problems for other characters, the solutions to which he claims to possess, constitutes one of Iago’s main strategies which he employs numerous times, all the while remaining undetected by using gaps in the play’s character configuration to catch his victims alone and unable to source outside information. Cassio’s repeated visits to Desdemona are clearly meant to fuel the suspicion Iago is yet to plant in Othello’s mind, though Cassio is entirely unaware of this, having been expertly primed and positioned by Iago. Having adopted the belief that Iago is “honest” (2.3.330) into his state of knowledge, Cassio exits. The next character to enter is Roderigo, whom Iago quickly convinces not to return to Venice (cf. 2.3.365), securing his henchman once more. In the following soliloquy, Iago states his intention to use Emilia’s newly gained access to Desdemona to ensure her contact with Cassio (2.3.378).

3.6 Act 3 Scene 1

As promised, Iago's wife Emilia assures Cassio that "all will sure be well" (3.1.43), while Iago looks for an opportunity to distract Othello under the pretence that it will allow Cassio and Desdemona to be "more free" (3.1.38), being aware of the fact that Cassio would likely feel nervous and ashamed in the presence of Othello, whose opinion and favour he strongly values. To Cassio, it merely seems as though Iago is doing him a courteous favour by actively removing Othello from the conversation. In actuality, Iago aims to prevent an official meeting involving Othello at all costs, as it would seem much less conspicuous and would not be nearly as indicative of a potential affair as a private meeting between Cassio and Desdemona.

3.7 Act 3 Scene 3

During their conversation, Emilia once more encourages Desdemona to help Cassio regain Othello's affection, stating that the current situation "grieves" (3.3.3) Iago as though "the cause were his" (3.3.4), covertly asking for her husband's worries to be soothed as well and affecting Desdemona's attitude towards him positively (3.3.5). From this small snippet of Iago's and Emilia's domestic life, which is almost entirely invisible throughout the play, I can infer that Iago likely feigns dejection at home, the root of which he claims to be his admiration for Cassio, convincing Emilia to aid him in the process.

Othello and Iago enter at the same time, abruptly disturbing the conversation between Cassio and Desdemona (3.3.28.1). Desdemona has only just agreed to passionately support Cassio's cause to the best of her abilities (3.3.20), decidedly marking their current position in terms of character constellation as a "friendship" (3.3.21). Having entered the stage only moments later, Othello has not heard any of these lines of dialogue and has no other options to gather information from but Iago, who is quick to react to Cassio's abrupt departure (3.3.34; see Fig. 1). Iago swiftly and effectively reframes the behaviour of the merely anxious Cassio (3.3.32) by voicing a simple and particularly vague comment suggesting that his secretive demeanour does not sit right with him (3.3.34). The ambiguity of Iago's "Ha, I like not that" (3.3.34) coupled with his refusal to provide further insight into his implied but fabricated thought process behind the statement (3.3.36) leaves Othello to do most of the speculative work. With Iago remaining intentionally quiet and withholding the identity of the mysterious man (3.3.36), Othello is the one who inevitably inserts Cassio into the conversation (3.3.37), only to have his assumption confirmed almost immediately by none other than Desdemona (3.3.45). She, after all, has no reason to hide the fact that Cassio seeks

to be in the good graces of Othello once more. By positioning the other characters in very specific ways and by structuring the surrounding conversations in a very particular manner, Iago has not only prevented an upfront and inconspicuous encounter between Othello and Cassio, but has also managed to install the exceedingly subtle suggestion of a secret alliance of some sort between Cassio and Desdemona in Othello's current state of knowledge. With Othello almost needing to insist on the fact, that the man they saw "steal away so guilty-like" (3.3.39) was his former lieutenant, Iago has cleverly coaxed Othello into implicating Cassio himself, rendering him much susceptible to Iago's lies. Desdemona naturally keeps the promise she has made and intensely commits herself to arranging an interview with Othello for Cassio (3.3.60). Cunningly, Iago takes advantage of the situation once Desdemona and Emilia have gone elsewhere (3.3.89.1; see Fig. 1). Now that all the individual parts of his meticulously crafted web of manipulation have been aligned accordingly, Iago can finally allow his plan to come into full fruition. Having denied certain characters specific pieces of information and having provided them with false ones at different times via various means, Iago has successfully set the plot's trajectory for the remainder of the play. Under the guise of both concern and reluctance, Iago questions Othello about Cassio's past conduct around Desdemona (Shakespeare *Othello* 3.3.94), gradually indicating that Cassio "may not be honourable, all the while insinuating that he, Iago, knows more than he is willing to say" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 119). Eventually, Iago partially releases the tension building up inside Othello with every vague allusion of his by disclosing a singular concrete statement: "Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio" (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.200). Surrounding this statement are ominous warnings of jealousy (3.3.201), deception (3.3.209), and fickleness (3.3.210), clearly outlining those acts of adultery and cuckoldry Iago aims to conjure up by the power of suggestion. He coerces Othello into following his ostensible thought process yet again, thus forcing him to subconsciously adopt it. Notably, Iago explicitly refers to Desdemona's betrayal of her father Brabantio (3.3.209) as proof of her perfidiousness, echoing the first act of the play. A potentially reprehensible character trait of Desdemona's, which Othello had firmly rejected previously, now gains an inkling of legitimacy coming from the mouth of "honest Iago" (1.3.295) instead of Brabantio.

Examining the manipulation of Othello more closely, I am able to determine some structural similarities that link this scene to the rousing and enraging of Brabantio. As with Brabantio, Iago uses Othello's growing doubts to convince him of Desdemona's infidelity. Whereas Brabantio's apprehension towards Othello needs little encouragement from Iago,

given how readily he responds to his provocation, Othello's distrust of Desdemona has to be established carefully and quickly and necessitates a lot of groundwork, all of which Iago prepares with the help of Roderigo. With Cassio having been successfully set on the path of pursuing Othello's favour, on which he is aided by Desdemona, all Iago needs to do now is to intensify and escalate the current situation to precipitate Othello's tragic demise.

Contributing to the sheer eventfulness (see Fig. 1) of the third act even further, Desdemona drops the handkerchief she received as a keepsake from Othello (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.291.1). The handkerchief's "symbolic status is underlined from the moment of its loss" (Dillon 80), thus alluding to its importance as "the object above all others that will convince Othello to believe Iago's lies" (81). Conveniently, Emilia promptly garners it up to present it to Iago, who has been pestering her for it for some time (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.296). Not allowing Emilia to listen in on his following monologue, Iago sends her away and ponders his intention of placing the handkerchief inside Cassio's place of accommodation for him to find (3.3.324-5).

During his next meeting alone with Othello, the effects of Iago's mind games become glaringly apparent, as Othello, already "tormented by jealousy, threatens Iago with death unless he provides proof of Desdemona's infidelity" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 119). More specifically, Othello demands "ocular proof" (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.363), a first taste of which Iago provides by shamelessly lying about having observed "Cassio wipe his beard with" (3.3.440) the embroidered handkerchief. On top of that, Iago fabricates a tale of a sleep-talking Cassio, whose half-conscious mutterings allegedly betray his sexual involvement with Desdemona (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 119). Consequently, Othello completely succumbs to Iago's influence and "vows to kill Desdemona" (119) while "Iago agrees to kill Cassio" (119), reinforcing Othello's utterly disorientated decision-making. Finally, Othello "appoints Iago to the lieutenancy" (119), proving that he must have considered him to some extent before appointing Cassio.

With the basic groundwork laid out completely and Othello fully enthralled in Iago's carefully crafted illusion of Desdemona's infidelity, that is largely based on situational ambiguity, suggestion, and the deliberate isolation of Othello from Desdemona and Cassio (see Fig. 1), little work remains to be done on the part of Iago. From here on out, Iago has prolifically established the progression of the play's plot, rendering the fourth and fifth act of the play a mere summary of the aftermath of his wily scheming.

3.8 Act 3 Scene 4

Unnerved by Iago's false tales, Othello seeks out Desdemona. In line with her previous assessment of her husband as being above all sentiments of jealousy (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.4.30-1), Desdemona, sensing no ill will and suspecting nothing out of the ordinary, resumes her efforts at redeeming Cassio (3.4.50), fuelling Othello's paranoid state. When Desdemona "cannot produce" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 153) the handkerchief at Othello's request, Othello flies into a rage which is only worsened by Desdemona's repeated demands for Cassio's reinstatement (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.4.94). Cursing, Othello storms off stage (3.4.99) and Iago enters shortly thereafter, followed by Cassio (see Fig. 1). Desdemona describes Othello's unusual behaviour to them, which she can only ascribe to some affair "of state" (Shakespeare *Othello* 3.4.141), leaving "no doubt as to her moral integrity" (Wells 64). Unsurprisingly, Iago graciously offers to find Othello (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.4.139). After Desdemona and Emilia have left, the prostitute Bianca (118), appears for the very first time with Cassio handing her the handkerchief (3.4.180).

During this scene, Iago also benefits strongly from Desdemona lacking awareness with regard to Othello's wariness. According to her state of knowledge, nothing has changed between Othello and Cassio aside from Othello's initial disappointment in his lieutenant. Clearly, Iago has taken great pains to isolate Desdemona from Othello, not allowing any exchange of information to take place between the two without his supervision or the lingering presence of his influence (see Fig. 1). He now reaps the fruits of his labour, as Desdemona's ingenuous behaviour only leads her to appear increasingly wanton and audacious in the eyes of Othello. Arguably, Desdemona has experienced the least amount of direct manipulation from Iago and yet has still been robbed of her agency, due to her severe structural disadvantage as well as the resulting acute lack of knowledge. This shows that Desdemona's proximity to Othello would prove exceptionally dangerous to the early stages of Iago's plans, as she would be able to relay the reality of the situation to her husband effortlessly, perhaps rekindling Othello's trust. Now that the seeds of doubt have been successfully planted, however, reducing Desdemona's presence is no longer necessary. On the contrary, her increased presence during the final scenes of the play only contributes to her demise.

3.9 Act 4 Scene 1

The following scene once again exemplifies Iago's ability to skilfully manipulate a given situation to trick certain characters, in this case Othello, into believing that a particular sequence of events is authentically unfolding in front of them. Partially recreating his actions from the scene in front of Brabantio's home, Iago intends for Othello to witness the illusion of a salacious conversation between him and Cassio about Cassio's supposed sexual encounters with Desdemona (4.1.85). Like with Brabantio, Iago must rob Othello of one of his senses in order to conceal Bianca as the real subject matter of their talk. Regarding the level of character configuration, this again requires a change in configuration on a smaller scale. Whereas Iago previously kept himself hidden from view, Othello's view of the events now becomes crucial while his hearing must be restricted, prompting Iago to instruct him in the following manner:

IAGO. [...] Do but encave yourself
 And mark the fleers, the gibes and notable scorns
 That dwell in every region of his face;
 [...] I say, but mark his gesture; marry, patience,
 [...] (4.1.85-8)

As when Iago had subtly persuaded Othello to follow his feigned thought process in the third scene of the third act, he now gives him a clear task to follow. Again, he forces Othello to see only his skewed design of the situation by providing him with an interpretative template based around Cassio's body language. Not only does Iago use the general structural devices of dramatic plays to his advantage, he also frequently employs structurally based strategies of manipulation.

By talking to Cassio about his relationship with Bianca (4.1.108), Iago quickly elicits "smiles, gestures and light behaviour" (4.1.103) from him, which Othello in his jealous state misconstrues as definitive proof of Desdemona's infidelity.

The scene culminates in the arrival of Bianca, who angrily returns the handkerchief to Cassio (4.1.153), finally presenting Othello with the aforementioned "ocular proof" (3.3.363) he clamoured for previously. Othello's insistence on a clearly visible piece of evidence is rooted in the "conventional notion that what one sees constitutes infallible knowledge that, in turn, serves as the basis for accurate interpretation" (I. Smith 407-8). Iago turns this generally reliable concept on its head by devising an utterly fabricated situation in which Bianca's certainty that the handkerchief must be "some minx's token" (Shakespeare, *Othello* 4.1.174) frames the handkerchief in a manner strongly conducive to Iago's plot against Othello. Having had his sense of hearing betrayed already, Othello can now no longer

trust his own sight, let alone his assumptions and conclusions, all due to Iago's painstakingly precise and entirely believable staging of false events. This clearly places him at a catastrophic structural disadvantage, rendering him unable to make informed decisions. The final act of presenting the embroidered handkerchief alongside every small hint and clue given by Iago thus constitutes the complete decimation of Othello's capability for reason and rationality. Here, the various causes for Othello's descent from reluctant doubtfulness to extreme conviction can clearly be traced back to different actions taken by Iago, eliminating the need for speculations based around racial stereotypes, gendered hierarchies, or deep-seated flaws of an ambiguous nature.

3.10 Act 4 Scene 2

Accordingly, Othello first interrogates Emilia and then Desdemona (see Fig. 1), who can no longer convince him of her innocence, even when Othello finally reveals to her that the cause of his anger lies in his belief that Desdemona has cuckolded him (Shakespeare, *Othello* 4.2.82). With Iago's influence weighing heavily on him, he then exits the stage before Desdemona can make any further attempts at defending herself (4.2.96), isolating him from the reliable information Desdemona could have provided him with (see Fig. 1). Though Iago's involvement is clearly no longer needed with regard to setting Othello on his path, his first and final opportunity at directly manipulating Desdemona arises, when she asks Emilia to bring in her husband (Shakespeare, *Othello* 4.2.108). Iago pretends to be surprised and shocked while Emilia and Desdemona recount the accusations and insults directed at Desdemona by Othello (4.2.124). Thus, Iago maintains the image of Othello's reasonable and composed ensign and advisor in front of Desdemona, who seeks his advice (4.2.151) precisely because she believes him to be an honest and close acquaintance of Othello's, whose opinions hold indisputable value. Seeing as Desdemona and Iago share few interactions, her knowledge of him must largely be based on events that precede the plot of the play as well as Othello's own accounts of Iago's honesty, as uttered in the third scene of act two (see Fig. 1). Again, Iago profits from the reputation he has created for himself. By reassuring Desdemona (Shakespeare, *Othello* 4.2.167) and advising her to remain inside, as "all things shall be well" (4.2.173), Iago knowingly seals her fate, a fate not determined by some transcendental power inherent in the subgenre of tragedy but a fate brought about by the easily retraceable actions of the play's antagonist.

Shortly afterwards, Roderigo confronts Iago one last time, feeling cheated of the chance at wooing Desdemona that Iago had promised him (4.2.175). But despite his realisation that Iago has been leading him on in order to achieve his own goals more easily, Roderigo falls yet again for Iago's lies and false promises (4.2.217) and ultimately agrees to aid in what he believes to be the killing of Cassio (4.2.245) in hopes of being granted another opportunity to court Desdemona (4.2.226-7).

3.11 Act 4 Scene 3

Feeling reassured by Iago's earlier assessment of the situation, Desdemona agrees to "go to bed and dismiss Emilia" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 213) at Othello's command, rendering her defenceless in her final moments.

3.12 Act 5 Scene 1

In order to fool Othello into believing that Iago has killed Cassio, Iago instead sends out Roderigo, who attacks Cassio but is wounded in the process (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.1.26), while Iago only stabs the former lieutenant in the leg without being detected (5.1.27). Cassio's outcry alerts Othello (5.1.28), who, this time unable to see the events unfolding on the street, thinks that Iago has fulfilled his part of their pact and "departs to murder Desdemona" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 225). Meanwhile, Iago prevents any disturbances to Othello's grizzly deed by swiftly dispatching of his only confidant Roderigo (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.1.61.1), framing him and Bianca for the attempt at Cassio's life, thus distracting the noble Venetians and officials of Cyprus, while Othello unerringly strides towards his doom. In his final and fatal speech act during this scene, Iago instructs Emilia to inform Othello and Desdemona of Cassio's peril (5.1.127), despite the fact that she is the only character left to possess an, albeit small, amount of inside knowledge concerning Iago's deceptive tampering. Why Iago sends out Emilia, who has stolen Desdemona's handkerchief for him, to the scene of her mistress's murder, where she ultimately exposes his machinations, remains unclear for now. While scholars of gender studies would likely propose that Iago's tendency to underestimate Emilia can be ascribed to his misogynistic view of women as a result of his socialisation in patriarchal Venice (St. Rose 25) and scholars dedicated to the field of psychoanalysis may see Iago's "hubris" (Sadowski 256) at fault, such speculations have no place in my structuralist analysis in the same way that presumptions about Iago's motives yield no productive results with regard to my approach. What matters to me at this stage is

the sheer fact that Emilia possesses a state of knowledge that proves to be calamitous to Iago's web of lies and manipulations, ultimately leading to its collapse. A reason for Iago's arguably uncharacteristic decision that proves to be much more compatible with my structuralist approach arises during the following scene.

3.13 Act 5 Scene 2

The final scene of *Othello* begins in the bedchamber of Othello and Desdemona, from which Emilia has been dismissed owing to Iago's influence on Desdemona, leaving Desdemona all alone with her husband (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.2.22-3), who has been so utterly convinced of her sexual entanglement with Cassio that none of her pleas can save her. Iago has altered Othello's perception of Desdemona, which is rooted in his state of knowledge, to such an extent that even reasonable objections cannot penetrate his killing intent. Desdemona's tears, and her insistence to speak to Cassio in order to resolve Othello's misconceptions about them only appear to him as proof of their liaison (5.2.76) and he smothers her to death (5.2.83). Promptly, Emilia, intending to notify Othello of Cassio's injury (5.1.127), enters the bedchamber and discovers the corpse of Desdemona alongside the culprit Othello (5.2.105). Othello confidently points to "honest, honest Iago" (5.2.150) as his ally and primary informant in the matter, only for Emilia to reveal a piece of information that only she is privy to and has now been granted the opportunity to divulge: Iago "lies to th' heart" (5.2.152) and is anything but honest. When Emilia cries out in order to alert the other characters to the murder of Desdemona, Iago has little choice but to appear at the scene of the crime himself alongside two noble Venetians (5.2.165), having involved himself in the investigation surrounding the injured Cassio. Emilia will not heed his commands to be quiet (5.2.180) and "Iago, under pressure, admits accusing Desdemona" (Mowat et al., *Folger Othello* 237). Before Iago can kill her in his final attempt to silence her, Emilia unveils the truth about the handkerchief she had stolen (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.2.224), completely reversing the effects of Iago's manipulation and revealing everything Othello believed about Desdemona and Cassio to be false, leading to his suicide (5.2.354). Having witnessed the occurrences, Montano and Gratiano, the two noble Venetians, apprehend Iago to have him slowly tortured to death (5.2.332) and appoint Cassio as the new governor of Cyprus (5.2.330) resulting in the play's abrupt ending.

The actions of the character of Emilia during this scene clearly warrant closer examination, as she partially thwarts the plans of her husband, whose disingenuous

personality she is evidently aware of to some extent. Though perhaps unknowingly, Emilia mirrors the behaviour of Iago by withholding from him the fact that she knows him to be a liar and that she suspects his unusual interest in the handkerchief to be of questionable nature. Therefore, Iago has no other option but to trust his current state of knowledge of Emilia as completely innocuous and entirely clueless. For the very first time and also the last time, Iago finds himself misled by his own inability to reach an informed decision, having been deceived by another character. Despite the fact that Iago has repeatedly dismissed Emilia when outlining the details of his plans, he has provided her with enough information to draw her own conclusions at Othello's mention of the handkerchief. A look at my diagram shows that up until this point both Iago and Cassio have only referred to Iago as an honest man in Emilia's absence (see Fig. 1), denying her the ability to shed light on her husband's proclivity for deceit. Emilia's presence during Othello's characterisation of Iago prompts her to turn Iago's strategies against him, toppling his elaborate schemes in only a few devastating speech acts.

4. A Structuralist Approach to Drama and the Subgenre of Tragedy

Despite the fact that the seemingly solid and reliable structural framework I have chosen allows me to avoid the ambiguities of racism, gender, and notions of morality, it cannot enforce total genre compliance, as genres tend to be "an inherently elusive subject" (Danson 2). According to Danson, "genres exist precisely as the history of their own subversions and revisions" (5), rendering even an ostensibly conclusive structuralist definition nigh impossible or at least rigid to the point of impracticality. Shakespearean tragedies negotiate among themselves the "affinity with" (5) or "distance from" (5) one another, "endlessly invoking and endlessly complicating the genres they simultaneously inherit and make" (7). As I see it, the only way to productively work with dramas and tragedies in a structuralist manner despite these circumstances is to acknowledge their fluidity fully. Accordingly, I have chosen a comparative methodology on top of my structuralist analysis. With both plays, *Othello* and *King Richard III*, having been written almost a decade apart, the aforementioned generic negotiations between the two must surely be visible. My mutable conception of tragedy as such currently allows for no comprehensive definition of the subgenre and appears most fruitful only in the highly specific comparative context of two Shakespearean plays, but its specificity nevertheless prevents the unnecessary ambiguity inherent in philosophical and affective approaches towards the subgenre (4). Regardless, I can determine a small but

deliberate number of general points of reference that clearly connect the plays according to a sufficiently tragic structural framework and will aid me during my comparison. Tragedies can very briefly be described as ending “usually with the death of one or more of their central characters” (Wells 1). The aforementioned central characters of a tragedy typically belong to a “social elite” (Longstaffe 66), thus the final act of a tragedy is commonly concerned with “the death (and, more importantly, the downfall) of someone of high social status” (66). Working with a deliberately reduced subset of easily comparable characteristics like these prohibits me from trapping my analysis within the rigid framework of a definition potentially written with a completely different purpose in mind, instead allowing me to freely observe the fluidity and “stylistic experimentation” (Neill 123) at play.

4.1 Comparing *Othello* and *King Richard III*

Having laid bare the play’s structural framework with regard to character configuration and character constellation, all that is left for me to do is to examine the generic conventions the tragedy of *Othello* rests upon. This undertaking requires a loose comparative frame of reference, easily achieved by juxtaposing *Othello* and one of its predecessors, *King Richard III*. Both plays revolve around the nefarious intrigues of their central villainous characters, which ultimately lead to the death of various other side characters as well to the deaths of the villains themselves (Longstaffe 67). By drawing attention to the tragic elements that constitute the overall plot of *King Richard III*, I hope to establish a productive basis for comparison, which I can then use to demonstrate the importance of *Othello*’s structural framework based on character configuration and constellation.

The tragedy of *King Richard III* also features the rise of its central villain to a higher position of social standing – Richard obtains the crown of England (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 3.7.239), while Iago receives the title of lieutenant (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.4.481) – as well as his eventual “downfall” (Longstaffe 66) – Richard is killed during battle (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 5.5.02) and Iago is sentenced to death by torture (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.1.332) – rendering their immense toils and misdeeds utterly futile. At the same time, both plays also feature the demise and deception of other characters already belonging to a “social elite” (Longstaffe 66), encompassing members of the court on one side and high-ranking military men and a single senator’s daughter on the other. As such, the two plays meet the previously outlined most basic criteria constituting a tragic plot. Additionally, both Richard and Iago rely on somewhat loyal henchmen, Roderigo and Lord Buckingham, whom they kill as soon as

their allegiance begins to waver (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 5.1.0.1; Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.1.61.1). Moreover, they feign personality traits “at odds with their true selves” (Womack 282) in order to exude an air of candour and veracity that allows them to take advantage of the other characters, though Iago maintains his false image more thoroughly than Richard does. The aspects listed above already establish a high degree of comparability between the two plays based on their commonalities. However, they also differ from one another in some aspects, which strongly accentuate the heightened causality of *Othello*’s plot that results from its reliance on the constant shifts in character configuration and constellation. Regarding each villain’s modus operandi, there is a key difference as to their preferred procedures. Whereas Iago relies heavily on essentially self-sufficient manipulation tactics that firmly set characters like Othello and Cassio on the trajectory Iago has conceived for them, Richard achieves his personal goals primarily via violent means and rarely invests in elaborate and extensive manipulative strategies. I will expound some of the aforementioned comparative aspects in greater detail in the following chapters, paying special attention to the ways in which the plays negotiate their relation to genre.

4.2 Rise and Downfall; Murder and Manipulation

The tragedy of *King Richard III* opens with a long monological speech (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 1.1.1-41) from the eponymous character who serves as both the protagonist as well as the primary antagonist of the play. While he is alone on stage (1.1.0.1), Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, lays out his insidious plans and declares his intent to obtain the crown of England. He begins his rise to the throne with the denigration (1.1.35-40) and subsequent murder of his brother Clarence (1.4.268). Many more murders (Mowat et al., *Folger Richard III* 157) occur alongside false accusations of illegitimacy (169) and staged “uprisings” (169) until Richard finally attains “kingship” (179). Arrests, imprisonment, and yet again more bloodshed maintain King Richard’s rule for a while until he is killed in battle by his rival Richmond during the final act of the play (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 5.5.02), ending his reign and passing the crown onto Richmond (5.5.4). Richard’s rise to the position he desires occurs in a large courtly setting (1.1.3), with many of his victims lacking detailed introductions. As a result, the individual causal relations between the play’s gory plot points are far less visible than they are in *Othello*, hence placing less emphasis on structural elements such as character configuration and constellation. When Richard has the sons of the previous king, Edward IV, killed, this deed does not require the levels of complex preparation Iago employs and can

easily transpire off-stage (4.3.1), almost in isolation from the rest of the plot, without disrupting the overall organisation of the play. By contrast, the various entanglements and intrigues leading up to Othello's suicide and the attempted murder of Michael Cassio are clearly visible throughout *Othello*, forming distinct causal foundations that reveal precisely why and how these events unfold in the way they do.

Similarly to Richard, Iago's rise to the rank of lieutenant ends with the triumph of his initial rival Cassio who becomes the next governor of Cyprus, culminating in the implied death of Iago (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.2.330-2). While Richard achieves his aims using primarily violent means, with his short forays into manipulation usually ending in murder regardless, as in the case of his brother Clarence or his first wife Lady Anne (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 4.3.39), Iago acts in a manner quite opposite to that of Richard. Throughout most of the play, Iago's modus operandi largely relies on continued long-term manipulation and only results in death towards the final scenes of the play, when the stakes are high and Iago's control over the situation begins to slip (Shakespeare, *Othello* 5.2.191). Whereas Richard abuses the authority his position among the social elite entails and exploits the rigid hierarchical structure of courtly society for his benefit (Ornstein 71), Iago juggles various states of knowledge and information on a much more personal level. This strategy based around influencing the other characters around him, not by means of issuing orders but by merely suggesting specific courses of action and by isolating characters from one another, renders each stage entrance as well as each stage exit a meaningful component of the plot. In *King Richard III* these structural changes occur as well and serve specific functions, but the play does not deliberately point to them as essential components of its plot progression. When Richard and Buckingham, for instance, "stage a scene of Richard's great piety" (Mowat et al., *Folger Richard III* 179), convincing the London officials to practically force the crown on Richard (179), their actions stand without precedent and do not stem from a number of small, carefully calculated steps leading towards Richard's acceptance of the crown. But when Iago feigns reluctance in front of the anxious Othello and Othello believes his behaviour to be genuine (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.94), this scene draws on the many previous interactions, some of which merely implied, between the two characters, highlighting the reasoning behind Othello's opinion of Iago.

4.3 Generic Negotiations

With regard to my thesis statement, the most notable differences between the two plays by far lie not only in the varying importance of the plays structural elements but also in the final results these elements engender, i.e. the play's respective endings. As mentioned previously, both Richard and Iago succumb to their rivals, though Iago technically succeeds in eviscerating the life of his second rival, Othello, to the point of provoking his suicide. The ways in which these villains fall, however, differ significantly with regard to a certain aspect. Before their climactic battle, "Richard and Richmond are both visited by the ghosts of those whom Richard has killed" (Mowat et al., *Folger Richard III* 273) and while the ghosts "cheer Richmond" (273), they in turn "curse Richard" (273), introducing an unprecedented supernatural component as the catalyst for Richard's eventual downfall. Iago, on the other hand, faces no such unearthly threat, being brought down instead by the potent state of knowledge of his wife Emilia, who defeats him by reversing his own strategies and turning them against him. Up until this point, the plots of both plays have transpired in a fairly similar manner, centring themselves around their respective antagonist who "plots the course of the dramatic action" (Ornstein 63). *King Richard III* now takes an abrupt turn, departing from the logical scaffolding that supported the vast majority of its central plot points, and presents "vindictive ghosts" (Neill 122) as the resolution to Richard's corrupt, though otherwise unerring and continuously successful ways, thus breaking the internal consistency of the play to ensure his defeat. Consequently, this sudden vengeful intervention from the spirit realm leads the play to partially resemble the perception of tragedy postulated by Bradley and Charlton as being determined by the imposing force of a tragic "ultimate nature of things" (Charlton qtd. in Ryan 68). It appears as though Richard's reign is forcefully, perhaps even unfairly, interrupted by an "overdetermined logic" (Smith, "Character in Shakespearean Tragedy" 93) it would have otherwise defied (Ornstein 62). By contrast, Iago's defeat remains entirely consistent with the previously established patterns of *Othello* and no outside force is needed to thwart his plans, affirming the effectiveness of the play's structural framework. Clearly, the metatextual function of the subgenre of tragedy has changed to some degree between the two plays, warranting a closer look at just how these tragedies define themselves in opposition to one another.

Modifying a claim made by Emma Smith that frames the character of Iago as "a dramatic device" (Smith, "Character in Shakespearean Tragedy" 94) that serves "to make visible the defining primacy of genre over characterisation" (94) and thus "manipulates and

distorts character” (94) to enforce the overall adherence of *Othello*’s plot to the basic conventions of tragedy, I argue that Iago’s presence instead serves to emphasise the productive interplay between structure and subgenre. Whereas in *King Richard III*, the subgenre of tragedy appears to be somewhat divorced from the plot, reining in its steady progression in a jarring manner to forcibly wrestle its villain to the ground, in *Othello* it merely contributes to the functionality of the play’s structural framework. The web of lies and manipulation Iago has woven throughout the play soon develops a level of self-sufficiency, as shown in my analysis, with Iago merely needing to monitor the level of character configuration more closely to ensure the isolation of specific characters. The generic conventions of tragedy serve only as waypoints in an otherwise flexible framework, with the central characters’ deaths clustering around the final scenes. As a result, no abrupt interruptions are necessary, as the tragic form arises smoothly from the play’s plot progression, propelled forward by meaningful changes in character constellation and configuration. The structural make-up of the plot and the supporting framework of tragedy are linked so efficiently that they even allow for playful instances of genre fluidity at the beginning of the play (Smith, “Character in Shakespearean Tragedy” 93), drawing attention to the play’s immense structural “awareness” (Ryan 71). The tragic form of *King Richard III* on the other hand matches Smith’s notion of the “primacy of genre” (Smith, “Character in Shakespearean Tragedy” 94) much more strongly and even echoes the assumptions of Bradley and Charlton to some extent. The primary reason for this lies not only in the continual development of tragic form, but also in the play’s artistic rendition of “the late medieval English past” (Hoenselaars 139). As both a tragedy and a history play, *King Richard III* ultimately seeks to contribute to the historically grounded artistic rendition of “successive monarchs” (139) and “their attempts to secure their position” (139), which playwrights then shaped “into the form most obviously associated with tragedy” (Wells 3), potentially leading to structural inconsistencies (Ornstein 3). Notably, these structural inconsistencies find their root not in the supposed “ultimate nature” (Charlton qtd. in Ryan 68) of tragedy but in their historical models, with the subgenre once more serving as a vehicle that allows playwrights to adjust historical material in favour of dramatic effect (Chernaik 12).

Summing up, the generic negotiations present between *Othello* and *King Richard III* largely revolve around the structural integration of the subgenre into the plot progression of each play. As proposed by Ryan, the tragedy of *Othello* deliberately highlights causality and

consequence (72), thus demystifying the subgenre and incorporating it fully into its structure. *King Richard III* appears to follow a similar trajectory at first, with Richard laying out as well as executing his plans according to a recurring pattern, only to suddenly be defeated by the ghostly manifestation of his crimes, resembling an almost divine intervention (Chernaik 68) rooted in the play's historical background. With the plot of *Othello* being entirely fictional, Iago can be seen as the more cunning and subtle version of Richard, fully realised beyond the restrictions of past historical events and hence able to unite structure and genre in a much more cohesive and tangible manner.

5. Conclusion: A Structuralist Reading of *Othello* as a Tragedy

Deliberately emphasising its awareness of dramatic structure consisting of character configuration and constellation, the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* rests on an intricately woven foundation of causality and consequence. The presence and modus operandi of its central villain, Iago, highlight just how strongly the play's plot progression depends on the choices of its characters, which are heavily influenced by their respective states of knowledge, that, in turn, result from Iago's manipulation of the basic structural elements of the play. The fact that the plot of *Othello* constantly revolves around and refers to its own structural configurations becomes even more apparent and impactful when Iago's plans collapse due to his wife Emilia using her structural advantage against him during the final act. Additionally, the play, unlike its comparative counterpart *King Richard III*, renders both the consequences of as well as the "specific constellation of conditions and pressures" (Ryan 72) behind its characters' actions in great detail, hence demystifying the supposed all-defining nature of its subgenre. Instead of yielding to an almost spiritually inclined approach to tragedy as a cosmic wheel of fortune that crushes its grand but inherently flawed protagonists (Burrow 6), *Othello* utilises its subgenre as a mere exemplary framework that allows for "experimentation" (Neill 123) as demonstrated in the play's covert emphasis of possible alternative paths. The generic negotiations present between *Othello* and *King Richard III* are part of this experimental transformation, which can only be grasped by employing a mutable definition of tragedy. Clearly, the function the subgenre serves within both texts changes considerably from one play to the other. How these plays position themselves with regard to their generic tradition – whether they present their tragic end as a grandiose historical event necessitating supernatural intervention, or whether their tragic conclusion logically arises from the established structural patterns it simultaneously adheres

to – distinctly affects their manner of storytelling. In the case of *Othello*, various plot points are linked by easily traceable causal connections, while the subgenre of tragedy merely provides a supportive framework for the plot to unfold. Thus, my brief generic comparison has greatly contributed to the structuralist understanding of *Othello* I aimed to achieve over the course of this thesis.

Additionally, my analysis clearly demonstrates that all instances of plot progression throughout the play, be they character choices or character interactions, can sufficiently be explained and justified with regard to the play's structural elements. By no means can the play only be examined via approaches based on contextual and societal influences such as hierarchically organised gender roles or racial tension. As such, I have not only sufficiently confirmed the assertions posited in my thesis statement, but have also demonstrated the legitimacy of a purely structuralist approach to both drama and subgenre. Far from reducing dramatic texts to apolitical and featureless husks (Habib 88), approaches rooted in structuralism allow critics to access literary texts with a great degree of specificity, drawing up their subtle and meaningful, though frequently overlooked, intricacies, while avoiding the potentially frustrating pitfalls of endless speculation.

	Events	Iago	Othello	Desdemona	Cassio	Emilia
Act 1 Scene 1		X →	O	O	O	O
Act 1 Scene 2		X	X	O	←	O
Act 1 Scene 3		X → ←	X →	 ← →	O	O
Act 2 Scene 1		X	← →	X →	X →	X →
Act 2 Scene 3		←	X → ← →	X → ← →	X → ← →	O
Act 3 Scene 1		← →	O	O	X	←
Act 3 Scene 3		← → ←	← → ←	X → ← →	X →	X → ← →
Act 3 scene				X		X

4			← →	← →	→	←	→
Act 4 Scene 1		X	X withdraws	O		← →	O
Act 4 Scene 2			X →	← →	O	X → ← → ← →	
Act 4 Scene 3		O	X	X	O	X	
Act 5 Scene 1		X retires	← →	O	← wounded	←	
Act 5 Scene 2		← arrested	X suicide	X killed	← governor	← killed	

Configuration key:

X = present from the beginning of the scene (but not necessarily until the end of the scene)

O = absent throughout the entire scene

← = enters during scene (may miss certain pieces of information)

→ = exits during scene (may miss certain pieces of information)

Events key:

Orange = Iago manipulates Othello / the effects of his manipulation influence Othello

Green = characters describe Iago as honest

Blue = Iago isolates Othello from Desdemona and/or Cassio /
the effects of Iago's manipulation lead Othello to isolate himself from Desdemona
and/or Cassio

Reading guide

Example 1: Act 1, Scene 3

My analysis skips the beginning of the third scene and starts with Iago, Othello, and Cassio already present at the duke's trial. Iago leaves the stage at Othello's behest and then returns with Desdemona. Afterwards, Othello and Desdemona exit, while Iago remains on stage.

Since Cassio's presence during this scene does not pertain to my analysis, the diagram treats him as absent.

Example 2: Act 4, Scene 4

Again, both my analysis as well as the corresponding diagram omit part of the scene, namely Othello's epileptic fit and the resulting back and forth between Iago and Cassio.

Following his seizure, Othello withdraws to observe the conversation between Iago and Cassio, who enters and then leaves after his confrontation with Bianca.

Fig. 1: Diagram illustrating the correlation between character configuration and Iago's manipulative strategies

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I hereby declare that I, _____, wrote the enclosed bachelor thesis “A Structuralist Approach to Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604)” under the supervision of Prof. Dr. phil. Jana Gohrisch and Aylica Boock M.A. myself and referenced all the sources used to complete the paper.

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit von (Name, Matr.nr.)

XXX hat zum Abschluss ihres Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema "A Structuralist Approach to Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604)" vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen sehr gut erfüllt. Die Arbeit besteht aus einer Einleitung, einem Theoriekapitel, zwei Interpretationskapiteln und einer Zusammenfassung sowie einem Appendix.

25.07.2024

Die Verf. beginnt die **Introduction** mit einer ausführlichen Darstellung des Forschungsstandes zum Drama und besonders zur Tragödie sowie dem gewählten Stück, die ihre außerordentliche Belesenheit demonstriert. Entgegen dem dominanten Trend in der Sekundärliteratur, die bevorzugt kontextorientierte Ansätze auf *Othello* anwendet, möchte die Verf. den Schwerpunkt auf die Strukturebene des Stückes legen. Das ist für eine Bachelorarbeit eine ungewöhnliche Herangehensweise, denn sie setzt voraus, dass die Verf. in der Lage ist, in der unübersichtlichen Vielfalt dramatischer Einzelelemente Strukturen zu erkennen und mit den entsprechenden Fachbegriffen klar zu benennen. Das gelingt der Verf. ganz hervorragend, weil sie sich mit der Figurenkonstellation und –konfiguration sowie der Handlung auf nur wenige formale Elemente konzentriert und eine klare **These** formuliert: „... I contend that the plot progression of Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* ... largely depends on the play's structural framework, especially with regard to the levels of character configuration and character constellation. Moreover, I shall argue that the subgenre of tragedy further enables the functionality of this structural framework, as the play negotiates its position within the generic tradition of tragedies." (3) Um zielführende Aussagen über die Tragödienstruktur bei Shakespeare treffen zu können, zieht die Verf. dessen deutlich früher entstandene Tragödie *King Richard III* heran, die zugleich als Historiendrama kategorisiert wird. Darauf wird die Verf. später im 4. Kapitel (28ff) ihre ausgewogene Diskussion der Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede beider Stücke aufbauen.

Im **2. Kapitel** definiert die Verf. unter Verwendung einschlägiger Nachschlagewerke den Strukturalismus und entnimmt, passend dazu, aus Pfisters strukturalistischem Lehrbuch zur Dramenanalyse die bereits genannten Konzepte, die sie später einsetzt. Zudem lässt sie sich von einer Studie zur computergestützten Dramenanalyse anregen (Ilsemann) und entwickelt von hier aus ihre eigene Visualisierung der Bühnenpräsenz der Figuren (Appendix). Selbstkritisch betrachtet die Verf. dann die in den verschiedenen Editionen unterschiedlich notierten Regieanweisungen Shakespeares, auf die sie sich dennoch verlassen muss, um festzustellen, wer auf der Bühne ist und daher über bestimmte Informationen verfügt, woraus sich dann strukturelle Vor- bzw. Nachteile ergeben.

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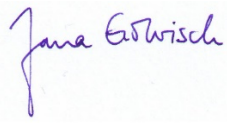
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Im **3. Kapitel** geht die Verf. in dreizehn meist kurzen Unterkapiteln die einzelnen Akte und Szenen durch, um die Informationsvergabe und damit den Wissensstand der Figuren zu untersuchen. Damit zeigt sie überzeugend, wie die Intrige des Iago strukturell funktioniert und warum sie erfolgreich ist. Dazu widmet sie sich zunächst dem Beginn des Stückes und demonstriert, wie Iago Roderigo manipuliert und dessen berechtigte Zweifel an seiner Redlichkeit zerstreut. Diese Technik bereitet das Publikum darauf vor zu beobachten, wie Iago aus egoistischen Motiven das Vertrauen, das die Figuren in ihn setzen, zugleich aufbaut und missbraucht (Kapitel 3.2). Sein Gegenspieler ist niemand anderes als der afrikanischstämmige General in venezianischen Diensten, Othello, der seinem Untergebenen zwar nicht das höchste Offiziersamt gibt, ihm aber in allen dienstlichen wie privaten Unternehmungen absolut vertraut. Das Publikum sieht nun zu, wie Othello Entscheidungen fällt, die sich als Fehler erweisen müssen, weil ihm das Wissen fehlt, das Iago ihm – für das Publikum – nur zu sichtbar vorenthält. Die Analyse der Figurenkonstellation legt bloß, wie Iago es verhindert, dass die Figuren (wie Othello und Desdemona bzw. Cassio) ihren jeweiligen Wissensstand abgleichen können, um Konflikte zu benennen und zu lösen (Kapitel 3.7ff). So kann die Verf. schließlich die dominante Tragödientheorie hinter sich lassen und nachweisen, dass nicht ein „tragic flaw“ die Ursache der Katastrophe ist, sondern klar interessengeleitetes Handeln (Kapitel 3.10, S. 21). Wo sich Gender Studies und Psychoanalyse fragen, warum Iago schließlich durch seine eigene Frau Emilia zu Fall gebracht wird, kann die Verf. mit ihrem klaren Strukturblick eine folgerichtige Antwort geben: Emilia wendet Iagos eigene Technik der Informationszurückhaltung gegen ihn (Kapitel 3.13).

Im **4. Kapitel** weitet die Verf. den Untersuchungsfokus auf die Untergattung der Tragödie aus und stellt in drei Kapiteln dar, wie sich die Shakespeare-Tragödie von *King Richard III* bis zu *Othello* verändert. Sie zeigt die Gemeinsamkeiten der beiden Stücke ebenso auf wie den für sie zentralen Unterschied: die Taktik des Intriganten (Kapitel 4.1). Wo Richard III., seine herausgehobene Machtposition systematisch missbrauchend, seine Gegner durch physische Gewalt vernichtet, greift Iago zur Manipulation, die seinen sozial über ihm stehenden Gegner in die Selbstvernichtung treibt. Mit der Technik der diskrepanten Informationsvergabe für Figuren und Publikum kann letzteres die Ursachen sehen und bewerten (Kapitel 4.2). Sehr schön ist dann Kapitel 4.3, in dem die Verf. belegt, wie das frühere Drama *King Richard III* das dominante Tragödienverständnis ermöglicht, weil der Protagonist durch schicksalhaft-übernatürliche Wesen entlarvt wird. Demgegenüber ist es in *Othello* die Figur der Emilia, deren Handlung folgerichtig aus dem Geschehen abgeleitet wird und die mit ihrer Information über Iago dessen Treiben ein Ende setzt. Hier zeigt die Verf. sinnfällig, dass die Tragödiendefinition fluide sein muss, denn Shakespeares Tragödienpraxis ist es auch (28f). Während das Handlungsgerüst der Tragödie gleichbleibt, ändert sich der Fokus auf die Figuren und deren Motivationen, wodurch wiederum die Strukturen der Stücke eine neue Bedeutung erhalten. Das abschließende **5. Kapitel** betont noch einmal den Experimentalcharakter des späteren Dramas *Othello*, dessen Zuschauer/innen immer sehen, wie die Handlung hätte verlaufen können.

Die umfangreiche **Bibliographie** entspricht dem *MLA Stylesheet*. Sie enthält eine Vielzahl passend ausgewählter Sekundärliteratur sowohl zu Genrefragen als auch speziell zur Shakespeare-Tragödie und zum Stück selbst. Die Arbeit wurde sauber korrigiert und erfüllt damit auch auf formaler Ebene sehr gut die Vorgaben. Das **Englische** liest sich absolut flüssig. Es ist variantenreich und bewegt sich durchgehend auf dem gehobenen akademischen Niveau. Abgesehen von zwei falschen Präpositionen (20f, 27) ist die beeindruckend gut und sprachliche korrekt geschriebene Arbeit fehlerfrei. Es war ein Vergnügen und Gewinn, sie zu lesen.

Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,0 (sehr gut)** bewertet.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jana Gohrlich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Prof. Dr. Jana Gohrlich

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Bachelorarbeit

Representations of Time in Bernardine Evaristo's Novel *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)

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1. Introduction

Teeming with life and crackling with energy, *Girl, Woman, Other* follows [its twelve characters] across the miles and down the years, through different generations and social classes, in this ever-dynamic, ever-expanding and utterly irresistible novel of our times. (“Girl, Woman, Other”)

When it was published in 2019, Bernardine Evaristo’s novel *Girl, Woman, Other* appealed like only few other literary works to the zeitgeist of the late 2010s and early 2020s; it captivated a largely left-wing, liberal, *woke* audience, received universal critical acclaim, and in 2019 shared the prestigious Booker Prize with Margaret Atwood’s *The Testaments*. *Girl, Woman, Other* explores feminism, gender, sexuality and racism in modern-day Britain, and it indeed takes, as the website of the Booker Prizes describes it, its audience “across the miles and down the years,” through twelve vastly different lives with their unique settings in time and space. In his review of the novel, Will Gompertz, editor for the BBC, describes *Girl, Woman, Other* as a “collage of well-composed individual stories the author has constructed into a single, albeit fragmented novel.” In literature, a collage is “a sequence of material by means of which a world is created” (“[Prozess] des künstlerischen Weltaufbaus aus einer Abfolge von Materialien”; my trans.; Voigts-Virchow 514). In the case of *Girl, Woman, Other*, the twelve chapters, i.e. the largely independent portraits of the characters’ lives, are the material used to create the world of what Gompertz calls a “fragmented novel” that nevertheless works as a whole.

By virtue of having been published only a few years ago, *Girl, Woman, Other* has yet to be examined in detail by literary scholars. Initial ventures to analyse the novel include Cédric Courtois’ piece on aesthetics and politics and Merve Sarıkaya-Şen’s journal article approaching *Girl, Woman, Other* from a feminist angle. In response to this lack of secondary literature and the strikingly unconventional structure of the novel, this Bachelor’s thesis is going to lay the groundwork for subsequent research by investigating the novel on a purely structural level. Its aim is to uncover the devices Bernardine Evaristo uses to tie together her collage. Accordingly, I argue that Bernardine Evaristo’s realist novel *Girl, Woman, Other* works as an essentially plotless collage because it derives cohesion from its temporal structure, i.e. from aspects of order, duration and frequency. In a broad sense, cohesion refers to “the grammatical and lexical linking within a ... text that holds [it] together” (Adamson 336). For my analysis and with regards to temporal structure, I will focus on lexical cohesion within *Girl, Woman, Other*, investigating macrostructural cohesive devices and patterns such as parallelisms and

recurrences within the novel and largely disregarding cohesion on sentence-level (Malmkjær and Carter 541).

To underpin and prove my thesis, I will use the terminology postulated by French structuralist theorist Gérard Genette in his seminal work *Figures III*, first published in French in 1972, parts of which later became known to the English-speaking world as *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (ND)*. In this 270-page essay, which he supplemented with *Narrative Discourse Revisited (NDR)* in 1983, Genette explains in detail and applies to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* his theory of narrative, covering the aspects order, duration, frequency, mood and voice. For my analysis, I will adopt the parts of his terminology pertaining to temporal structure, i.e. concepts from his chapters on order, duration and frequency.

As a realist novel largely devoid of a plot, *Girl, Woman, Other* subverts genre conventions and has to rely on its use of time and temporal devices to create cohesion between its parts. More specifically and using Genette's terminology, I claim that cohesion is established by repetitive temporal ordering within chapters. Additionally, upon reaching the present, or the point furthest towards the present of the novel, all chapters slow down considerably, while past events, which make up the majority of *Girl, Woman, Other*, are often summarised, highly condensed and interspersed with ellipses, spanning decades of story time. On the level of frequency, chapters are linked implicitly by the way they employ iterative narrative and explicitly by the use of repeating narrative, which supplies multiple perspectives on the same event or subject.

Looking at the macrostructure of *Girl, Woman, Other* and its chapters, two main categories of temporal ordering become apparent, warranting a case study of two chapters as representatives for the entire novel. For this purpose, I chose *Amma* and *Shirley* since their respective structures can be applied to all but one of the other chapters, and they also lend themselves well to an examination of duration and frequency. Moreover, they feature two central characters who are part of the frame narrative and connected to most of the other characters. Following an introduction of structuralist theory and method, I will analyse *Amma* and *Shirley* in-depth, uncovering how they are ordered and how they, like all of the other chapters, link up using duration and frequency, in order to ultimately show how *Girl, Woman, Other* creates unity and cohesion in a plotless collage.

2. Theory and Method

If the object of analysis is indeed to illuminate the conditions of existence – of production – of the text, it is not done, as people often say, by reducing the complex to the simple, but on the contrary by revealing the hidden complexities that are the secret of the simplicity. (Genette, *ND* 137-138)

In this sentence from perhaps his most famous work, Gérard Genette captures succinctly the essence of structuralism, the theory he spearheaded as one of its most prominent thinkers: its aim lies in the investigation and uncovering of the complex underlying structures that make texts work as engaging pieces of art. The subject of the present analysis, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, has indeed engaged and enthralled critics and the masses alike, but how did it achieve this feat that eventually netted the novel and its author some of the most prestigious prizes in the world of literature, along with numerous nominations and places on shortlists? Which structures lie at the very core of the novel's success?

As has been established in the introduction, I claim that aspects of time and its temporal structure lend cohesion to this essentially plotless collage, thereby making it accessible to a large audience. The dimensions of temporality form “a network of intertextual connections” and render the narrative “a complex of recurrent patterns”; two of the larger containing structures identified by Peter Barry as the main areas of inquiry of structuralist critics (50). In his analysis of temporality in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Genette claims that he operates “at the level of ‘immanent’ temporal structures that give the text its skeleton and its foundation – and without which it would not exist” (*ND* 137). Thus, by shedding light on time in *Girl, Woman, Other*, one gains an immediate insight into the bone structure of an award-winning, universally acclaimed novel.

At the very heart of such an analysis lies the investigation of the relationship between the temporality of the story and the temporality of discourse, i.e. between story time and discourse time. This distinction was first drawn by German scholar Günther Müller in the 1940s, and it “becomes useful when one contrasts the uniform progression of story time, which is modelled on our everyday notions of clock and calendar time, with the fits and starts, pauses and speed-ups encountered on the discourse level of narratives” (Fludernik 608). As Genette himself puts it: “We can characterise the temporal stance of a narrative only by considering at the same time all the relationships it establishes between its own temporality and that of the story it tells” (*ND* 155). This relationship has three dimensions: the relation between the order

of the events as they happened in the story and the order in which these events are narrated; the disparity or congruence between the duration of events in story time and the discourse time allotted to them; and the relations of the frequency of events in the story as opposed to their frequency in discourse.

These dimensions immediately raise questions about the time of the written narrative since it is not readily available for measuring and seems to only be realised through the highly variable and subjective act of reading. Genette refers to this time as a “pseudo-time” (ND 34). In practice, the issue of discourse time as a pseudo-time is really only pertinent to the dimension of duration. While the duration of the story may be just as challenging to determine, narratives usually offer at least some indications of the time that passes within the story. Conversely, discourse time, if regarded as the amount of time required for the reception of a given text, is impossible to measure in a way that would satisfy the criteria for scholarly work. The solution to this conundrum lies in the treatment of lines, i.e. of the physical length of the narrative, as discourse time. Lines or pages serve as objectively quantifiable units of “time” that can be related to the amount of story time elapsing within them. The relationship between story time and discourse time within a given narrative unit constitutes its speed. Speed proved a more workable and versatile category than duration, as Genette conceded in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (34), his response to criticism of his initial work, and I will thus employ it in order to analyse time in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

I plotted the respective story times and discourse times of narrative units in *Amma* and *Shirley*, the chapters chosen for my case study, in diagrams C to F in Appendix C. The chapters were divided into narrative units according to the criteria proposed by Genette (ND 88-89). While counting lines and pages to arrive at the discourse time of a narrative unit is fairly trivial and yields exact results, pinpointing the duration of these units in story time proved a challenge despite the fairly frequent mentions of years and time spans in *Girl, Woman, Other*. Many of the story time durations are therefore only approximate. However, these diagrams serve the purpose of showing at a glance the striking discrepancies between story time and discourse time of some of the units. The fastest-paced summaries dominating story time, the scenes occupying a disproportionate amount of discourse time, and the patterns these create will be analysed in the chapter on duration. It will also investigate pauses and ellipses, the remaining two relations of tempo put forward by Genette, in which either story time or, in the case of an ellipsis, discourse time stops.

Before undertaking an in-depth look at duration, my analysis is going to survey the order of events in *Girl, Woman, Other*. A narrative may, in principle, either be chronological, stringing together events in the order they transpired in the story, or it may employ anachronies to deviate from chronological storytelling and create dissonance between the order of events in the story and the order as arranged in the discourse. As Genette notes, “a condition of perfect temporal correspondence between narrative and story ... is more hypothetical than real” (ND 36). A degree of dissonance between the two is thus conventional and is brought about by either analepses or prolepses. Analepses, i.e. flashbacks, are characteristic of *Girl, Woman, Other*, and the novel uses them as its primary tool to access the past. However, the chronological progression of the story in the past must not be confused with analeptic tales; in this caveat lies one of the main differences between the two principles of macrostructural ordering I propose for the novel, which I have summarised in Appendix A and which shall be examined in detail in chapter 3.1. Prolepses are exceedingly rare, and the few ones found are insignificant to the novel’s grand temporal scheme.

Analepses are the key feature determining order in *Girl, Woman, Other*, and the table in Appendix B shows how they interrupt the chronological order of events in *Amma* and *Shirley*. An analepsis always depends on a first narrative, i.e. on “a temporal level of narrative with respect to which [it] is defined as such” (Genette, ND 48). In these two tables, an individual analepsis depends on the last instance of narrative that was set one column further to the left. For instance, the analepsis on page thirty-six, Amma and Roland agreeing to have a child together, depends on lines eight to twelve on the same page, the description of Yazz’ birth, which is, in turn, defined as an analepsis in relation to the initial first narrative that re-emerged in line seven.

The *initial* first narrative used in the white columns of Appendix B is a term I coined for the very first narrative unit of a chapter and its setting in time simply because it is essential for assessing the order of the novel. Following its traces throughout the chapters works exceptionally well when analysing the two types of macrostructures since the frequency of digression from the initial first narrative by means of anachronies is what sets them apart. Furthermore, I distinguish between minor and major analepses based on their extent in discourse time. Minor analepses may only extend over a few or even just a single line, as is frequently the case in *Amma* and *Shirley*, whereas I consider major all analepses spanning more than three pages. The longest analepsis in *Amma*, for instance, spans seventeen pages.

Genette further assigns analepses an extent and a reach by determining the analepsis' total duration in story time and the amount of story time between the end of the respective first narrative and the beginning of the analepsis. Based on their extent and on whether or not they rejoin the first narrative, he distinguishes between partial and complete analepses. He also suggests three further types depending on their reach:

We have seen how the determination of reach allowed us to divide analepses into two classes, external and internal, depending on whether the point to which they reach is located outside or inside the temporal field of the first narrative. The mixed class — not, after all, much resorted to — is in fact determined by a characteristic of extent, since this class consists of external analepses prolonged to rejoin and pass beyond the starting point of the first narrative. (Genette, *ND* 61)

Frequency is the last dimension of time I will turn to. Genette introduces four types of relations of frequency: narrating once what happened once; narrating *n* times what happened *n* times; narrating *n* times what happened once; and narrating at one time what happened *n* times (*ND* 114-16). For the purpose of investigating the means by which cohesion is created in *Girl, Woman, Other*, I will stick to the latter two types, i.e. to repeating and iterative narrative. Iteratives condense multiple events into a single utterance, and their usage can be linked to aspects of duration. Repeating narrative generally allows for “stylistic variation [and] variations in ‘point of view’” (Genette, *ND* 115). The overt links established between the chapters by repetitions are illustrated in Appendix D. The diagram reveals the extensive network of connections and relationships between *Amma, Shirley* and the remaining chapters, and it shall be examined further in chapter 3.2.3.

Before taking an in-depth look at time in *Girl, Woman, Other*, the structure of the novel necessitates some preliminary remarks. Firstly, the table of contents lists only five chapters and the *Epilogue*. The first four chapters consist of a triplet of sections. Each section bears the name of its respective protagonist, along with an Adinkra symbol whose meaning usually corresponds to or comments on the mood and theme of the section in question. For instance, the symbol chosen for *Winsome*, which features an eponymous main character who betrays both her husband and her daughter by having an affair with the latter's husband, is Kete Pa, a symbol for a good marriage (Rhys). For the sake of clarity, I will refer to these sections as “chapters” throughout my analysis. Thus, the novel will be treated as having fourteen chapters; twelve main chapters, *The After-party* and the *Epilogue*.

Secondly, due to the novel's peculiar structure, these chapters are going to be regarded and examined as entities largely independent from the temporal context of the novel as a whole. If the entire novel was taken into account when analysing the order of the chapters, for instance, one would have to deem most of them entirely analeptic in relation to the narrative frame the novel commences with. This frame is constituted by the passages set on the day of the opening of Amma's play, and it is closed by *The After-party*. Embedded in it is most of the remainder of the novel, whose reception is facilitated by the framing narrative (Wolf 604). Considering the chapters individually is going to yield clearer results and allow for the unearthing of patterns that run through the novel and establish cohesion, which is ultimately the purpose of this thesis.

3. Exploring Time and Cohesion in *Girl, Woman, Other*

The virtual absence of a plot makes *Girl, Woman, Other* an outlier in the tradition of realist storytelling. Plots are integral constituents of realist novels and serve as their principal sources of cohesion; events are linked causally and logically, guiding the reader through the narrative. One would struggle to come up with a concise description of *Girl, Woman, Other's* plot. Is the novel about the opening night of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, interrupted by some four hundred pages of biographies? Is it a collection of twelve independent short stories with twelve independent plots? Accepting this hypothesis, how does one go on to define the plot of chapters like *LaTisha*, for instance? Is *LaTisha* about a worker at a supermarket going about their daily business? This difficulty in formulating plots that capture the essence of the novel arises from *Girl, Woman, Other's* collage-like structure and its temporal depth.

The novel employs temporal elements in order to compensate for its lack of an overarching, continually recurring and progressing plot. With a single exception, its fourteen chapters display two basic structures of order, while all chapters share a large variety in speeds, the insignificance of the present and the selective use of iteratives. More explicitly, the chapters are linked by repeating narrative. The following analysis of time in *Girl, Woman, Other* shall move from the implicit to the explicit, from the underlying, covert means of establishing cohesion to the overt textual links connecting parts of the novel to one another. It thereby follows the approach of Gérard Genette, and it shall also attempt to link the aspects of order, duration and frequency.

3.1 Patterns in Order and Anachronies

Girl, Woman, Other is characterised by the parallel temporal structure of its fourteen chapters. This parallel structuring lends cohesion to the novel, which becomes increasingly more predictable as it progresses through the lives of its protagonists. The novel employs two macrostructural principles of temporal ordering, which I will refer to as “type A” and “type B” going forward (Appendix A). These types can be attributed to seven and six chapters, respectively, only leaving a single chapter requiring further investigation. The first principle, which I will call “type A,” uses the initial first narrative, which is set in the present, continually and throughout the whole chapter as a temporal point of reference. This first narrative is briefly introduced; subsequently, short sequences of that narrative separate the detailed anachronies and serve as the chapter’s bone structure. The other principle, which I will refer to as “type B,” is generally more chronological. Chapters of this type commence at some point in the past and progress towards the present. On a microstructural level, however, this progression is not perfectly linear but frequently interrupted by anachronies, albeit much less so than the initial first narrative in chapters of type A.

Both structures, and, in fact, all chapters, use anachronies to supply background information on the characters, their lives, traits, relationships, and relations to other characters. The vast majority of *Girl, Woman, Other* negotiates the past and past events. Consequently, analepses are an indispensable tool for the novel; they are vital for achieving a detailed account of what happened up to the novel’s present. The two structures thus share the significance of the past, but they handle it very differently; while type A explores the past from a present point of reference it frequently digresses from and returns to, type B commences in the past and therefore uses considerably fewer analepses (Appendices A-C). Chapters of type B *may* use anachronies to delve deeper into the past, while chapters of type A *depend* on using them in order to even access the past.

Yazz and *Bummi* are the only main chapters that do not fit easily into either of the established categories. However, *Yazz* is closely related to the macrostructure of type A, and *Bummi* can be considered a hybrid chapter combining aspects of both macrostructures. The *Epilogue* is a rather short chapter sharing the peculiarity of *Yazz*, while *The After-party* is constructed rather uniquely in the context of *Girl, Woman, Other*. It inverts the ratio of past and present events established in the preceding twelve chapters; present events dominate and

are only occasionally interrupted by analepses. Accordingly, *The After-party* also displays aspects of duration unlike any other chapter, as will be shown in chapter 3.2.

3.1.1 Type A: Initial First Narrative as Bone Structure

Amma is the chapter I have chosen as the case study for type A. It is the very first chapter of *Girl, Woman, Other*, and its eponymous main character is central to the novel and its narrative frame. Its microstructure is detailed in Appendix B. The table visualises how the initial first narrative frequently re-emerges throughout the chapter and pinpoints both the most prominent and the minor anachronies, which are separated by the instances of said first narrative. It also differentiates between multiple levels of analepses. The bone structure characteristic of *Amma* is immediately apparent, and the chapter's structure and its properties pertaining to order can be transferred to all of the other chapters of the same type (Appendix A).

The initial first narrative is about Amma Bonsu, playwright and director, making her way from the riverside towards the National Theatre in London, arriving there and pondering the play that is to open that very night. This first narrative, which all the other parts ultimately depend on as their temporal point of reference, commences on the first page and re-emerges throughout the chapter (Evaristo 2-6, 23-30). Amma's thoughts on current events, on the state of her life, and on her friends and relatives have also been attributed to the table's white column since they are essentially set in the present and thus share their temporal setting with Amma making her way to the theatre despite not actually, i.e. spatially, being part of that storyline. Examples of these spatially unrelated remarks about the present include Amma explaining her current love triangle and expressing how much she misses her daughter Yazz (22, 39-40).

Beneath this bone structure lies the substantial part of the chapter, the anachronies. They break with the chronology of the initial first narrative and dominate the chapter, combining for eighty percent of its lines (Appendix C, diagram A). The first major analepsis, interrupting Amma's thoughts about the present, introduces her best friend, Dominique, and describes how they first met and how their friendship and their lives developed thereafter (Evaristo 6-22). It reaches back about thirty years and extends for several years. The analepsis is eventually interrupted by an ellipsis, taking the narrative back to the present (22). Therefore, it is a partial, external analepsis. Naturally, an analepsis spanning seventeen pages also serves as first narrative for other analepses, further fragmenting the temporal structure of the chapter. In this case, analeptic digressions from the first level of analepsis include Dominique's childhood (7-9), Amma's parents (9-12), and one of Amma's possessive lovers (21-22).

The second major analepsis of *Amma* is the one taking the narrative back only a couple of days, to an encounter between Amma and her friend Sylvester; they spend the night together at a local bar (30-36). The analepsis merely spans seven pages and extends for only a couple of hours of story time, but it carries a plethora of further analepses worth analysing. Perhaps most striking is the story of Amma's inheritance and how she became a homeowner, told in a sequence of convoluted analepses (34-36; Appendix B). The whole section is an external and complete analepsis carried by the first narrative that ends with Amma making her way back home (Evaristo 34). The story of her being homeless and losing both her mother and her father within a short period of time is recounted using a mixed and complete analepsis (34-36). Woven into it are five external and partial analepses in which Amma reasons with the life and death of her father and their relationship.

The purpose of these larger analepses is thus evidently providing detailed background information and portraying the characters in pivotal situations, and they are often used as a first narrative to go even further back in time. Since these analepses are mostly external, they cover timeframes that do not interfere with the extent of their respective first narratives, thereby avoiding repetition and achieving the highest possible temporal coverage. Similarly, the abundant minor analepses complementing the longer ones embellish the narrative with titbits from the lives of the characters, introduce other characters, and establish connections between the protagonists of the twelve chapters (see also chapter 3.2.3 and Appendix D). In *Amma*, they include Amma's outlook on aging (Evaristo 4), how she came up with the idea for her play (24) and the story of how she and Shirley met as children (26-27). This function of the different analepses remains the same across all chapters of *Girl, Woman, Other*.

The analepses in *Girl, Woman, Other* generally end abruptly and leave a gap; the first narrative that carried the respective analepsis then resumes. They are thus predominantly partial analepses. This gap is most pronounced at points where the initial first narrative, i.e. the present, re-emerges. For instance, towards the middle of the chapter, Amma reminisces about the exciting time she had with Dominique in their youth (22-23). The narrative then leaves a gap of multiple decades and takes the reader back to middle-aged Amma making her way to the theatre: "Amma throws her coffee in a bin ..." (23). These external *and* partial analepses prevalent in *Girl, Woman, Other* strengthen the perception of the novel as a collage by making the chapters appear to be patchworks of the most important anecdotes and memories of and about the main characters, who thereby become more three-dimensional.

Carole, *LaTisha*, *Winsome* and *Hattie* are the chapters sharing the established structure. Like *Amma*, they consist of an initial first narrative in the present, one or two major analepses detailing central events or times in the characters' lives, and many more less extensive anachronies. *Carole* and *LaTisha* use a day at work for their respective protagonists as the bone structure the analepses detailing their lives depend on. *Winsome* is preparing her family's favourite dish; the analepses are prompted by her reminiscing. Similarly, *Hattie* is suffering through a Christmas dinner with her extended family, leading her to ponder her life and the stories of her relatives. As is the case with *Amma*, the majority of these chapters is made up of analeptic digressions from their respective first narrative, most of which are external and partial. The act and aftermath of *Carole* being raped, for instance, is the major analepsis of *Carole*, spanning twenty pages (119-38). The other, minor analepses in this chapter tackle the sexism *Carole* experiences at work (117-18), advances by her boss (142-43), her memories of *LaTisha* (145), and how she met her partner, *Freddy* (147-49).

Yazz adds a peculiarity to this structure, but it shares the predominance of anachronies and can thus reasonably be attributed to type A, as is indicated by the colour code in Appendix A. The major difference to the previously discussed chapters lies in the spatial inconsistency of the initial first narrative in *Yazz*, the opening night of *Amma's* play. It appears to merely frame a long analeptic part in the middle (50-74), but it does indeed re-emerge throughout. In contrast to other chapters, where it returned to and advanced a rather mundane moment in the respective protagonist's life, the initial first narrative in *Yazz* promptly changes its setting and interjects to describe the present but spatially unrelated state of affairs with sentences such as: "Waris says yes to the hijab and sex outside marriage, no to booze and pork" (55), much like it did, albeit to a lesser degree, in *Amma* (see above and Appendix B). The traces of the first narrative that commences with *Yazz* sitting in the theatre (Evaristo 41) are thus much fainter than in the other chapters of type A since its spatial setting is not retained. Reconsidering the order of the chapter in light of this fact, *Yazz* can indeed be perceived as a chapter adhering to the established structure with a first narrative serving as a bone structure, one major analepsis (56-72) and many minor analepses.

Despite not being a main chapter and only spanning fourteen pages, the *Epilogue* is also worth mentioning here. It connects the stories of two of the characters from previous chapters with a final twist and employs a structure similar to *Yazz*. Here, the first narrative about *Penelope* riding the train and meeting her mother frames the chapter (439-40, 450-52) and emerges once with spatially unrelated remarks on *Jeremy* and *Sarah's* family (444-45). These

remarks separate two analepses that combine for more than two thirds of the chapter's lines: the story of how Penelope met and settled with her new partner and of how she found out about her biological mother. The *Epilogue*, *Yazz*, and the aforementioned *Carole*, *LaTisha*, *Winsome*, and *Hattie* are thus constructed in the same way as *Amma*, and their contribution to *Girl, Woman, Other*'s cohesion lies in their structural similarity and the recurring of that structure throughout the novel, as is the case for the second type of macrostructure.

3.1.2 Type B: Chronological Progression

Shirley is the chapter chosen to serve as a case study for the six chapters of the second type. These chapters also explore in-depth a character's past, their relationships and personalities, but instead of weaving anachronies into a present first narrative, they approach their subject matter from the past and move chronologically towards the present. Therefore, they are much more linear than chapters of the previous type. By virtue of already being set in the past, they require far fewer analepses, let alone single analepses spanning more than a dozen pages, to enrich the narrative about the past. This most prominent distinction between the two types established here is immediately visible in the tables detailing *Amma*'s and *Shirley*'s order (Appendix B). Sixty-nine percent of the lines in *Shirley* can be attributed to the initial first narrative in the white column, while only thirty-one percent of the lines deviate from temporally linear narration. Contrastingly, in *Amma*, only twenty percent of the lines are used for the initial first narrative, while anachronies account for the remaining four fifths (Appendix C, diagrams A and B).

Shirley commences with a description of its eponymous protagonist's first day as a teacher. Despite being written in the present tense, this section is immediately clarified to be set in the past. The second line gives the clue that Shirley has not married Lennox *yet*, yet she has already appeared and been referred to as "Mrs King" in three chapters up to this page. The chapter progresses chronologically through her first day, her first year and the confrontation with Penelope at a staff meeting, which she bemoans the following night when she and Lennox meet for dinner. This section extends to page 229 and is only rarely interrupted by minor anachronies of no more than a few lines, the only exception being the analepsis providing a glimpse into Shirley's childhood (Evaristo 218). The same holds true for the chronological sequence tracing Shirley's increasing disillusionment with her job and the peaceful transpiring of the King family's middle-class life (234-44), which is interrupted by only seven minor anachronies with the one about their children being the most significant (244). The narrative

eventually reaches the present; Shirley is spending her holidays at her family's retirement bungalow in the Carribean (245).

Shirley contains two larger analepses worth examining more closely. The external flashback to how Shirley and Lennox met, got to know each other and eventually married is the only multi-layered analepsis of the chapter, and it separates the two predominantly linear sections outlined above (229-33). It serves as the first narrative to the external analepsis summarising Lennox' life and his experiences with racism (230-31) and to another external and partial analepsis recounting how Shirley and Amma met and how the dynamics of their relationship developed (232-33). The other major analepsis is Shirley's perspective on Carole, her friends and her development (245-48), a highly anticipated section since the relationship between Shirley and Carole and Shirley's role as Carole's mentor are alluded to in three of the preceding chapters (see also chapter 3.2.3 and Appendix D). All of the analepses mentioned and discussed above, both minor and major, are external, much like the vast majority of analepses in *Amma*. Their main purpose is shedding light on the characters' backgrounds, on their life stories and traits. The character and function of the anachronies can thus indeed be said to remain the same across both types of temporal structuring and throughout the novel.

The more linear structure of *Shirley* is shared by *Dominique*, *Penelope*, *Megan/Morgan* and *Grace*. They all commence in medias res, multiple decades before the present point of reference they eventually reach. *Grace* is somewhat of an outlier in that regard. Its protagonist was born in the 1890s and is the only main character not alive in the present, i.e. at the time of the opening night of Amma's play. The chapter starts ab ovo and progresses linearly towards a section of first-person narrative, a letter from Grace to her late mother, which concludes the chapter. Grace probably wrote it in the 1940s or 1950s since she mentions Ada Mae, who is in her seventies at the present time and was therefore born in the late 1930s or in the 1940s. Grace knew Ada Mae only "for a little while" (Evaristo 404) and "fell ill when ... Ada Mae hadn't yet started school" (366), hence the assumption about the date of the letter. In spite of its unique timeframe, *Grace* conforms to the basic structure of type B.

Like *Shirley*, these other chapters occasionally digress from the chronological progression of the narrative. Here too anachronies are used much less frequently than in the chapters of type A, and their extend is limited to a few pages at most. *Penelope*, for instance, commences sixty-five years from the present and recounts in order how Penelope grew up as an adopted child, how she married and divorced two men, and how her life continued thereafter.

Her daughter revealing her plans of moving to Australia appears to bring the narrative to the present since this passage employs the present tense (303-06), but Penelope's story continues and only reaches the present in the *Epilogue*. Analepses are rare and short in *Penelope*, and they are mostly used to shed light on the stories of other, minor characters, such as her mother and her grandfather (277-79) or her daughter's husband (304). Most of them are external and partial, as was the case in the other chapters.

Bummi and *The After-party* are the only chapters whose order remains to be categorised. *The After-party* completes *Girl, Woman, Other's* narrative frame, giving the novel a definitive present point of reference in relation to which all previous parts may be defined as analeptic. Its unique feature is the predominance of the present first narrative and the resulting relative insignificance of past events. The chapter follows various characters around the afterparty of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, frequently changing its focaliser. On the one hand, assigning it to type A would make sense on the grounds that the chapter features an initial first narrative in the present, interspersed with analepses. On the other hand, the analepses do not dominate the chapter as they do in *Amma*, *LaTisha* or *Winsome*; rather, the chronological progression of the evening is foregrounded and separated by analepses. Therefore, *The After-party* may be considered closely related to but not entirely in line with the structure of type B, as is indicated by the colour code in Appendix A.

Bummi cannot be assigned to either of the two established categories. It is a hybrid chapter that combines aspects characteristic of both type A and type B. The long, largely chronological account of how Bummi and her mother fled the Niger delta and of how Bummi migrated to Britain, founded a cleaning company, and eventually came to terms with her daughter's white husband (159-88) would certainly qualify the chapter as one of type B. However, this entire part is preceded by the description of Carole's increasing alienation from her mother and their eventual reconciliation (150-59), making the former account a mixed and complete analepsis. The major part of the chapter is thus analeptic; a feature characteristic of type A chapters. One might still be inclined to assign *Bummi* to type B, arguing that the chronology of events is much more pronounced than the chapter's analeptic nature. It is also lacking a re-emerging first narrative, and, consequently, analepses are exceedingly rare. However, based on the sheer extent of the aforementioned analepsis on the one hand and the overall degree of chronology on the other, I opted for a unique colour coding and a 'hybrid' status for *Bummi* instead (Appendix A). Assigning *Bummi* to either of the established types would not be justifiable.

The temporal structure of the chapters of *Girl, Woman, Other* is predictable; a hypothetical thirteenth main chapter would likely share its macrostructure with many of the preceding chapters. Readers could expect an extensive account of the past with long analepses providing abundant information on the life of a protagonist and other characters related to them. The cohesion generated by the order within chapters lies in just this outlined parallel structuring and the resulting predictability: the two macrostructures, type A and type B, alternate almost perfectly throughout the novel and thereby hold the text together.

3.2 Implicit and Explicit Links through Duration and Frequency

Duration and frequency are two further temporal properties of the novel by means of which cohesion is created. Similarly to order, duration supplies another underlying structure that links the chapters implicitly. They display an equally wide variation in speeds, and chapters of the previously established “type A” may even be considered to share a rhythm determined by what was found to greatly influence the order of those chapters, too — the initial first narrative. Contrastingly, aspects of frequency also create explicit links between individual passages of *Girl, Woman, Other*. The lives of the novel’s protagonists overlap temporally, and they are also inextricably intertwined through the manifold relationships between the characters, affecting both duration and frequency. *Girl, Woman, Other* contains dozens of instances of repeating narrative, offering multiple perspectives on events and subjects and overtly linking chapters and characters.

3.2.1 The Speeds of *Girl, Woman, Other*

Duration, speed and rhythm are central categories when analysing a novel that undertakes to tell as many stories spanning as long a story time as *Girl, Woman, Other* does. By virtue of attempting to squeeze the life stories of twelve characters into twelve chapters of no more than forty pages each, the novel generally moves at a high speed, often covering months, years or even decades in a few lines or skipping them altogether. Much like the nonlinear order of the chapters, this pace of the narrative is by no means unchanging or smooth. Summaries dominate, but they are frequently interspersed with ellipses and selected scenes from the protagonists’ lives, giving the chapters their own rhythm. Upon reaching the present, all chapters slow down dramatically and do not advance the narrative any further, while past events are usually summarised and highly condensed. After assessing the speed of the entire novel, and in order to highlight differences between the chapters in the context of duration, it makes sense to refer

back to the two types of macrostructure outlined above since their rhythms are distinctly different.

Girl, Woman, Other's present point of reference, the opening night of Amma's play, can reasonably be assumed to be set between early 2017 and late 2018. The Brexit referendum and the presidential election in the USA which saw Donald Trump become president, held in summer and autumn of 2016, respectively, are referred to multiple times throughout the novel (Evaristo 42, 347, 412), which was itself published in the spring of 2019. The majority of *Girl, Woman, Other* concerns itself with the lives of twelve characters; its oldest protagonist, Hattie, is ninety-three years old (341) and was thus born in the mid-1920s. However, the temporal span of the novel is extended by the late Grace, who was conceived in 1895 (332), and of course by the analepses investigated in the previous chapter. The earliest point mentioned in *Girl, Woman, Other* is the year 1806, when the construction of Greenfields farmhouse began (367). Therefore, the novel covers over 210 years in 453 pages, or, in other words, close to half a year per page.

However, duration is a more complicated issue than this rather simple approximation suggests. While many years in the nineteenth century are not explored further in the novel, the pivotal decades of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are covered multiple times since, with the exception of Grace, all characters are contemporaries, and their stories are told separately. The speed of the individual chapters is thus even greater because for the most part, they share roughly the same fifty-year timeframe. Due to their structure, the exact duration in story time is fairly complex to pinpoint in most chapters of type A. Amma, for example, is in her fifties. The chapter recounts her childhood and her professional development, but it also goes back to Dominique's birth and life story (7-9) and to the hardships her mother faced from the 1930s onwards (9-11); events that happened, at least partly, simultaneously. As a result, *Amma* may be considered to span about eighty years in forty pages, but in fact, it progresses through many more years. Duration and speed of the more linear chapters of type B are easier to characterise; *Shirley* essentially narrates its protagonist's entire life from her childhood onwards without revisiting any period in thirty-two pages, thereby covering about forty years or an average of ten months per page.

Shirley is comprised of narrative units separated by distinct temporal or spatial breaks. I propose the following eight: Shirley's first day as a teacher (217-21), her first year (221-22), the staff meeting and the following evening (222-29), the analeptic tale of the first months and

years of Shirley and Lennox (229-34), roughly the first ten years of friendship between Amma and Shirley (232-33), the change of Shirley's life and her attitude towards her job over the course of thirty years (234-44), Shirley pondering for mere moments (245), and the few years of Carole's development from Shirley's perspective (245-48). The chronology of these events was analysed in the previous chapter; the earliest analepsis is the one about Shirley and Amma, followed by Shirley and Lennox and the flashback to Carole. The units' approximate durations in story time and their extents in discourse time are illustrated in diagrams C and D in Appendix C.

The most striking observation to make is the difference in the number of segments between diagrams C and D. While Shirley's first day, her holidays and the staff meeting all have a considerable extent in discourse time, with the staff meeting stretching over more than a fifth of the total lines, their extent in story time is limited to a few hours and therefore dwarfed by the other, highly condensed accounts that span multiple decades. Those three units are the slowest parts of *Shirley* and mostly move at the speed of a scene. The staff meeting, for instance, commences with a description of the staff room and some of Shirley's colleagues (222-25) during which story time does not stop. The narrative accelerates slightly, summarises the points Penelope makes (226), and returns to an equality of story time and discourse time for the exchange between Shirley and Penelope (226-27) and for Shirley's rant (227-29), which follows an ellipsis of a few hours (227). Even within a narrative unit, speed may evidently vary dramatically.

The remaining segments move at a much higher pace. "Shirley changing" (234-44) is the unit immediately catching the eye due to the marked contrast between story time and discourse time. It covers roughly thirty years, from the 1980s to the novel's present, i.e. two thirds of the chapter's story time, but only one third of its lines. In this part, an average of three years of story time pass on every page, and it necessarily uses summaries and iteratives to achieve that pace (see also chapter 3.2.2). Fifteen years of changes to Shirley's life as a teacher, to its conditions and her students, are negotiated within the first four pages (Evaristo 234-38), followed by a slower passage describing how Penelope and Shirley eventually became friends and how Shirley opted against applying elsewhere (239-41). The chapter is concluded by a plethora of iteratives and summaries that reach all the way to the present, illustrating the life of Shirley, Lennox and their children (242-44).

The three analepses identified as separate narrative units move at a high speed. The analepsis summarising the story of Shirley and Lennox (229-34) is difficult to pinpoint exactly in story time, but it certainly stretches over multiple years, as does the analepsis it serves as first narrative to, recounting once more how Shirley and Amma met (232-33; see also chapter 3.2.3). Shirley's remarks on Carole cover about five years in two and a half pages. This finding can be transferred to all of the more linear chapters of type B; they generally feature analepses of above-average speed. This is due to them not being dependent on flashbacks and, resultingly, only employing them to supplement crucial information on characters, typically their condensed life stories, while slower passages and scenes are part of the chronological progression. For instance, in *Dominique*, a chapter mainly comprised of rather slow summaries and scenes separated by ellipses, the only major analepses shed light on Nzinga's childhood and adolescence (Evaristo 77-78), on her first abusive relationship (92), and on her eventual demise (110-11), each moving through many years within just a few dozen lines.

Amma displays a similar diversity of speeds, but its highly fragmented order profoundly affects its rhythm. For a structural analysis, I suggest the following ten narrative units (Appendix C, diagrams E and F): firstly, the sum of all present parts sharing their setting with Amma making her way to and arriving at the theatre (Evaristo 1-5, 22-29) and secondly, these nine analepses: Dominique and Amma getting to know each other, founding a company and being successful (2, 6-22, 25-26), Dominique's life (7-9), Amma's parents (9-12), Amma's night at a black women's group (12-13), the story of Amma and Shirley (26-27), Georgie's life (29-30), Amma and Sylvester at the bar (30-34), the death of Amma's parents (34-36), and Yazz' life (36-40). Contrary to the previous findings for type B chapters, these analepses vary considerably in speed. Thirty lines are spent on Amma's night with Elaine and other black women (12-13), for example, while roughly the same discourse time is used for the decade-long friendship between Shirley and Amma (26-27).

The overall rhythm of *Amma* and all the other chapters of type A is dictated by the re-emerging initial first narrative, which was already found to be essential for the typical order of those chapters. It covers mere hours of story time and separates the fast-paced summaries by frequent interjections of scenes or slower summaries from the present. In *Amma*, for instance, the passages describing Amma's way to the theatre and her thinking about the play and her guests combine for a total of about two and a half pages and extend over no more than a few hours (1-6, 23, 25-26, 28). All the remaining lines assigned to the white column in Appendix B, the initial first narrative, which in the case of *Amma* is synonymous with the present, are

descriptive pauses without an extent in story time. The alternation of fast summaries and the slower present is established early on in the chapter. The introductory passage about Amma walking through London (1) is followed by a brief summary of decades of her professional life (2) and picked up again when Amma approaches the theatre (2-3). This rhythm is maintained throughout the chapter, albeit with a lower frequency, and it also governs duration and speed in *Yazz*, *Carole*, *LaTisha*, *Winsome*, *Hattie* and the *Epilogue*.

While being rhythmically different, these chapters share the wide variety of speeds with the previously analysed chapters of type B. Appendix C again reveals a disparity in the number of segments when comparing story time and discourse time in *Amma* (diagrams E and F). The present parts, Amma's night out with Sylvester, and her night with the group of black women combine for roughly a third of the chapter's lines, yet as the slowest segments of the chapter, covering fewer than twenty-four hours, respectively, they are negligible in story time. Conversely, the lives of Amma's parents and the tale of Amma and Shirley account for the majority of the story time elapsing in *Amma* while being rather short in discourse time. More than forty years pass between Shirley and Amma meeting as eleven-year-olds and the current state of their relationship, yet this episode is contained within two pages, making it one of the fastest in *Girl, Woman, Other* (Evaristo 26-27). Since *Amma* and the other chapters sharing its structure are predominantly analeptic, the pattern found for the speed of analepses in *Shirley*, which were all of above-average speed, cannot be transferred to them; in *Amma*, their speeds vary considerably.

Another similarity lies in the previously described gaps left by analepses in all chapters, and this similarity constitutes an intersection of duration and order (chapter 3.1.1). The majority of analepses in *Girl, Woman, Other* are partial, and the abrupt ending of a partial analepsis is always followed by an ellipsis and the resumption of the respective first narrative (Genette, *ND* 61-62). Ellipses are thus abundant in the novel and in the individual chapters, and they contribute greatly to their pace and the perceived collage-like structure since the ellipses frequently bridge gaps of years or even decades. Chapters of type A in particular feature many ellipses due to their fragmented order rich in analeptic tales.

The twelve main chapters also have in common the relative insignificance of the present. Passages set in the present are generally short, both in story time and in discourse time, and they have or approach either the speed of a scene or of a pause, as has already been demonstrated for *Amma* and the similarly structured chapters. The sizeable blue segment in

diagram E completely vanishing in diagram F's grand scheme of story time is a testament to this observation. In *Shirley*, a chapter of type B, the part set in the present is a scene providing a brief glimpse into an ordinary day in the life of the protagonist; Shirley is lounging on the veranda and thinks about the school year ahead (Evaristo 245). In the same vein, the summary of the eponymous protagonist in *Penelope* spending a day with her daughter's family in the present concludes the chapter (303-06). Thus, the present contributes but a temporal point of reference to the novel, and it is extremely slow in comparison to the average speed of *Girl, Woman, Other*.

The After-party offers a striking change in speed and rhythm after the final of the twelve rapidly moving main chapters concludes. The chapter foregrounds and follows closely the events transpiring in the present. Only a few hours of story time elapse between the end of the play and the intoxicated Amma and Dominique philosophising about the state of feminism (405, 436-38). In any of the preceding chapters, this evening would have been a mere footnote or an analepsis covering a few pages, but in *The After-party*, the present dominates and stretches over more than two thirds of the chapter's thirty-four pages. As has already been established and as is customary in *Girl, Woman, Other*, even *The After-party* contains plenty of analeptic passages. It is here where the aforementioned rift between the speeds of past and present is most pronounced. In the passage outlining the change Yazz brought to Roland's life, for instance, years of story time pass within twenty-seven lines (413-14). This passage is embedded in the description of a hug; for this frame, story time equals discourse time, thus creating a stark temporal contrast, both in order and in speed (413, 416).

In conclusion, speed and rhythm can also be considered parallel and increasingly predictable across the twelve main chapters of the novel, much like their order. Cohesion is once again brought about implicitly, by a structural similarity; every chapter features a short and slow passage set in the present. The extensive parts set in the past vary drastically in their speed. They are generally much faster-paced than the present and range from scenes to summaries and ellipses of multiple decades. Analepses are generally of above-average speed in chapters of type B, while the analepses in chapters of type A vary greatly in speed due to their virtual omnipresence. The latter nonetheless share a unique rhythm dictated by the slow initial first narrative which also governs their order.

3.2.2 Iterative Narrative

Mum worked eight hours a day in paid employment, raised four children, maintained the home, made sure the patriarch's dinner was on the table every night and his shirts were ironed every morning

...

yet every year he gets her the soppiest Valentine card you can buy and ... sits in the kitchen on Sunday evenings listening to albums of Jim Reeves and Charley Pride (11)

Iterative narrative is a fairly common technique in realist novels, and *Girl, Woman, Other* is particularly well-suited to extensive use of iteratives due to its speed and the disparities between story time and discourse time throughout the novel. Iteratives allow the novel to convey abundant information on a character, their life, habits and traits, using only a limited amount of space by telling once what happened multiple times. This technique can be linked to aspects of duration within *Girl, Woman, Other*: I argue that iteratives are particularly common in the fastest passages of the novel, i.e. in summaries, which are commonly used to supply background information on characters and their lives, and their usage decreases with the deceleration of the narrative; scenes thus mainly employ singulatives. Resultingly, iteratives create yet another implicit, structural layer of cohesion through an aspect of temporality.

In *Shirley*, iteratives most notably dominate the section previously titled "Shirley changing," which moves through roughly thirty years of story time (234-44; see also chapter 3.2.1 and Appendix C). Here, iteratives facilitate the description of how Shirley's life changed and how she became increasingly resentful of her job and of the changes made to school as an institution. For instance, her decade-long routine with her husband Lennox is outlined almost entirely in iteratives: he did the cooking, went out on Friday nights and watched football on the weekends, they had sex on Sundays, attended church weekly in order to give their children the possibility of going to a prestigious school, and their daughters were often taken to the sea by their father and their grandmother (Evaristo 242-44). Likewise, Shirley's childhood and the difference in the treatment of her and her older brothers by her parents are illustrated using iteratives (218). In these instances, singular scenes would unnecessarily slow down the narrative and prolong discourse time. Iteratives are thus indispensable for a narrative progressing as rapidly as many parts of *Girl, Woman, Other* do.

This is also apparent in *Amma* and, in fact, in all of the other chapters. One of the prime examples of iterative narrative is the quote above. In the fastest-paced summary of the chapter, Amma describes the relationship of her parents and employs iteratives to express what happened continually throughout the decades of their marriage (11). The same can be said, for instance, about the section in which Winsome recounts the story of how she and Clovis, her husband, met (258-66). The lines in which she tells her granddaughter about the racism she had to endure after migrating to Britain are a particularly good example of iteratives being used to capture in a single utterance what happened repeatedly over the course of months, years or even decades (263). *The After-party* may be regarded as an exception, for it contains only very few iteratives. It has previously been identified as a chapter dominated by the relatively slow progression of the present and is, therefore, expected to be mainly constituted of singulatives. Even where the speed picks up, as in the passage about Roland and Yazz (413-14), iteratives remain rare.

Although they become increasingly rare with decreasing speed, iteratives may also occasionally be found in scenes and slower summaries. In *Amma*, for example, the eponymous protagonist reminisces about her daughter, Yazz, and yearns for her presence by stringing together things she used to do at home (39-40). When the staff room and some of the colleagues are described in *Shirley*, external iterations are used to supply background information on the relationships Shirley has with some of the other teachers (224-25). Generally, however, these sections are characterised by singulative narrative, as is also exemplified by the entirety of *The After-party* or the scenes in the initial first narrative in *Amma*. Therefore, the frequency of iteratives in a given narrative unit is indeed proportional to its speed, creating cohesion by means of the structural similarity of these parts throughout the novel; while faster sequences feature more iteratives, slower ones tend to employ singulatives.

3.2.3 Repeating Narrative

Shirley never had a negative thing to say about her sexuality (27)

Amma came out as lesbian to Shirley at sixteen

which was initially quite disgusting

it felt like a betrayal of their friendship although Shirley never let on her true feelings

because she didn't want to hurt Amma (232)

Repeating narrative is an overt, readily apparent cohesive device in *Girl, Woman, Other* rather than a more obscure underlying structure like the previously discussed aspects of order,

duration, and frequency. Many of the twelve main characters featured in the novel's twelve chapters are relatives, friends, colleagues or in some other way connected to one another. As a result, the individual chapters, despite telling the story of one of the characters, always feature at least one and usually two to three of the other main characters, with Shirley being connected to as many as eight of the remaining eleven. As a result of these relationships and the multiple appearances of characters, the novel routinely tells multiple times from different points of view what happened only once, thus linking its chapters by repetition.

Shirley is a central character to the novel, both in terms of the position of her chapter and in terms of her relationships with the other characters. *Shirley* is the seventh out of twelve main chapters, occupying the pages in the very middle of the novel; a prominent position which corresponds to the significance of the character it focusses on. Shirley is Winsome's daughter and one of Amma's best and oldest friends, thereby being acquainted with Dominique, whom she shares a mutual dislike with, and Yazz, whom she babysat in the past. Furthermore, Shirley is Penelope's colleague and a former teacher of LaTisha's and Carole's, also connecting her to Bummi, Carole's mother, who is delighted for her daughter to be Shirley's protégé.

Consequently, *Shirley* contains many passages that are repeated in other chapters from the point of view of other characters (Appendix D). Most notably for this analysis, *Shirley* and *Amma* are linked by multiple instances of repeating narrative. One of the most striking examples, showing the potential of repetition for the juxtaposition of conflicting views on the same subject or event, is the quote that opened this chapter. It reveals, some two hundred pages after Amma expresses her gratitude for her friend's tolerance, how Shirley secretly disapproves of Amma's sexuality. This unresolved dissonance between the two characters is brought up again by Dominique in *The After-party*, when she calls Shirley a "closet homophobe" (430), creating a threefold repetition that spans the entire novel.

The link between *Shirley* and *Carole* is another prime example of how repetition works as a cohesive device in *Girl, Woman, Other*. Carole had been a diligent student until she became reclusive following Trey and his friends raping her (Evaristo 125-27). Eventually, she turned to Shirley for help (129-30). This process is reflected on in *Bummi* (154-55), the chapter about Carole's mother, and by LaTisha, one of Carole's former classmates, who considered her change of character a betrayal of her peer group's values (201). In *Shirley*, Carole's story is portrayed from the teacher's perspective, and Shirley voices her disappointment about the lack of gratitude by Carole (248), which is elaborated on from both perspectives when Carole and

Shirley meet towards the end of the novel (420, 422). This example is thus much denser than the aforementioned repetition in *Shirley* and *Amma*, repeating four times in just over one hundred pages the story — or parts of the story — of Shirley and her protégé, which is eventually brought to a conclusion during *The After-party*.

Apart from these overarching repetitions connecting several chapters, *Girl, Woman, Other* is also interspersed with many more subtle repetitions of seemingly minor details that nevertheless lend cohesion to the novel. For instance, Amma reveals that she and the two women she is involved in a love triangle with occasionally have sex together (22). In the following chapter, Amma's daughter Yazz is pondering the possibility of this transpiring in horror (52). Amma also tries to justify the one-sided friendship with Shirley by claiming that she has made Shirley's rather dull life more exciting (27), which Shirley confirms to be true in a conversation with her husband, Lennox (233). Another example serves as a characterisation of Shirley, who thinks she is doing her mother a favour by spending the summer at her house since Winsome supposedly finds purpose and joy in helping others (245). However, only a few pages later, Winsome is revealed to be weary of her daughter's inconsiderate behaviour and the responsibilities for others she has had for her entire life (250, 257).

These examples illustrate how *Amma* and *Shirley* reach far into many other chapters, yet repeating narrative is a device used in all chapters throughout the novel, giving *Girl, Woman, Other* a rich bone structure of explicit connections. Each of the four triplets of chapters features a mother and their daughter. The third chapter in triplets one to three tells the story of a friend of either mother or daughter, while the first chapter of the fourth triplet focusses on Morgan, the great-grandchild of Hattie, who is Grace's daughter. The majority of repetitions are of the more subtle, smaller-scale type and, as a result of the relationships between the characters, occur within the frame of these triplets of chapters. Repetitions that transcend the respective triplet are rare and almost exclusively involve *Amma* or *Shirley*.

In relation to this dimension of temporality, *Dominique* is an outlier among the chapters of *Girl, Woman, Other*. It tells the story of why Dominique, Amma's best friend, left Britain for America and what happened thereafter, and that story is largely self-contained; none of its parts are repeated anywhere else in the novel. However, Dominique is a central character in *Amma*, where her childhood and professional life are explored, and also appears prominently in *The After-party*, compensating for her own chapter's lack of repetitions. On the other end of the spectrum lies *Shirley*, a chapter which, as has already been established, contains more

instances of repeating narrative than any other, making it the centrepiece of the novel in that regard.

In addition to these large-scale and small-scale repetitions, the frame narrative of *Girl, Woman, Other*, the opening night of Amma Bonsu's play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, at the National Theatre in London, is a frequently recurring element in its own right. It is not an instance of repeating narrative per se, yet it is alluded to in multiple chapters from different points of view, lending it at the very least a repetitive character. *Amma*, the first chapter of the novel, following the director of the play, opens up the frame (1). It then emerges again in *Yazz*, a chapter that is itself framed by the opening night of the play (41, 74), *Carole* (146) and *Megan/Morgan* (329), before closing in *The After-party* and being mentioned one last time in the *Epilogue* (439). Thus, the frame narrative does not only establish a context for the main narrative, but it also serves as a cohesive device throughout the novel by virtue of its re-emergence, much like the initial first narrative in chapters of type A.

4. Conclusion

After praising its composition, its readability and the "rich and textured account of life in Britain" it succeeds in depicting, Will Gompertz turns to the novel's final third and adds to his overall favourable review a critical remark: "The once effervescent *Girl, Woman, Other* becomes a bit monotonous, a tad formulaic; a little predictable." While Gompertz' criticism is understandable in so far that the final triplet of character portraits, which he describes metaphorically as "three more passengers squeezing on to an already packed railway carriage," could have reasonably been replaced by an advancement of the plot in the present, weaving together the paths of the nine characters introduced up to that point, it is precisely this predictability that constitutes *Girl, Woman, Other's* unique feature, the structural heart it cannot derive from its plot. Without it, the novel would lose most of its appeal, particularly its appeal to a more casual readership, and it probably would not have received its numerous accolades.

Girl, Woman, Other's lexical cohesion stems from the patterns, parallels and recurrences in its temporal structure, which are also at the root of the novel's predictability. This thesis has uncovered these aspects of temporality by investigating *Amma, Shirley* and selected passages from other chapters. In order to conclude my findings, I would like to return to the hypothetical thirteenth main chapter mentioned earlier. The cohesion and, in turn, the very predictability brought about by time in the novel allows for several assumptions about

such a chapter. It would most certainly share one of the two types of ordering presented in chapter 3.1, which are governed by the structure of the respective initial first narrative and the anachronies. A thirteenth main chapter of type A would employ an abundance of analepses of varying speeds. Here, the initial first narrative would dictate order and rhythm of the chapter. Conversely, a chapter of type B would only rarely resort to analeptic tales, prioritising a chronological progression from past to present. These rare analepses would, however, generally be of above-average speed.

In any case, this hypothetical chapter would display a great variety of different speeds, with the past taking up the vast majority of story time and discourse time and telling the story of the chapter's protagonist, making extensive use of summaries and thereby moving rapidly. The comparatively slow present would recede into the background and serves as a mere temporal point of reference in a chapter of type A or as the endpoint of a chronological progression in a chapter of type B. Furthermore, most of the analepses would be external and partial, returning to their respective first narratives after an ellipsis. The frequency of iteratives would generally be proportional to the speed of a given passage, and repeating narrative, as the only overt cohesive device accessible to any attentive reader, would likely link the chapter explicitly to multiple others by offering new viewpoints on events or subjects already considered earlier in the novel.

This is thus the temporal bone structure upon which the novel is built. The aspects of order, duration, and frequency do indeed compensate for the lack of a conventional plot in *Girl, Woman, Other* and establish cohesion in this plotless collage. The patterns and parallels found in the temporal structure of the novel tie it together, and a hypothetical thirteenth main chapter could be expected to exhibit most of these characteristics. In fact, by the third triplet, the novel has already displayed its full range of temporal structures and later chapters conform to them, with the exception of the rather unique status of the present in *The After-party*. This thesis has therefore achieved its aim of uncovering how *Girl, Woman, Other* succeeds in appearing as a cohesive whole, thereby laying the groundwork for further scholarly investigations of the novel.

Appendix A

Order: Macrostructure of the Chapters in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

Chapter (pages)	Macrostructural description of order
<i>Amma</i> (1-40)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic with frequent interjections of initial first narrative
<i>Yazz</i> (41-74)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic with frequent interjections of spatially inconsistent first narrative
<i>Dominique</i> (75-112)	Type B: Chronological progression towards the present, few interjections of analepses
<i>Carole</i> (113-49)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic with frequent interjections of initial first narrative
<i>Bummi</i> (150-88)	Hybrid: Largely chronological progression <i>and</i> majority of the chapter analeptic
<i>LaTisha</i> (189-216)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic with frequent interjections of initial first narrative
<i>Shirley</i> (217-48)	Type B: Chronological progression towards the present, few interjections of analepses
<i>Winsome</i> (249-75)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic with frequent interjections of initial first narrative
<i>Penelope</i> (276-306)	Type B: Chronological progression towards the present, few interjections of analepses
<i>Megan/Morgan</i> (307-40)	Type B: Chronological progression towards the present, few interjections of analepses
<i>Hattie</i> (341-71)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic with frequent interjections of initial first narrative
<i>Grace</i> (372-404)	Type B: Chronological progression towards the present, few interjections of analepses
<i>The After-Party</i> (405-38)	Type B: Chronological progression <i>in</i> the present, few interjections of analepses
<i>Epilogue</i> (439-52)	Type A: Majority of the chapter analeptic, framed by first narrative, single interjection

Appendix B

Order: Anachronies in *Amma* and *Shirley*.

The numbers indicate pages (left column) and lines (remaining columns).

<i>Amma</i> (1-40)	prolepsis	initial first narrative	analepses			
1	12-13	1-11				
2		1 25-28	2-18 19-24	19		
3		1-2 7-22 28-29	3-6 23-27			
4		1-5 18-28	6-17			
5		1-17 26-28	18-25			
6		1-3 5	3-4 6-26	27-29		
7			6-10	1-5 11-27		
8				1-9		

8			10-11	12-27		
9			5-6	1-4 6-15	16-28	
10			16-17 21-25	5-16 18-20 26-27	1-4	
11			15-18 22-27	1-8 19-21	9-14	
12			1-2 9-10 14-18	3-8 10-11 18-19 20-28	11-13 19	
13			23-27	1-22		
14			1-25			
15			1-27			
16	14-15		1-14 16-28			

17			1-28			
18			1-28			
19			1-29			
20			1-26			
21			1-21	22-29		
22		6-20	3-5 20-27	1-2		
23		5-24	1-4			
24		1-2 28-29	3-27			
25		1-25	26-28			
26		9-12	1-2 12-29	3-8		
27		26-28	1-25 28			
28		17 23-28	1-16 17-22			
29		1-11	12-27			
30		6	1-5 6-16			

30		17-22	23-27			
31		8-13	1 14	1-7 14-29		
32		2-6	7-28	1		
33			1-3 6-15 18-30	3-6 15-17		
34			1-5	5-7	8 12-25	8-11
35					1-8 10-15 15-16 24 28	8-9 15 17-23 24-28
36		7	8-12		3-6	1-2

36			17-24	12-16		
37		17-22	1-16 23-28			
38			1-17 20-29	18-19		
39		8 17-28	1-7 9-10 11-16	10-11		
40		1-6 8-14	6-7			

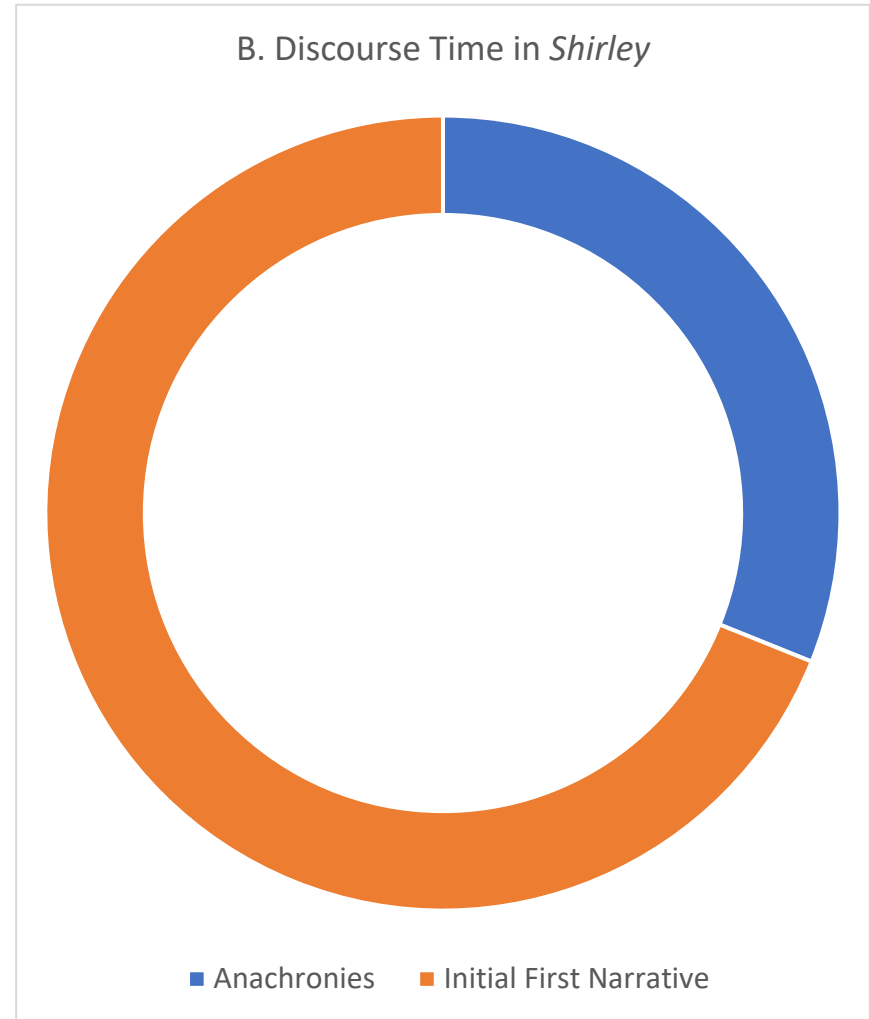
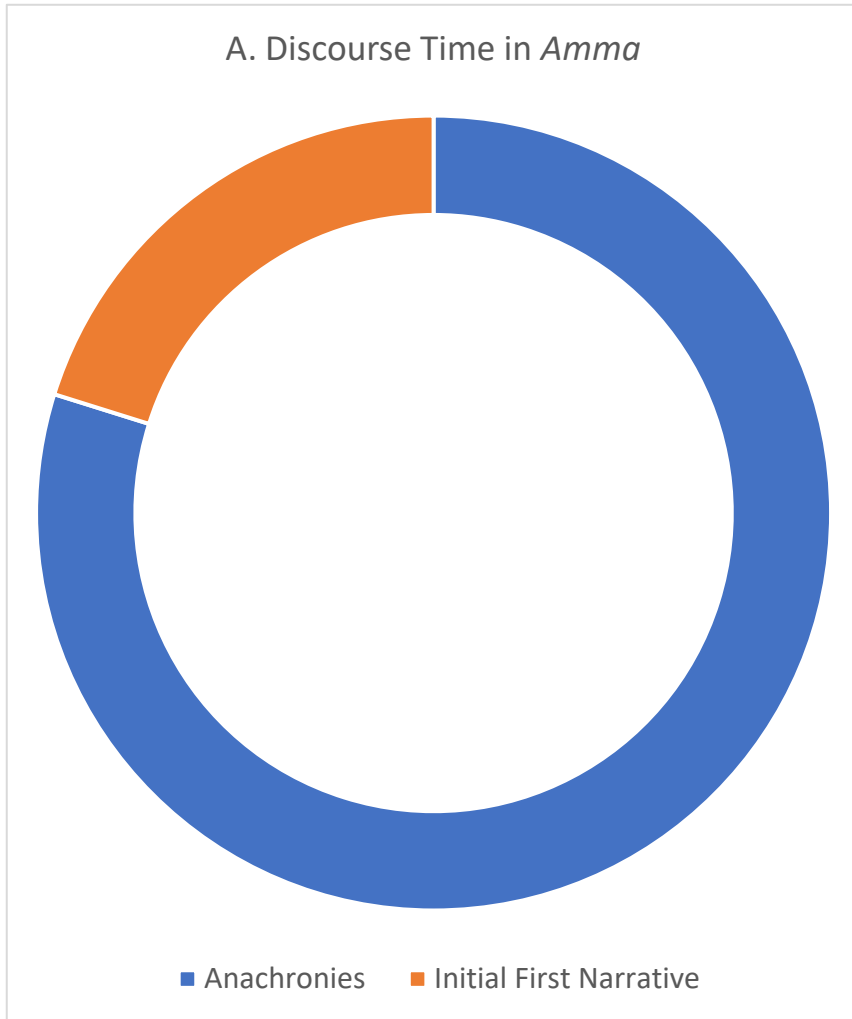
<i>Shirley</i> (217-48)	prolepsis	initial first narrative	analepses			
217		1-14				
218		1-8 11	8-10 12-29			
219	13-14	2-12 15-25	1 25-28			
220		3-30	1-2			
221		1-29				
222		1-25				
223		1-20 23-27	21-22			
224		1-27	28-29			
225		3-27	1-2			
226		1-28				
227		1-19 23-25	20-22			
228		1-17 24-27	18-23			
229	21-22	1-21	23-28			

230			1-2 29-30	3-29 30		
231			17-27	1-14	15-16	
232			1-3	4-28		
233		8-26		1-8		
234		1-2 10 11-26	3-9 10-11			
235		1-30				
236		1-27				
237		1-22 25-28	23-25			
238		1-28				
239		1-29				
240		1-10 12-29	10-11			
241		1-7 12-27	7-11			
242		1-2 7	3-7 8-16			

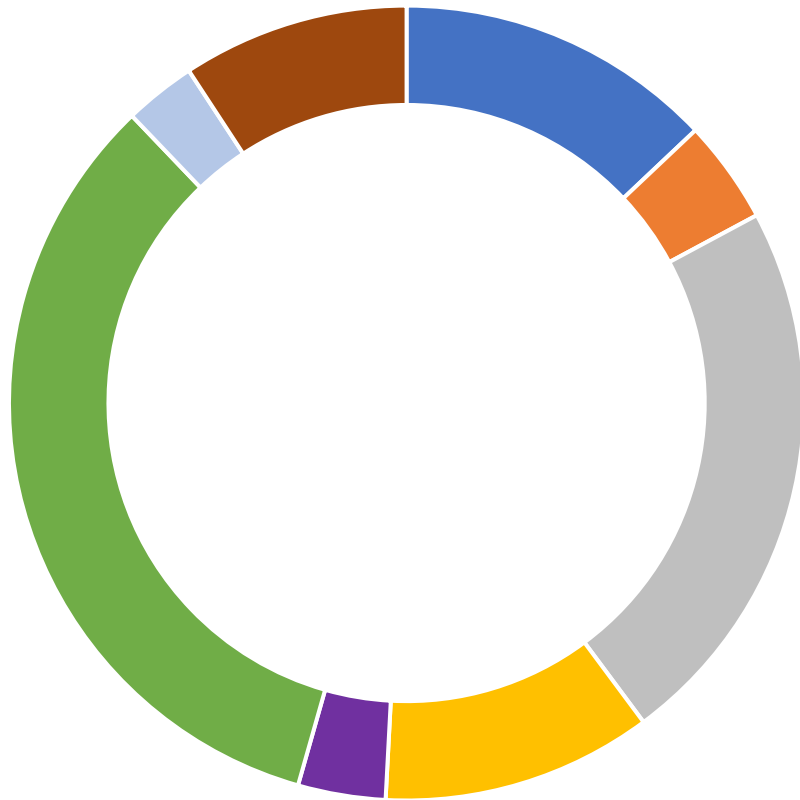
242		17-28				
243		1-8 21-26	9-20			
244		24-28	1-23			
245		1-23	24-26			
246			1-8 11-29	9-10		
247			1-28			
248		5-9 11-19	1-4 10			

Appendix C

Duration: Discourse Time and Story Time in *Amma* and *Shirley*.

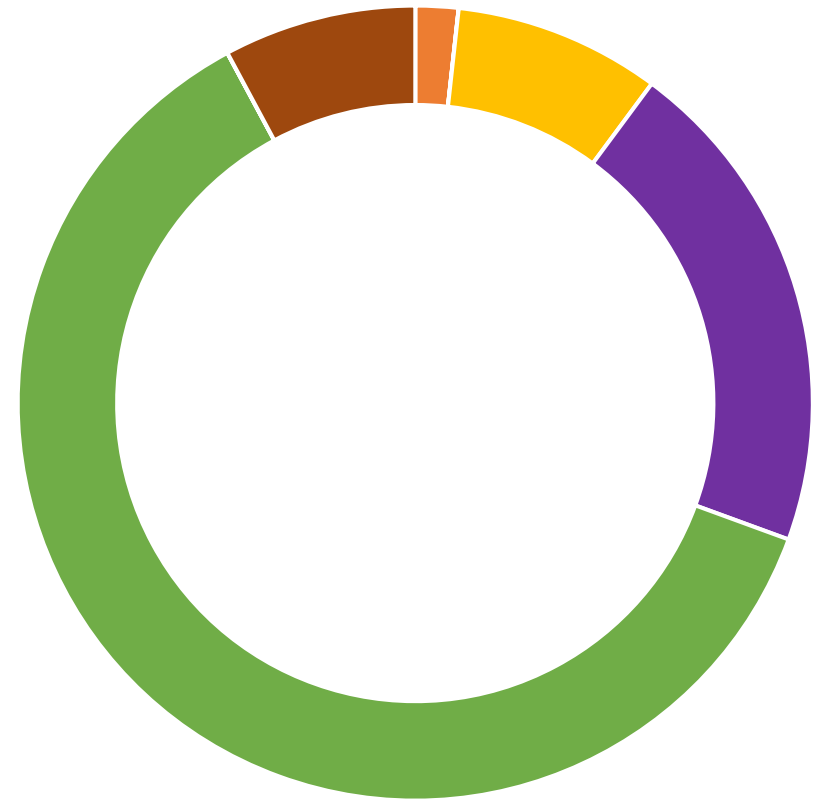


C. Discourse Time in Shirley



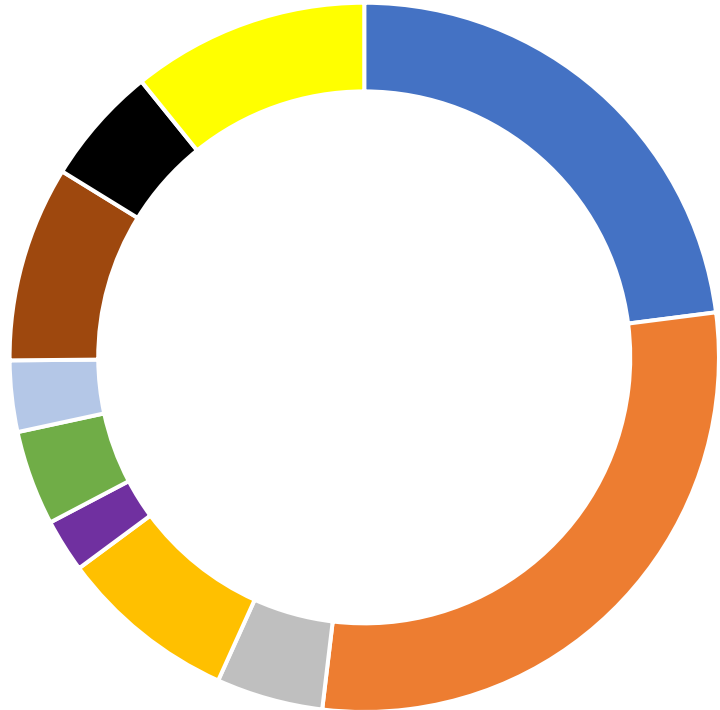
- First day
- First year
- Staff meeting
- Shirley, Lennox
- Shirley, Amma
- Shirley changing
- Holidays
- Carole

D. Story Time in Shirley



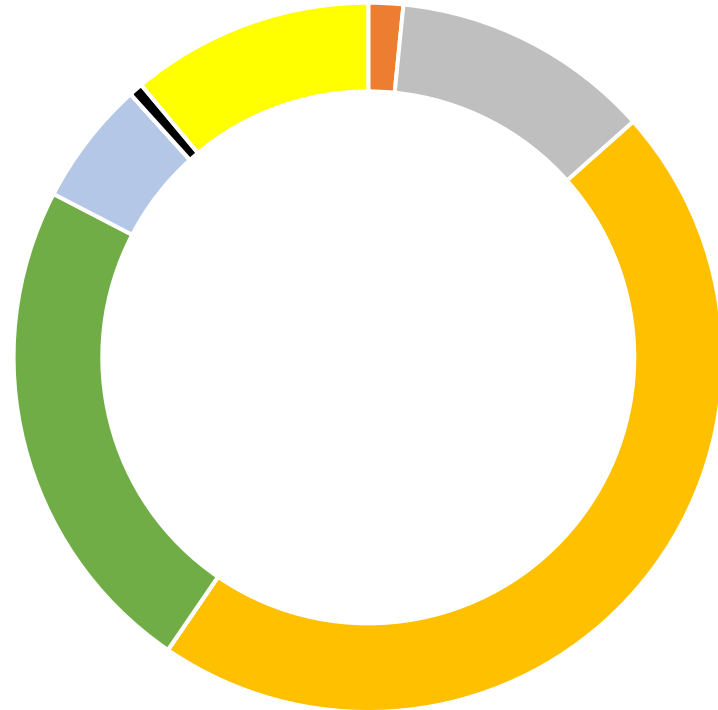
- First day
- First year
- Staff meeting
- Shirley, Lennox
- Shirley, Amma
- Shirley changing
- Holidays
- Carole

E. Discourse Time in *Amma*



- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| ■ Present | ■ Dominique, company |
| ■ Dominique's life | ■ Amma's parents |
| ■ Women's group | ■ Amma, Shirley |
| ■ Georgie | ■ Amma, Sylvester |
| ■ Parents' death | ■ Yazz' life |

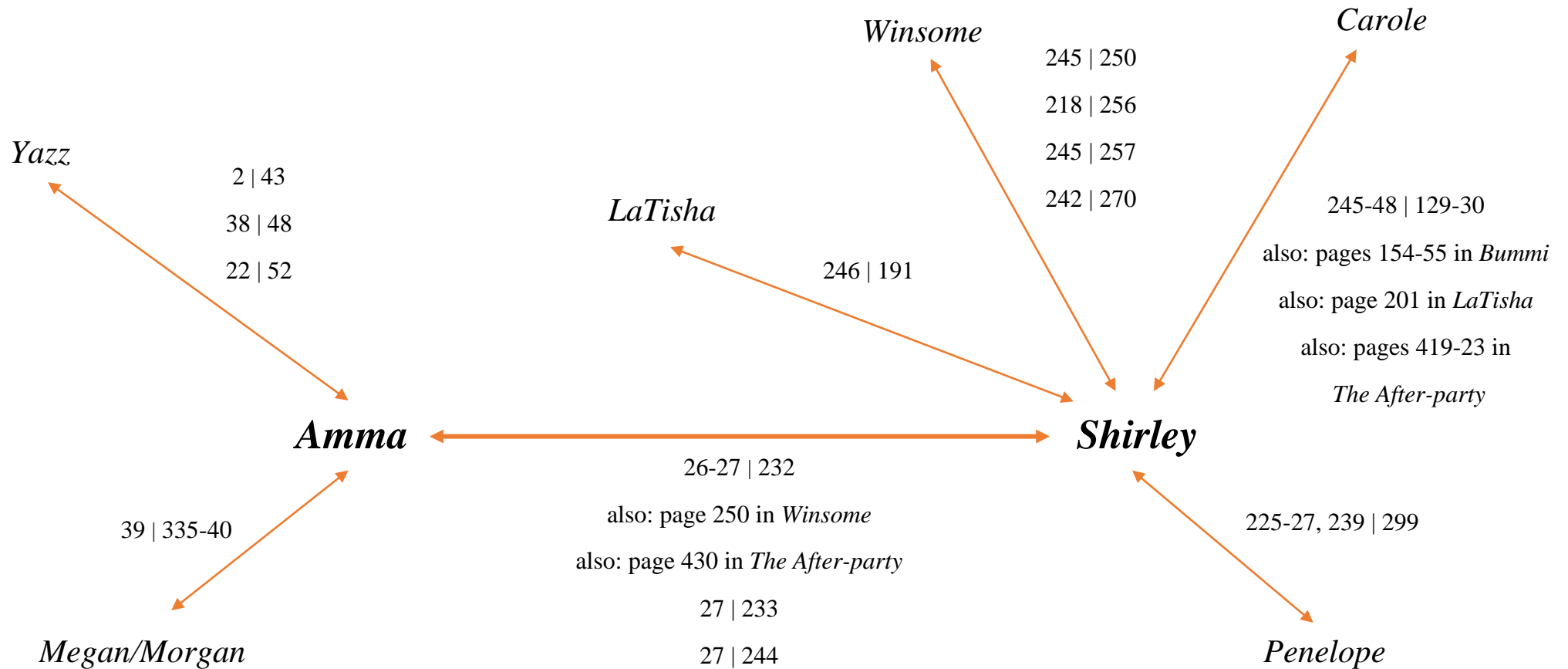
F. Story Time in *Amma*



- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| ■ Present | ■ Dominique, company |
| ■ Dominique's life | ■ Amma's parents |
| ■ Women's group | ■ Amma, Shirley |
| ■ Georgie | ■ Amma, Sylvester |
| ■ Parents' death | ■ Yazz' life |

Appendix D

Frequency: Instances of Repeating Narrative Involving *Amma* or *Shirley*.



Key

A | B The first page number (A) refers to the passage in *Amma* or *Shirley*. The second one (B) can be found in the chapter indicated by the arrow.

also: Passages from other chapters that refer to the particular instance of repeated narration above but do not warrant a connection in their own right.

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I hereby declare that I, [name], wrote the enclosed final thesis titled *Representations of Time in Bernardine Evaristo's Novel Girl, Woman, Other (2019)* myself and referenced all the sources and resources used to complete it. I have not submitted the enclosed final thesis for another class, module or any other means to obtain credit before. I consent to my final thesis being submitted to external agencies for testing using plagiarism detection software.

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit von Name (Matr.nr. x)

Herr Vorname Nachname hat zum Abschluss seines Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema "Representations of Time in Bernardine Evaristo's Novel *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)" vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen sehr gut erfüllt. Die Arbeit folgt in ihrer Gliederung den Vorgaben. Die dreizehn arbeitsintensiven graphischen Darstellungen in drei Anhängen gehen dann deutlich darüber hinaus und zeigen anschaulich die Zeitstrukturen des Romans.

10.10.2022

Das **1. Kapitel**, die „Introduction“, führt sehr gut in den Gegenstand und das Erkenntnisinteresse der Arbeit ein. Sie beschäftigt sich mit einem aktuellen Roman, zu dem es bisher kaum Sekundärliteratur, sondern nur (vor allem lobende) Rezensionen gibt. Der Verf. wählt einen strukturorientierten Zugriff auf den Text und untersucht dessen Zeitstruktur. Damit betritt er wissenschaftliches Neuland und legt eine originelle Studie vor, die das Niveau einer Bachelorarbeit deutlich übersteigt. Das zeigt sich daran, dass es dem Verf. gelingt, die narratologischen Kategorien der Zeitdarstellung aus Genette zielführend auf den Roman zu übertragen und sinnvoll zu erweitern. Mit Blick auf die generische Besonderheit dieses realistischen Romans formuliert er eine zentrale These, die seine Argumentation klar strukturiert: „I argue that Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Girl, Woman, Other* works as an essentially plotless collage because it derives cohesion from its temporal structure, i.e. from aspects of order, duration and frequency.“ (3) Um das Fehlen einer verbindenden Handlung auszugleichen und für das Lesepublikum nachvollziehbar zu bleiben, operiert der fiktionale Text mit sich wiederholenden zeitlichen Mustern (4). Der Verf. arbeitet diese an zwei Romankapiteln exemplarisch heraus und skizziert sie bereits hier sehr klar.

Im **2. Kapitel** zu „Theory and Method“ legt der Verf. die theoretischen Grundlagen seiner Analyse und entwickelt die zentrale Forschungsfrage zu den Zeitstrukturen des Romans. Er referiert Genette, ergänzt um kürzere einschlägige Beiträge u.a. von Fludernik, und belegt, dass er sich des grundlegenden methodologischen Problems der Nicht/Messbarkeit von *discourse time* sowie der nur vagen Bestimmbarkeit von *story time* bewusst ist (6). Diese Kategorien sind grundlegend für die Analyse der erzählerischen Anordnung des Geschehens (*order*), der Dauer bzw. Geschwindigkeit des Erzählens (*duration*) und der Häufigkeit (*frequency*), mit der Ereignisse erzählt werden. Er führt seine Leserinnen in den Gebrauch der Anhänge ein, auf die er auch im 3. Kapitel immer wieder verweist, so dass diese sehr gut in das Argument eingebunden sind. Der Verf. beschreibt im Folgenden seine Vorgehensweise und

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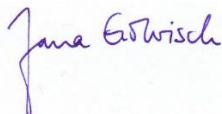
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begründet die Abfolge der Arbeitsschritte (7f). Zu den bereits eingeführten Begriffen fügt er sehr sinnvoll mit „initial first narrative“ einen eigenen Begriff hinzu, der ihm als Bezugsgröße für *order* dient (7): „Following its traces throughout the chapters works exceptionally well when analysing the two types of macrostructures since the frequency of digression from the initial first narrative by means of anachronies is what sets them apart.“ (7)

Das **3. Kapitel** zu „Exploring Time and Cohesion in *Girl, Woman, Other*“ beginnt mit Forschungsfragen, die um den Zusammenhalt des Romans kreisen, der keine durchgehende Geschichte erzählt, sondern durch seine sich wiederholenden Zeitstrukturen Zusammenhänge herstellt. Diese behandelt der Verf. in zwei Unterkapiteln: In **3.1** geht es um „Patterns in Order and Anachronies“ mit zwei Unterkapiteln zu Typ A und Typ B, während **3.2** in drei Unterkapiteln dann „Implicit and Explicit Links through Duration and Frequency“ behandelt und sich dabei den verschiedenen technischen Möglichkeiten widmet, das Erzähltempo zu steigern oder zu reduzieren. Die Darstellung dieser komplexen Sachverhalte gelingt dem Verf. ganz ausgezeichnet, denn er schreibt sachlogisch klar und ruhig. Er vermeidet erfolgreich jegliche Nacherzählungen der Handlungselemente, die er stattdessen prägnant zusammenfasst (14). Er lotet zunächst die Gemeinsamkeiten der Kapitel aus, stellt die Merkmale der einzelnen Typen an je einem Musterkapitel vor, ordnet dann die anderen Kapitel zu und klassifiziert die Ausnahmen. Er zitiert ausgewählt und zielführend aus dem Roman, um seine Befunde zu verdeutlichen. In Verbindung mit den Anhängen werden die gegenläufigen Zeitstrukturen der beiden Typen plastisch sichtbar (z.B. 14ff, 18ff). Beide Kapitel enden mit einer Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse, die dann auch im Zentrum des **4. Kapitels**, der „Conclusion“ steht und die zu Beginn eine im 1. Kapitel zitierte Rezension aufgreift. Basierend auf seinen Ergebnissen kann der Verf. die kritische Anmerkung des Rezensenten, der Roman wiederhole sich zum Ende hin und sei daher vorhersehbar (27f), bejahen und erklären – und zwar ganz sachlich und strukturbasiert.

Die **Bibliographie** entspricht dem *MLA Stylesheet*. Sie enthält nur sehr wenige Angaben, vor allem Einträge aus Lexika und die beiden narratologischen Standardwerke von Genette, auf die sich der Verf. methodologisch stützt. Leider fehlen die beiden in der „Introduction“ erwähnten Aufsätze von Courtois und Sarikaya-Sen zum Roman (3). Im Text wird 1983 als Erscheinungsdatum für Genettes *Narrative Discourse Revisited* genannt (4), während in der Bibliographie 1988 steht. **Das Englische** ist fast fehlerfrei und liest sich absolut idiomatisch. Der Ton ist angenehm unprätentiös und nüchtern; der Ausdruck präzise und so dem Gegenstand und der Methode der Untersuchung sehr angemessen.

Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,0 (sehr gut)** bewertet.



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Englisches Seminar

Bachelorarbeit

Hannah Pardey (M.A.)

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WiSe 2020/21

**Reframing Detective Fiction:
Orientalist Constructions in Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937)**

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1. Introduction

Agatha Christie's works are widely known, not least because of numerous stage and TV adaptations, which have made the source material accessible for various audiences of different generations and cultures. She published 67 novels and 117 short stories during her lifetime, which have been sold more than two billion times, making her listed as the bestselling fiction writer of all time by *Guinness World Records*. In 1971, she was made Dame Commander for her contributions to literature by Queen Elisabeth II. These aspects underline and emphasise the continued popularity and influence her writing had in the past and still maintains today, which demonstrates her secure place in popular culture through time.

Agatha Christie's works have been "regarded as archetypically British" (Plain 4) and are part of the second Golden Age of crime fiction. Being one of the foremost female authors during the period, she was termed one of the 'Queens of Crime', next to Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham. Through her continuous work, Christie helped to establish "a female presence in crime writing" (Cuddon 169) and is considered to be a "purveyor of middle-brow fiction" (435). In general, the term 'middlebrow' is laced "with contempt" and deemed as "conservative, unoriginal and smug" (435). Nowadays, middlebrow studies are established "as a literary-historical critical mode" (Ehland and Gohrisch 7) due to the pioneering works of literary scholars such as Nicola Humble. With her seminal study *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* (2001), she sought out to "rehabilitate the middle-brow novel and defend it from elite condescension" (Cuddon 435).

While the genre of detective fiction is a central concern of literary studies, Agatha Christie's works are "often dismissed as predictable, easy, middlebrow genre writing" (Atia, 90). They have yet to win a secure place in the canon (Lassner 31). Alison Light reflects that "[t]here is something about Agatha Christie [...] which seems to mark her out for an especially cold shoulder and the particularly gratuitous insult" (63-64). Kaplan tries to explain the lack of academic studies by arguing: "[E]ven amongst feminist critics an unacknowledged *cordon sanitaire* has been drawn" to distinguish Christie and her work, from her "more 'literary' sisters" (145). Still, some scholars, such as Earl F. Bargainnier, Cora Kaplan, Susan Rowland, Allison Light, Phyllis Lassner, and Nadia Atia, among others, have approached Christie and her works in their studies. Even though Rowland, Light, Lassner, and Atia read some of her work through a postcolonial lens, there is still a lack of attention towards this field of study. Therefore, this paper focuses on one of Christie's hitherto neglected detective novels, *Death on*

the Nile (1937). While most academic studies investigate Christie's work in relation to the genre of detective fiction, this paper aims to add a postcolonial investigation for one of her novels.

The novel *Death on the Nile* (1937) is one of Christie's best-known works. It is based on one of her short stories, *Death on the Nile*, which was published in the short story collection *Parker Pyne Investigates* in 1934. Unlike the short story, the novel features the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, who was already a well-established character by the time the novel was published. He is Christie's most famous detective, a quirky foreigner, whom she created during a heightened state of xenophobia in interwar Britain. Poirot appeared in popular works of Christie's, such as *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), or *Five little Pigs* (1942). Overall, he appeared in 33 novels, two plays and 52 short stories as the principal detective figure. *Death on the Nile* remains one of Poirot's most famous cases and has been adapted many times for film, stage, radio, television, and even anime. A recent film adaptation, with Kenneth Branagh as Poirot, has been scheduled for release in late 2021, following the success of 20th Century Fox's 2017 adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*, which also featured Branagh.

Death on the Nile is set in Egypt on a tourist cruise along the Nile. The novel's setting was inspired by Christie's own travel experiences with her husband Sir Edgar Lucien Mallowan, a well-known British archaeologist.¹ It was published in 1937, during the interwar period, which is often titled the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction. The Golden Age spanned from the late 1920s until 1939, involving critical historical moments in Britain such as the Great Depression, two World Wars, as well as significant changes to the British class system.

This thesis aims to 'reframe' a classic detective fiction novel into a postcolonial perspective in order to contribute to the hitherto rare and insufficient scholarly works to investigate the novel through a postcolonial lens. Hence, I argue that Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* encases the murder plot with oriental, racial, and cultural stereotypes. The Orientalist construction of the novel functions to create a simplified and ahistorical image of the Orient and thereby provides an 'exotic' shelter appealing to the armchair tourist between the wars. In concentrating on Said's *Orientalism*, this thesis has a threefold set of purposes. It aims, first, to examine the genre conventions of detective fiction and the murder plot of the novel. A second concern will be to consider stereotypical Orientalist constructions and how they encase the murder plot. Particular attention will be drawn to the 'oriental backdrop', which

¹ In her foreword of *Death on the Nile* Christie recounts that the novel was "written after coming back from a winter in Egypt. When I read it now, I feel myself back again on the steamer from Aswan to Wadi Halfa" (vii). This emphasises her upper-middle-class status, for she is well travelled and draws on her own experiences for her foreign travel novels.

is assembled through Orientalist constructions. Subsequently, the functions of the oriental backdrop and its appeal for the armchair tourist during the interwar period will be examined. To conclude this thesis, I will provide an overview regarding the diverse claims I have made in the individual chapters and suggest potential for further investigation.

2. Theory and Method

I will divide the theory and method chapter into two subchapters. To begin with, I will establish the general theoretical framework of this thesis by defining crucial terms and themes of postcolonial studies. The focus thereby will be set on Said's concept of 'Orientalism', which I will employ during the profound examination of Oriental constructions within the novel. In addition to that, I will define and discuss the context-oriented concepts of 'silenced history', 'armchair tourism' as well as the 'exotic shelter'. The second subchapter will deal with the methodology of my thesis. In it, I will define genre conventions of classical detective fiction as well as give an overview of the genre's historical context.

2.1. Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial Criticism's academic field emerged during the 1990s and tries to shift dominant Western perspectives upon the colonised voices that have been neglected so far (Young 2). As McLeod states: "[r]ethinking the conventional modes of reading and thinking [...] is fundamental to postcolonialism" (40). Due to its "subversive posture towards the canon, in celebrating the neglected or marginalized" (Walder 60), postcolonialism does not only refer to a specific selection of texts but moreover functions as powerful reading practice (Ashcroft et al. 193). "Postcolonial critics are concerned with the impact of colonialism" and show through the analysis of literature "how colonial ideas are transmitted through writing, which often involves a rereading of Western texts in order to expose the biases operating in what it claimed to be universal humanism" (Cuddon 551).

Edward Said is considered to be one of the founders of the academic field of Postcolonial Studies. With his major work *Orientalism* (1978), he pioneered colonial discourse analysis influenced by Gramsci, Fanon, Foucault, and others. *Orientalism* is a critique of the cultural representations which are the basis of Orientalism, that is, of how the Western world has perceived the Middle East in order to justify its colonial rule and exploitation. Much of the colonial discourse has been "partial and prejudiced," and "[m]uch of it is marred by racism, naivety, presumption and plain ignorance, and there [is] often facile generalization" (Cuddon 500). As Huggan concludes:

[w]hile postcolonial literatures may be simply defined as those English-language writings which have emerged from the former colonies of the British Empire, the term ‘postcolonial’ clearly has a wider valency. On one level, it refers to an ongoing process of ‘cultural embattlement’ (Suleri 1992b): postcolonialism, in this context, denotes an ‘index of resistance, a perceived imperative to rewrite the social text of continuing imperial dominance’ (Huggan 1996:3). On another level, though, the term also circulates as a token of cultural value; it functions as a sales-tag in the context of today’s globalised commodity culture. (ix)

The academic field of Postcolonial Criticism focusses on two main groups of written texts. Its primary focus lies on postcolonial texts written by authors from former colonies, while an additional focus lies on rereading canonical texts “in the light of post-colonial discursive practices [which] [...] has begun, more recently, to produce powerfully, subversive general accounts of textuality and concepts of ‘literariness’ which open up important new areas of concern” (Ashcroft et al. 194).

This thesis focuses on the latter one, a novel about the Orient written by a Western author. To substantiate my thesis, I will adopt a postcolonial perspective to analyse Christie’s *Death on the Nile*. I will examine the novel’s Orientalist constructions by employing Said’s concept of ‘Orientalism’, which I will further elaborate on in the next subchapter.

2.1.1. ‘Orientalism’

Said’s work *Orientalism* (1978) is an elective study of how “the Western image of the Orient has been constructed by generations of writers and scholars, who thereby legitimated imperial penetration and control” (Walder 70). Said delineates “the Orient [as] one of [Europe’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (*Orientalism* 1), which has been fundamental in defining the West “as its contrasting image, idea, personality [and] experience” (2). The collective noun ‘Orient’ “has been used to homogenise and refer to these places” (McLeod 47). In general, ‘Orientalism’ “refers to the sum of the *West*’s representation of the Orient” (47), in which the Orient is characterised as everything the West is not. Fundamental to these representations of the Orient are the binary oppositions on which the Orient and the Occident are constructed. Through the construction of binary oppositions, inescapably, stereotypes, simplifications and generalisations are created. These binary oppositions include, according to Childs, “one member [...] which is evaluated positively (e.g. white) and the other negatively (e.g. black)” (217). As Bhabha, who works with a similar set of theories, adds:

the stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (107)

In ‘Orientalism’, Said asserts that in Western culture, the Orient is often shown as inferior and described negatively to underline the West’s superiority and strength (McLeod 49). The vital notion thereby is that the “Western views of the Orient are not based on what may actually exist in Oriental lands, but result from the West’s dreams, fantasies, and assumptions about what this apparently radically different, contrasting place contains” (50). ‘Orientalism’ is a term “pertaining to the Orient as discovered, recorded, described, defined, imagined, produced and, in a sense ‘invented’ by Europe and the West” (Cuddon 497). As McLeod further elaborates:

Looking particularly at representations of Egypt and the Middle East in a variety of written materials, Said pointed out that rarely did Western travellers in these regions ever try to learn much about, or from, the native peoples they encountered. Instead, they recorded their observations based upon commonly held *assumptions* about ‘the Orient’ as a mythic place of exoticism, moral laxity, sexual degeneration and so forth. (24)

Furthermore, the West is “considered the place of historical progress” (52), whereas the Orient is “unchanging” (Said, “Orientalism” 96), a timeless place and deemed ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’. The Orient is seen as a “fascinating realm of the exotic” (Barry 195) and homogenous, “the people there being anonymous masses rather than individuals” (195). Their actions and emotions are always defined by racial considerations and any form of individualism is discounted (196).

In his work, Said stresses that “[i]t is the discourse about the Orient that constructs its meaning and so what is important for Said is not the ‘truth’ of the discourse in some correspondence with an actual Orient but rather the internal consistency of the discourse of Orientalism” (Childs 164). Nevertheless, Said’s study gained some criticism, such as dealing with stereotypical oriental representations as being ahistorical, neglecting any form of resistance from the colonised, disregarding the significance of gender as well as ignoring the resistance within the West (Said “Culture & Imperialism” xiii-xxxv). Even though most of the objections are of importance, for this thesis analysis, the objections play no significant role and their discussion would go beyond its scope. In response, Said’s approach will be the basis of my thesis to analyse the orientalist construction within *Death on the Nile*.

2.1.2. 'Silenced History'

A further step of my interpretation will be to decipher the missing or suppressed historical events and information throughout the narrative, which I will define as 'silenced history'. For this context-oriented approach, I will draw from Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995). In his work, he illustrates how power operates in the making and recording of history and how silences function in the reproduction of history. He argues that "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences" (27) and that "[m]entions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis" (48). While Trouillot's work is primarily focused on the field of historiography, these 'silences' – deliberate omissions – also play a central role in literary fiction, in the depiction of existing places and persons, even more so if we examine descriptions of former colonies and colonial matter in a postcolonial approach to these works of fiction. To a certain degree, stereotypes and simplifications are both created by 'silencing' elements of complexity and suppressing contradictions to the occidental world view. Here, the relation between power and the production of history is essential, as "[a]t best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won" (5). This furthermore relates to the 'orientalist' representation of former colonies through the colonisers in works of literary fiction of the time. Trouillot argues that "the epistemological break between history and fiction is always expressed concretely through the historically situated evaluation of specific narratives" (8). In 'silencing history', stereotypes and simplifications are created by means of reduction and the conscious elimination of truths and contradictions. In chapter 5, I will examine historical 'silences' in *Death on the Nile* and in a further step, I will demonstrate how these 'silences' contribute to the novel's 'oriental backdrop'.

2.1.3. Armchair Tourism

In the last chapter of this thesis, I will interpret the findings of my analysis with regard to the term 'armchair tourism'. In *The Long Tail of Tourism: Holiday Niches and their Impact on Mainstream Tourism* (2011), Baxter and Pieszek define 'armchair tourism' as "a fairly new way of exploring the earth without having to travel physically. This can be made possible through the Internet, travel literature or television" (171). The focus hereby will be on the medium novel, for during the interwar period, it was "the best information source for people who wanted to inform themselves about a travel destination or imagining life there" (172). Watson further adds that the novel itself is "an entry-point or escape-hatch to a place altogether elsewhere" (1).

Thus, the ‘armchair tourist’ is a spatial phenomenon that has to be read closely with the concepts of space before and after the spatial turn. The ‘armchair tourist’ between the wars exists before the ‘disappearance of space’ as David Harvey describes the shrinkage of objective space through the means of accelerated travel (Günzel 14-23). While for a person between the world wars, the fastest means of travel was the locomotive with 60 to 100 km/h, only 80 years later, the global space has shrunk to around 1/8th of its size at the beginning of the 20th century through travel speeds of up to 800 km/h by airplanes (33). The ‘armchair tourist’ does not travel physically, though. If we follow Harvey's logic, the objective size of global space plays a role in the process of ‘armchair tourism’ in the way that during the interwar period, for example, Egypt seemed much further away than it is for readers nowadays – even more for the middlebrow reader of the time – making Egypt a far more ‘exotic’ destination than it would be today. The way the ‘armchair tourist’ travels resembles a ‘folding of space’ through an imagined form of space. As Günzel elaborates: “Die beiden Orte sind distanzlos miteinander verbunden und der Eintritt aus dem Norden in den Süden ist jederzeit möglich” (34), which shows that geometric spaces in the context of the ‘armchair tourist’ are replaced by topological space.

While the destination is days away in physical space, through the medium of travel literature, or in this example a detective fiction with an ‘exotic’ setting, the tourist is able to transcend the means of physical space and ‘teleport’ himself to a place of longing. In this way, the ‘armchair tourist’ is able by the simple means of the written word to overcome individual spatial restrictions. In times of significant limitations, travel literature in that way becomes a mode of transportation that is able through the ‘folding of space’ to liberate the individual.

As mentioned above, my analysis focus will be on the armchair tourist during the interwar period, whereby I will particularly examine the confluence of the ‘exotic shelter’ and the armchair tourist.

2.1.4. ‘Exotic Shelter’

In this subchapter, I will define the concept of the ‘exotic shelter’ based upon Huggan’s definition of the ‘postcolonial exotic’ and link Orientalism with its appeal to the ‘armchair tourist’, which will be part of my analysis. The term ‘exotic’ is based on postcolonial studies’ sociological dimensions and includes “the material conditions of production and consumption of postcolonial writings” (Huggan vii). The controversial term ‘exotic’ is often misinterpreted as:

an inherent quality to be found ‘in’ certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. (13)

The term ‘shelter’ connects to the role of the armchair tourist in defining the concept. It relates to the spatial element of the ‘armchair tourist’ as being the destination of the non-physical travel through ‘folding of space’ as defined in the last chapter. This expands the idea of the ‘otherness’ in the ‘exotic’ in a multi-spatial dimension between reader and destination. Through this widening the anthropological limitations Huggan sets up in his seminal work. In that way, the ‘exoticism’ within works of literature such as Christie’s *Death on the Nile* “is marketed and distributed for Western audiences” (Huggan xi) as a travel destination.

‘Exotic shelter’, in that “exoticism has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of imperial power”(14), also connects to Said’s construction of Orientalism by relying on “an aestheticizing process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar” (ix-x). This process always works by means of simplification and the creation and reproduction of stereotypes in making the ‘other’ palatable to the reader (Gregory 447-448). Thereupon, I argue that the ‘exotic shelter’ functions as escapism for the armchair tourist during the interwar period.

2.2. Method

To begin with, I will use a text-oriented, structuralist reading approach in order to analyse and examine structural elements that combine different genre conventions and characteristics used in the novel. As Peter Barry defines, structuralists analyses narratives, “relating the text to some larger containing structure” (50). The larger structure could thereby, for example, be “conventions of a particular literary genre, or [...] a notion of narrative as a complex of recurrent patterns or motifs” (50). A structuralist reading, thereby, “presents a series of parallels, echoes, reflections, patterns, and contrasts, so that the narrative becomes highly schematised” (53). Moreover, I will apply analytical constituents of narrative texts: action, character, place and time, as proposed by Nünning and Nünning (2009). In a further step, I will then combine the findings of my structuralist reading in a context-oriented reading and analyse the ‘oriental’ constructions of the novel. These ‘oriental’ constructions form the novel’s setting, which I will define as an ‘oriental backdrop’.

A first necessary step before analysing Christie's novel *Death on the Nile* is to examine the genre of Golden Age detective fiction. This type of classic detective fiction was written between 1920 to 1939 and Christie as well as other authors of the genre "continued writing the form after 1939" (Bargainnier 16). The "distinctive new feature of detective fiction in the Golden Age was the cultivation of the murder-mystery narrative as a light-hearted intellectual puzzle, no longer as a sensational treatment of bloody outrages" (Baldick 153). Until today, with its underlying pattern from the Golden Age period, detective fiction is one of the most popular literary genres. It is a subgenre of crime fiction in which "the principle action and focus of interest is the investigation of a crime or apparently criminal enigma by a detective figure" (94). The genre originated in the mid 19th century and "the full-length detective novel [...] grew in importance in the early 20th century with the success of such major practitioners as Agatha Christie" (94). The interwar period, which began in the late 1920s and ended in 1939, centred on the novel and marks the Golden Age of Detection (Cuddon 169). Even though Britain's interwar period was marked by depression, hardship and volatility, it also included rising economic improvements (Poplawski 489-496). For rising living standards, expanded avenues of social welfare, increased leisure time and mass consumerism lead to a new form of mass entertainment, which included popular fictions, such as Christie's works (Kramer 170-172). Through cheaper printing methods, rising literacy and the expansion of public libraries led to the creation of a new reading public across England (Glynn and Oxborrow 33-40). During that era, "detective fiction was both the most popular and the most intellectually respectable [genre], and therefore it was the form where high and low were most likely to mingle and become middlebrow" (Schaub viii). Detective novels "pursued their ideological transformation of readers by their presentation of characters with whom readers would wish to identify" (viii). Characters "of both sexes were consistently and frequently depicted as gentlemen, thus producing an ideological composite that was mildly conservative in its approach to social class, but progressive in its approach to gender" (viii).

Detective fiction consists of principles which follow the formulaic pattern of mystification-detection. This underlying formulaic pattern is visible in the basic structure of "death-detection-explanation" (Horsley 12). Dorothy B. Hughes summarises the meaning of the pattern: "The mystery novel, like the theatrical play or the sonnet, is contained within a prescribed pattern. The writer may wander a bit but not far, not and stay within the form" (127). Due to this common pattern, "the reader knows beforehand what to expect when he begins a detective novel" (Bargainnier 11). Necessities for this pattern are concerned with the construction of characters, plot and setting.

The character construction of classic detective fiction includes at least one victim, numerous suspects and a detective figure. This detective figure “remains fundamental to conceptions of the genre” (Plain 4) and “is a seemingly omniscient investigator who enters an enclosed environment” (4) in which a crime took place. “With surgical precision the detective identifies the criminal and exonerates the community from any imputation of responsibility or guilt” (4).

The action of the plot revolves around the investigation of a committed crime, which “was focused upon a murder rather than any other crime” (Snell 23), and even “multiple murder involving the elimination of witnesses to the original crime” are a common convention (Baldick 94). The investigation always featured “a sequence of red herrings (a parade of suspects)” (Cuddon 169) before the ‘true’ criminal was charged. In general, the murder was committed by one of the leading characters (Snell 23). The investigation, which was carried out by a detective figure, always ended in a solution of the case, a *dénouement*. By solving the crime, “[o]rder is restored and stability returns to what is depicted as [a] homogenous society” (Plain 4).

The setting of a classic detective fiction novel of the Golden Age was “hermetically sealed, typically by location in a country house (though any isolated setting will do)” (Cuddon 169). A vital notion is that the setting needs to limit the suspects, which means the murder must be one of “the closed circle” (Bargainnier 22).

An additional principle of detective fiction is that the reader needs to suspect every character and a puzzle, which needs solving, is always present in classic detective fiction (Singer 157). Hence, the subgenre is also titled the ‘whodunit’ and ‘the clue-puzzle story’ (Horsley 12). The genre “thrives on the unexpected” through which it “creates a world in which the usual suspects must for once be exonerated” (11). Through the centuries, “its survival has depended upon its capacity to surprise, and this in turn has had the result of creating a popular genre which constantly poses at least the possibility of subverting cultural ‘norms’ and expectations” (12). Today, the genre of detective fiction “has become one of the principal forms of prose in the UK [...], as well as many other European countries” (Cuddon 169). Its continuous growth of popularity is “bolstered by a symbiotic relationship with the mass media of entertainment and information” (169).

Through a structuralist approach in the third chapter of this thesis, I will examine crucial tropes and characteristics of the detective fiction genre in Christie’s *Death on the Nile*. This will be done in order to analyse in how far these genre tropes are encased by the orientalist constructions of the novel.

3. Genre Conventions of the Detective Fiction in *Death on the Nile*

Death on the Nile (1937) is a classic detective novel following the common genre conventions of a whodunit, in which an investigation is led by a detective figure. In this novel, Christie's famous detective Hercule Poirot solves a committed murder through investigation and detection. The novel is one of Christie's foreign travel ones, and as Light notes, "[i]n the 1930s there is hardly a novel which does not bear some mark of 'abroad'" (89). It is set in Egypt during the 1930s and its plot revolves around the murder of a wealthy American heiress in a tourist setting of a Nile cruise. This murder plot is a typical convention of detective fiction, in which "the principle action and focus of interest is the investigation of a crime or apparently criminal enigma by a detective fiction" (Baldick 94). This investigation often includes the narrowing down of suspects from several to one. As mentioned in chapter 2.2., the genre of detective fiction is highly formulaic and mostly follows the same pattern: "death-detection-explanation" (Horsley 12).

Death on the Nile employs a third-person narrator, in other words, a non-named voice outside of the events of the text. For most of the novel, the story has an external focalisation, only reporting what is said and done. There is no insight into the character's thoughts, except for a couple of moments where it takes on an internal focalisation on Poirot (Nünning and Nünning 110-123). The novel is split into two parts, in which part one introduces the "[c]haracters in Order of their Appearance" (Christie 1), and part two is named "Egypt" (41). This structure strongly resembles the classic composition of a dramatic text. Part one is subdivided into twelve small excerpts in which each of the novel's characters, who are planning their visits to Egypt, is introduced and characterised. The novel's action starts in part two, in which the action is narrated *in media res*, for all the characters have arrived in Egypt and are about to embark on their cruise along the Nile river.

In the following, I will analyse important genre tropes of detective fiction to later demonstrate how orientalist constructions encase these tropes of the novel's murder plot. Therefore, I will not make a comprehensive genre analysis; instead, I will narrow my research to specific tropes, which will serve as a base for my subsequent analysis of the oriental backdrop. For that, I will look at the novel's constructions of the setting, characters as well as on the level of plot. The setting will only be analysed in regard to its superordinate structure as the construction of the setting, with the focus on its orientalist construction, will be examined in chapter 4. The construction of the characters will mainly be analysed concerning their stereotypical function of the detective fiction genre.

The plot pattern of detective fiction is often “hermetically sealed” by an isolated setting, which fulfils the “closed circle setting” (Cuddon 169). This convention is also true for *Death on the Nile*, as it is set on a private tourist cruise along the Nile. This foreign travel setting, besides the British countryside house, is one of the most common settings of the genre during the Golden Age era (McManis 321-322). Even though the novel is set in Egypt, “the emphasis of setting lies more on the means of travel than on the place of travel” (Bargainnier 29). The means of travel are often focused on slower means of transport, such as ship and train, as in *The Problem at Sea* (1936) and *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) to give the investigator enough time to solve the puzzle. Moreover, the plot's tension is held by the certainty that the criminal, in this case, the murderer, must still be part of the group. This isolation makes it clear that the murderer in the novel must be a person on board of the *SS Karnak*, limiting the investigation to the group of tourists and the staff of the ship. Bargainnier endorses the function of an isolated setting:

The advantage of a limited space isolated for the action of a detective story are several. It limits the number of suspects [...] at the same time, all of those present in the closed circle can become suspects, for generally known to one another, they offer a multiplicity of motives. [...] The closed circle also emphasizes the abnormality of the crime by isolating it from the everyday matters of the world around it. The focus is solely on the crime and its detection. Finally, being out of that everyday world, cut off from usual concerns, creates tension and suspense. Nerves become frazzled, tempers flare and spirits flag, for a murderer is loose and “one of us”. (22)

On the level of character construction, the characters are constructed by the narrator as well as by utterances of other characters. An essential notion for the character construction is that the classic detective fiction novel “consists not of characters who determine the action, but action which determines the characters” (38). In the following section, I will investigate how the main characters as well as the minor characters are constructed within the novel. The conglomeration of a detective figure, the victims, murderer, witnesses, suspects and bystanders will be studied, for they are significant constituents of detective fiction.

First and foremost, the novel employs a detective figure, a figure of personal authority, in this case, Hercule Poirot. He is Christie’s most famous detective and a reinvention of the consulting detective archetype deriving from Conan Doyle’s infamous ‘Sherlock Holmes’, “‘The Great Detective’, the genius solver of mysteries which baffle all others” (Bargainnier 45). Common for the classic detective figure, Poirot is a retired police officer who simply enjoys the occasional solving of a case. In his investigations, he is independent of official authority

and “free from the regulations and red tape of the police; he can create his own rules of work” (42). He is described as being highly intelligent, frequently arrogant, and one of his most prominent characteristics is his “dandyism” (Acocella). He enjoys the finer things in life, for example, in the forms of food, drink, and sedentary leisure (Christie 16). Furthermore, he expresses his love of travel and considers himself the consummate tourist (16-17). He functions as “a seemingly omniscient investigator who enters an enclosed environment” (Plain 4), in this case, a participant on the Nile cruise where the murder happens. As the detective figure, “he is able to judge because he is given the power of distinguishing absolutely between good and evil”, which gives him the power to “perform his task of lifting suspicion, distrust and guilt in whatever community he may find himself” (Bargainnier 42).

Besides Poirot, the novel has three additional main characters, Linnet and Simon Doyle as well as Jaqueline de Bellefort. The character Linnet Doyle is characterised as a wealthy, beautiful American heiress with “straight autocratic features” (Christie 3) and “bright golden hair and an eager confidence face” (3), often evoking different kinds of jealousy in other characters. She later becomes the first and most important murder victim on the cruise. One common convention regarding the victims in detective fiction is that “the reader must not be unduly disturbed by the victim’s death” (Bargainnier 113). This is often prevented by giving the victims “traits which make him or her objectionable” (113) and unsympathetic. Fitting this description, Linnet has specific traits, such as being ‘wealthy’, ‘wilful’, ‘tyrannical’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘successful’, which trigger jealousy and envy, as well as dislike in most of the other characters. Most of them openly voice their dislike for her and all of them would ‘gain’ something through her death, for as a common genre convention, the usual motives for murder are money, fear and revenge. This leads to many red herrings during the investigation, for their jealousy makes them all a suspect as soon as Linnet is murdered.

Her husband, Simon Doyle, is another main character of the novel. Initially, he is introduced as Jaqueline de Bellefort, who is Linnet's best friend, fiancé. He is characterised as “a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with very dark blue eyes, crisply curling brown hair, a square chin, and a boyish, appealing, simple smile” (Christie 24), naïve and penniless man. He is later revealed as the murderer and commits to having worked with Jaqueline to kill Linnet, to inherit her fortune. Besides being one of Linnet's oldest friends and Simon's former fiancé, Jaqueline is characterised as a “fiery little creature” (11) and a “vivacious Latin brunette” (11) with “a kind of sharp cunning apparent on her face” (195).

Even though the murder investigation is limited to a relatively small group of suspects, the investigation is not a simple one. Most characters have a motive, so Poirot needs to narrow

down the suspects. The group of Western tourists is full of stereotypical burgeoning middle and upper-middle-class character constructions, who became increasingly mobile during the interwar period, in both class boundaries and travel. Nearly all of the passenger characters have different quirks and traits, which lead to various red herrings and unfortunate situations throughout the murder investigation. The defects are disguised at first and are only revealed throughout the investigation. They serve as supporting characters, as bystanders, witnesses and suspects, whose functions are “to provide information about victim and/or murderer, to provide red herrings, to provide social commentary, to provide humour, and to provide a sense of familiarity by recurrent appearances” (Bargainnier 131). A problem, which further heightens the mystification of the interrogation, is that part of the secondary character group are always characters who are guilty of a crime unrelated to the murder. In trying to conceal their guilt, they impede the investigation.

For instance, the passenger-list of the novel features the character of Mrs. Otterbourne, an eccentric novelist, Miss van Schuyler, a kleptomaniac, and Tim Allerton, who is involved in a jewellery thievery scam. Besides the British and American characters, there are, as in any of Christie’s novels, characters from different countries, who function as the ‘outsiders’. On the one hand, there is Signor Guido Richetti, an Italian archaeologist. Later it becomes clear that he travelled under a false identity and is, in fact, a wanted agitator. On the other hand, there is the character of Dr. Bessner, a physician from Austria. He is one of the only passengers to have no motive at all to hurt Linnet, so he is never a likely suspect in the case. Nevertheless, his medical profession proves to be useful on the cruise, for he examines all the bodies found and gives Poirot helpful advice.

Another character on board of the *SS Karnak* is Colonel Race. He is a recurrent character, having been part of Poirot’s previous cases, e.g. *Cards on the Table* (1936). In *Death on the Nile*, he functions as Poirot’s confidant to whom he summarises his findings. He serves as the reader’s surrogate, allowing him to know Poirot’s observations, through which the reader keeps on being included in the solving of the crime. This is another common detective fiction convention, in which the detective has a subordinate sidekick, who is admiring, helpful but not as clever as the detective person and would not be able to solve the crime without him. In this case, Colonel Race has his own investigation to conduct, for he is looking for an agitator, who later is uncovered to have been Signor Richetti. Furthermore, his character is an ex-Army officer, and his support gives Poirot the legal authority to investigate the murder case. The narrative constructs him as “a man of unadvertised goings and comings. He was usually to be found in one of the outposts of Empire where trouble was brewing” (Christie 145). His

connection to working in outposts of the empire fits his name's functions as a telling name, for his name 'Race' suggests a reference to his work in the British colonies.

Besides this set of characters, the staff, consisting of locals, are the only other characters on board of the *SS Karnak* during the murders and their investigation. Nevertheless, the staff is not even questioned as part of the murder investigation. Poirot only investigates the group of Western tourists with their previously described traits, which qualify them as possible murderers in the story. This is a common occurrence in Christie's novels, where servants appear "rarely as developed characters or as murderers, for the murderer needs to have ascertainable motives, false alibis, method and personality" (Snell 28). A closer look at the Egyptian staff's characterisation will be made in chapter 4, which focuses on Orientalist constructions within the novel.

To sum up, the essential function of the character construction and constellation of *Death on the Nile*, including the detective figure, the victims, the murderers, and secondary characters, is to serve the main action of the murder plot. After the main murder of Linnet, two additional murders happen on the cruise during Poirot's investigation. The additional murders serve as red herrings and complications for the murder investigation. A prevalent pattern of detective fiction is that the first murder is occurring intentionally, and the subsequent killings are a result of fear on the part of the murderer. The additional two murder victims Mrs. Otterbourne and the maid, Louise Bourget, are only killed to hide the identity of the murderer and to provide a complication in the murder investigation. Louise Bourget is a likely subsequent victim, for she blackmailed the murderer and withheld information in an attempt to gain profit for herself. The character of Mrs. Otterbourne is killed at the moment, in which she tries to reveal important information about the murderer. In both cases, the murderous pair Jacqueline and Simon decided that the characters are threats great enough to risk killing again.

A common trope of the genre is that the murder case is an exceptionally baffling one which can only be solved by an exceptional detective. After identifying the murderer, Poirot concludes with an edge of admiring that "[t]his is a crime that needed audacity, swift and faultless execution, courage, indifference to danger, and a resourceful, calculating brain. [...] This crime wasn't safe! It hung on a razor edge! It needed boldness!" (Christie 327).

Fitting the genre convention, the ending of *Death on the Nile* is 'closed'. Poirot successfully manages to identify Jacqueline's and Simon's murder plot, and they both confess their guilt. When being brought ashore, after the cruise arrives in Cairo, Jacqueline shoots Simon and then herself in order to escape justice. This is a common end of the genre, in which the murderer escapes arrest by committing suicide. Here, Poirot allows Jacqueline to shoot Simon

and commit suicide without hindrance: “Mrs Allerton said softly ‘You – knew?’ He nodded. [...] Mrs Allerton said: ‘You wanted her to take that way out?’ ‘Yes. But she would not take it alone. That is why Simon Doyle died an easier death than he deserved’” (371-372). Afterwards, Poirot enlightens the other characters about the solved investigation through which order is restored for the small group of passengers.

To conclude, the novel employs numerous common tropes of the detective fiction genre, thus following the pattern of a classical detective fiction novel. As shown in my analysis, the secluded setting of the Nile cruise fits within the genre conventions. In the following chapters, the actual construction of the setting with its orientalist constructions will be the focus of the analysis and interpretation. With regard to the character construction analysed above, a further focus on the orientalist construction of the Egyptian natives and staff members will be shown in the following chapters. There, I will also examine how the Western characters interact with them. The murder plot will not be a focus in the next chapters, as it plays a secondary role in the creation of the orientalist construction. The above analysed conventions will help me to demonstrate how far orientalist construction, which I am going to analyse in the following chapter, encase the murder plot of *Death on the Nile*.

4. ‘Orientalism’ in *Death on the Nile*

The main action of *Death on the Nile* is set in the country of Egypt sometime in the 1930s. During that time, Britain and Egypt were connected through a bilateral relationship and an important colonial history. In the following text segment, I will summarise a brief look at their shared history in order to have a better contextualisation of the oriental constructions and the ‘silences’ of history.

The ‘overland’ route to India across Egypt and trade with the eastern Mediterranean were increasingly important to Britain from the early 19th century (Dalziel 76). With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt “acquired an even greater strategic importance for the British Empire” (116). It ensured a more direct route between the North Atlantic and northern Indian oceans, allowing faster sea transport to India. From 1882 onwards, Egypt was under British occupation but still under an Ottoman government (Cannadine 77). With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers and “the fiction of Ottoman authority was finally abandoned in 1914 when Egypt was declared a protectorate” (Dalziel 77) of Britain and was thenceforward governed by indirect rule. At the end of World War one, “Egyptian nationalism exploded in revolt (1919). To overcome the difficulties and expense of direct rule, Britain created a system of control by treaty, allowing

independence (1922) but retaining a key role in Egyptian foreign affairs and defence” (Dalziel 116). Despite Egypt remaining an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire, it was still governed by British indirect rule. The Egyptian Revolution in 1952 brought with it the withdrawal of British forces from Egyptian troops. In 1956, in accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, Egypt declared its independence and the British occupation of Egypt ended gradually (Kramer 188-190). Even though Egypt was a former British territory, it is no member of the Commonwealth today. A closer look at how the colonial connection between Egypt and Britain is ‘silenced’ in the novel will be given in chapter 5.

The depicted setting in *Death on the Nile* is a constructed and fictional representation of Egypt. Therefore, stereotypes and simplifications are created by means of reduction, the conscious elimination of truths and contradictions, and binary oppositions. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how far the novel's representation of Egypt is a construction and what its functions are. One way through which the novel represents orientalist construction is the use of binary oppositions. They stress the differentiation of the West as ‘civilized’ and the East as ‘uncivilized’ and construct the Orient as the ‘other’, as defined by Said (*Orientalism* 1-3). These orientalist constructions can, among other things, be found within the setting, the character construction and the narrative situation as well as in different utterances of the Western characters.

Even though the action of the novel takes place in Egypt, the first part of the novel, however, is mostly set in Britain. The narrative construction and description of the British and the Egyptian landscape differ clearly from each other. The Egyptian landscape is constructed as the West's ‘alter ego’, for it is depicted as everything the British landscape is not (McLeod 49). Whereas the British landscape is portrayed as beautiful, rich and pastoral, the Egyptian landscape is depicted as being foreign, mysterious and “savage” (Christie 104). In chapter one, for instance, the countryside of Wode Hall, the home of Linnet Doyle, is outlined as follows: “the gardens [and] open country with blue shadows of woodlands. ‘It’s rather perfect, isn’t it?’ said Linnet” (5). The country estate is furthermore portrayed as something grand and beautiful: “His eyes rested on the graceful proportions of Wode Hall. There was nothing to mar its old-world beauty [...] [i]t was a fair and peaceful sight bathed in the autumn sunshine” (10). In opposition to this tranquil depiction of the British Landscape, the Egyptian landscape is described as something ‘savage’, wild and mysterious, as the following excerpt substantiates:

There was a savage aspect about the sheet of water in front of them, the masses of rock without vegetation that came down to the water’s edge – here and there a trace of houses

abandoned and ruined as a result of the damming up of the waters. The whole scene had a melancholy, almost sinister charm. (104)

This description of a “melancholy, almost sinister charm” further enhances the constructed mysteriousness of the Egyptian landscape. Furthermore, it reinforces the portrayal of the ‘Orient’ as wild and uncivilised and stresses its constructed ‘otherness’.

In the same chapter, the character of Mrs. Otterbourne sketches Egypt as follows: “‘There’s something about this country that makes me feel – wicked. It brings to the surface all the things that are boiling inside one. Everything’s so unfair – so unjust’” (104). Here, the character's utterance “suggests a classic ‘Orientalist’ attitude when she describes the savage landscape as releasing her inner passion” (73), as Rowland argues.

In a previous chapter, as Poirot and Mrs. Otterbourne are waiting for their fellow passengers to board the cruise, the narrative depicts the Egyptian landscape as follows: “They looked down to the shining black rocks in the Nile. There was something fantastic about them in the moonlight. They were like vast prehistoric monsters lying half out of the water. A little breeze came up suddenly and as suddenly died away” (Christie 59).

This excerpt constructs the Egyptian landscape as something ‘wild’ which cannot be controlled. It additionally cites the historic entity of the lost culture of ancient Egypt with a notion of expectancy and ‘otherness’.

After boarding the *SS Karnak*, Simon Doyle states his impression of the cruise they are about to embark on. In his utterance, the Orient is again constructed as being ‘wild’ and referring to an entity of authenticity described as the “heart of Egypt”:

‘This is grand,’ he said as he too leaned on the rail. ‘I’m really looking forward to this trip, aren’t you, Linnet? It feels somehow so much less touristy – as though we were really going into the heart of Egypt.’ His wife responded quickly: ‘I know. It’s so much – wilder, somehow’. (105)

The action on the cruise along the Nile River is occasionally interrupted by different sightseeing stops, which some of the characters explore. For example, these stops are at the first and second Cataract, as well as the Temple of Abu Simbel. They only serve the setting and have no vital impact on the action and plot, though. These places function as archetypal symbols for the country and its culture, for they are common tourist attractions. During one of these sightseeing trips, Simon Doyle recapitulates his experience: “‘You know; I’m not much of a fellow for temples and sightseeing and all that, but a place like this sort of gets you, if you know what I mean. Those old Pharaohs must have been wonderful people’” (130-131). This binary

opposition of the Western country as being ‘civilized’ and the Orient as its opposite enhances itself further in the construction of the characters.

As analysed in chapter 3, the stereotypical Western characters have an additional function in the novel. They act as Western tourists who travel abroad in a ‘foreign’ country. The underlying notion of this travel abroad to ‘foreign lands’ is the fact that they act as Western imperial tourists. They are only able to take the trip to Egypt and to travel, because they live in and are from a rich imperial country. Their wealth and social positions are dependences of them taking this trip and how they ‘act’ in Egypt.

The character construction in *Death on the Nile* further establishes binary oppositions between the West and the East. In the novel, the Egyptians are only characterised as subordinate and working characters, which are in an inferior position compared to the Western tourists. They are only functioning as stock characters and are depicted as waiters (17, 57), donkey boys (21, 46), boatmen (94, 100), porters (102), stewards (169, 208, 254, 255, 257, 265, 273, 309, 327), stewardesses (360, 367, 369, 273-275), dragomans (118) as well as beggars (135). In general, they are only minor characters who are excluded from the novel's main action, even though most of its action takes place in Egypt. They are not characterised as individuals with particular qualities. Instead, they are being constructed as a homogenous mass as they are provided with equal characteristics and thus deprived of their individualism. This may be attributable to individualism being regarded as a significant component of Western identity. As Herzfeld suggests, “[i]ndividualism has long been a stereotype of European identity” and in the works exploring European society and culture, “the conventional self-view of Europeans as autonomous selves possessing discrete property and distinctive properties appears as a fundamental assumption” (139). Throughout the novel, the native characters are simply characterised as inferior, childish, sneaky, mischievous, and intellectually weak. In some utterances, the Western characters even employ animal imagery when referring to the Egyptians. This form of marginalisation and dehumanisation can, for instance, be found when Poirot and Rosalie are on the market:

They came out from the shade of the garden on to a dusty stretch of road bordered by the river. Five watchful bead sellers, two vendors of postcards, three sellers of plaster scarabs, a couple of donkey boys and some detached but hopeful infantile riff-raff closed in upon them.

‘You want beads, sir? Very good, sir. Very cheap...’

‘Lady, you want scarab? Look - great queen - very lucky...’

‘You look, sir-real lapis. Very good, very cheap ...’

‘You want ride donkey, sir? This very good donkey. This donkey Whisky and Soda, sir...’

‘You want to go granite quarries, sir? This very good donkey. Other donkey very bad, sir, that donkey fall down ...’

‘You want postcard - very cheap - very nice ...’

‘Look, lady ... Only ten piastres - very cheap – lapis – this ivory...’

‘This very good fly whisk - this all amber...’

‘You go out in boat, sir? I got very good boat, sir...’

‘You ride back to hotel, lady? This first-class donkey...’ [...] The infantile riff-raff ran alongside murmuring plaintively: ‘Bakshish? Bakshish? Hip hip hurrah-very good, very nice ...’ [...] Now Poirot and Rosalie only ran the gauntlet of the shops-suave, persuasive accents here... ‘You visit my shop today, sir?’ ‘You want that ivory crocodile, sir?’ ‘You not been in my shop yet, sir? I show you very beautiful things’.

(46 Christie)

Poirot and Rosalie’s attempt of ‘getting rid’ of the vendors furthermore implies that oriental people are ‘simple’, ‘stupid’, and ‘uncivilized’. Whereas he makes “vague gestures to rid himself of this human cluster of flies” (46), she “stalke[s] through them like a sleep walker” (47) and advises Poirot that “[i]t’s best to pretend to be deaf and blind” (47). The description of the vendors is even further extended in the narration: “Their gaily coloured rags trailed picturesquely, and the flies lay in clusters on their eyelids. They were the most persistent. The others fell back and launched a fresh attack on the next comer” (47). This whole excerpt underlines the stereotypical orientalist construction of the novel. The Egyptian characters are represented as behaving “*oddly* different” (McLeod 53) and as being ‘in need’ of the Western characters taking pity on them as well as their help and money. Additionally, the use of the word ‘attack’ to simply describe how the vendors offer them merchandise is highly exaggerating. In sum, the construction reinforces the opposition between the peripheral and central positions of the Easterners and Westerners, respectively.

In a further extract, the character Mrs. Allerton makes similar notions towards the Egyptian children playing around while talking to Poirot on the island of Elephantine. She expresses her annoyance:

‘I thought they’d get tired of me,’ said Mrs. Allerton sadly. ‘They’ve been watching me for over two hours now – and they close in on me little by little, and then I yell ‘Imshi’ and brandish my sunshade at them and they scatter for a minute or two, and then they come back and stare and stare and their eyes are simply disgusting and so are their noses,

and I don't believe I really like children, not unless they're more or less washed and have the rudiments of manners'. (Christie 95)

As this excerpt demonstrates, the Egyptian children are depicted as the 'other' by a Western character, who objectifies them. She further stresses her annoyance towards Egypt and the natives: "If there were only any peace in Egypt, I should like it better", said Mrs. Allerton. "But you can never be alone anywhere – someone is always pestering you for money, or offering you donkeys, or beads, or expeditions to native villages, or duck shooting" (95). Here she clearly makes stereotypical assumptions and homogenises the natives and their country through her utterance.

An additional example is the excerpt in which the passenger Mr. Fanthorp tries to reassure an Egyptian steward of the ship that nothing had happened, even though a gunshot was heard before and Simon Doyle has been shot in the leg: "[Fanthorp] wheeled round to the door where a startled Nubian face showed. He said: 'All right all right! Just fun!' The black face looked doubtful, puzzled, then reassured. The teeth showed in a wide grin. The boy nodded and went off" (160-161). This clearly demonstrates that the steward is depicted as a 'simple-minded' character. Additionally, Fanthorp's utterance implies an authority of a Western character over the Egyptian staff, which does not comply with the actual hierarchy on board of the *SS Karnak* where a member of staff should hold a position of authority over the passenger.

At the end of the novel, after Simon and Jaqueline have been identified as the murderer, the character Cornelia summarises her experience of the incidents towards Ferguson:

'I'll never forget this trip as long as I live. Three deaths...It's just like living in a nightmare.' Ferguson overheard her. He said aggressively: 'That's because you're over-civilized. You should look on death as the Oriental does. It's a mere incident—hardly noticeable.' Cornelia said: 'That's all very well – they're not educated, poor creatures.' (303)

The excerpt clearly represents the 'Oriental' as being inferior in terms of civilization and education. It produces distorted assumptions about the natives, which are constructed as having no concerns and understanding about death in comparison to the 'civilized' Western characters. Through his utterance, Ferguson represents Death as being something casual in 'Oriental' society.

The constructed 'backwardness' of the East, in comparison to the Western "superiority" (Said, "Orientalism" 7), is further stressed, for example, by the character of Dr. Bessner after Simon Doyle gets shot in his leg. He advises Poirot to get Doyle back to "civilization," where he will receive the 'right' medical aid: "We will get him to civilization and there we will have

an X-ray and proper treatment” (Christie 191). Of course, a steamer cannot be expected to serve as a well-equipped hospital, but the choice of the word “civilization” is worth noting here in terms of its reference to the Western world. It furthermore stresses the stereotypical construction of the Orient being timeless, in which “the West is considered the place of historical progress” and “the Orient is deemed remote from the enlightening process of historical change” (McLeod 52; cf. Said, “Orientalism” 96).

A further binary opposition can be found in the case of the murder investigation. This can furthermore be linked to the notion that the oriental characters are depicted as needing the help of the ‘intellectual’ Western characters. Even though the murders are committed on a ship in Egypt, Poirot, in the role of a Western tourist, takes charge of the investigation without questioning the local authorities. The Egyptian captain of the ship withdraws his authorities because he does not think he is ‘capable’ to take charge of the investigation: “The poor man was terribly upset and worried over the whole business, and was eager to leave everything in Colonel Race’s hands. ‘I feel I can’t do better than to leave it to you, sir, seeing your official position’”. (Christie 174)

At the ending, after Poirot has successfully solved the crime, he murmurs: ““*Quel pays sauvage!*”” (368). Here, his utterance implies that the ‘Oriental’ setting was the main reason why the three murders occurred, even though they were clearly committed by Western characters that even planned their murder plot before embarking on their travel.

By depicting different ‘orientalist’ attitudes in *Death on the Nile*, I have shown how the ‘Orient’ is constructed within the novel through stereotypes, simplifications as well as binary oppositions. Based upon these findings, I am going to analyse how these constructions build the oriental backdrop and how this backdrop encases the murder plot.

5. Oriental backdrop in *Death on the Nile*

As already established in chapters 3 and 4, the setting on the Nile cruise in *Death on the Nile* serves as a common trope for the Golden Age detective fiction genre. It fulfils the notion of an isolated setting, a closed circle, in which a crime occurs. The isolated setting can appear in a variety of forms, such as a moving vehicle, for instance, train and plane, as well as a detached country house. The main structure of the murder plot remains unaltered, no matter the specific setting, for the setting in a detective fiction novel is often not integral for its plot. This suggests a possible interchangeability of the setting, where plot and setting do not depend on each other, except for its notion of isolation. This reminds of the composition of theatre, where hypothetically, the scenery can be interchanged and still permits the actors to carry out their

performance. The reciting of a dramatic text would still work if there were no scenery at all. While it loses a great deal of its appeal to the audience, the performance of the text still works detached from the scenery as the plot in a detective novel still works detached from its setting.

Regarding this basic assumption that the setting is interchangeable, I will establish my construction and definition of the novel's 'oriental backdrop'. For my definition of the 'oriental backdrop', I will follow the definition of a scenery flat, as applied in the theatre. A flat or coulisse derives from the French argot *coulisse*, which initially described chutes that allowed different backdrops to change during a theatrical performance (*Oxford English Dictionary*). These backdrops often consisted of sliding panels which portrayed different sceneries, which could be exchanged regardless of the action on stage. This classic construction of the scenery in the theatre was based on layering, where multiple backdrops were put in front of each other to give a spatial illusion of the stage as a whole. The scenery was constructed of panels that were commonly painted with texture, architectural elements, or landscape detail, which simulated a spatial illusion and disguised the simple construction for the audience.

Therefore, I suggest that the 'oriental backdrop' in *Death on the Nile* functions and constructs its setting in a similar manner. Whereas the murder plot, with its generic genre conventions, fits the norm of classic detective fiction of the Golden Age, the setting can be understood as decorative and a necessary backdrop to it. As I will discuss later, the chosen setting in Egypt is under no circumstances coincidental, and it can analogously be read to the historical context of the interwar period.

Hereafter, I will demonstrate how the orientalist constructions within the novel, as analysed in chapter 4, construct the 'oriental backdrop'. While the novel's setting in Egypt can be read in the analogy of the backdrop, I furthermore argue that the character constructions of the natives, in their function as secondary characters, are an essential part of the 'oriental backdrop'. Furthermore, 'silenced history', which I defined as a concept in which stereotypes and simplifications are created by means of reduction and the conscious elimination of truths and contradictions, constitutes the oriental backdrop. This results in a setting that appears as vibrant in the first moment but on a closer look can be understood as a two-dimensional backdrop just like in the theatre, which functions as a constructed 'exotic' backdrop. In a second step, I will explore how the Oriental backdrop encases the detective fiction genre's plot by combining the findings of this chapter and chapter 2, in which I analysed the genre conventions in relation to the novel. Furthermore, I argue that the oriental backdrop caters to the 'exotic' appeal for the armchair tourist during the interwar period in Britain, on which I will further elaborate in chapter 6.

5.1. Construction of the Oriental backdrop

In this chapter, I will combine the findings of chapter 4, which contains the analysis of the oriental constructions in the novel and the definition of the backdrop as made in the previous chapter. By employing the theatre scenery analogy, I will give exemplary elements of this backdrop to illustrate the construction and the resulting illusion of the backdrop. At first, the setting consisting of landscape and the built environment will be examined, followed by the native characters, which I understand as extras to stay within the theatre terminology. In the end, I will show how through silences, this constructed backdrop lacks complexity and thus, in combination with the orientalist constructions, becomes a flat and unlively representation of Egypt. The theoretical construction of the oriental backdrop is further illustrated in figure 1.²

The described landscape of Egypt builds the largest element of the backdrop in terms of scale. Christie employs archetypal elements of this assumed Egyptian landscape, such as the desert and foremost the Nile as a continual and linear element, which serves the reader as a continuous reminder of the ‘foreign’ setting. Just like in the theatre, on the furthest layer of the backdrop, the general idea of the scenery is conveyed, be it, for example, a forest or an ocean. In the novel, these landscape elements of the endless desert and the meandering Nile fulfil this part. In general, the Nile is mentioned a total of 27 times throughout the novel, and most of the time, it only functions as a reminder of the Egyptian setting. In seven instances, the narrative refers to the Nile setting, when a conversation between two characters has ended, and one of the characters processes his or her thoughts. The characters can be observed “overlooking the Nile” (Christie 51, 51, 74), “looking out across the Nile” (52), “star[ing] out over the Nile” (60), or “to contemplate the banks of the Nile” (122) and to look “down on the shining black rocks in the Nile” (59). Even the novel’s title, *Death on the Nile*, evokes the imagery of an Egyptian setting through the use of the word Nile. The intention of the title is to tell the reader exactly what to expect, namely, one or more murders occurring in Egypt on the Nile.

As merely temporarily appearing elements, the built environment of Egypt functions as the coulisses of the novel’s setting. Just like the sliding panels in a theatre scenery, these elements of the backdrop are added only in certain parts of the novel but function on a similar symbolic level as the landscape, which is continuously present, does. As such an element, we can, for example, describe the temples as well as the first and second cataracts. By employing such archetypal build structures, the Egyptian setting is further emphasised and enhanced.

² see figure 1 – Construction of the Oriental backdrop in *Death on the Nile*

These elements have no influence on the plot, though, as they just form the background for conversations about the land and its culture:

As they walked together up an avenue of sphinxes, [Cornelia] responded readily to [Poirot's] conventional opening, 'Your companions are not coming ashore to view the temple?'

'Well, you see, Cousin Marie [...] never gets up early. [...] And she said, too, that this isn't one of the best temples'. (117)

There is no dependence on these shown places in terms of the detective plot. Also, the market stalls and the city Aswan at the beginning of the novel, before the cruise starts, can be read as such elements:

'[Aswan] enchants me', [Poirot] was saying. 'The black rocks of Elephantine, and the sun, the little boats on the river. Yes, it is good to be alive. [...] You do not find it so, Mademoiselle?'

Rosalie Otterbourne said shortly:

'It's alright, I suppose. I think Aswan's a gloomy sort of place. The hotel's half empty, and everyone's about a hundred'. (44-45)

They provide a background for the exposition of the native characters and help to cement the power hierarchy between the Westerners and the Egyptians.

The native characters can be seen as extras or secondary characters in the theatre analogy, due to them taking no part in the action and are such sparsely characterised that they can be seen rather as part of the backdrop than part of the character set of the novel. Just like in the Venetian operas of the 17th century, they are employed as anonymous masses to convey the setting and populate the stage – or here the novel's setting – as living elements of the scenery:

They came out of the temple into the sunshine with the sand yellow and warm about their feet. Linnet began to laugh. At their feet in a row, presenting momentarily gruesome appearance as though sawn from their bodies, were the heads of half a dozen Nubian boys. The eyes rolled, the heads moved rhythmically from side to side, the lips chanted a new invocation:

'Hip, hip *hurray!* Very good, very nice. Thank you very much.'

'How absurd! How do they do it? Are they really buried very deep?'

Simon produced some small change.

'Very good, very nice, very expensive,' he mimicked.

Two small boys in charge of the 'show' picked up the coins neatly.

Linnet and Simon passed on. (135)

Here, the Egyptian children merely serve the touristic experience of Linnet and Simon and further stress the ‘otherness’ of the Egyptian backdrop without taking part in the action.

On the *SS Karnak*, for instance, the servants are only characterised through the narrative situation as well as through utterances of the Western passengers. They do not participate in direct speech and are simply ‘muted’ participants and fall into the background. Due to them being only spoken about and portrayed as the ‘other’ through a Western perspective, which only shows them in a biased, racist stereotypical way. Thus, one can argue that the native characters only attest to the tourist setting in Egypt and suggest an ‘authentic’ experience of the Oriental setting.

These elements create the ‘oriental backdrop’ as the scenery of the novel. However, as with a theatre scenery, it cannot withstand a long and closer look while sustaining the illusion it was intended to create. In the case of the novel, this has to do with the simplification of these elements and also with the ‘silences’ as part of the backdrop. While Christie uses stereotypical symbols of landscape, architecture and characters to create an image of Egypt, she ‘silences’ the complexity of Egypt's political and cultural state at that time. As shown at the beginning of this work, Egypt had unilaterally been renounced a British protectorate in 1922. Britain dominated Egypt's political life and retained control of the Canal Zone, its external protection, which included police forces, the army, the railways, and the communications. Egypt furthermore was hit hard by the Great Depression of the 1930s, for it depended on its cotton export, which decreased heavily in these years (Kramer 188-190.)

During the 1930s, the nation of Egypt was further affected by a growing nationalism as political groups advocated the emergence of a new Egyptian Empire consisting of Egypt and Sudan. The year 1936 marked a significant year in Egypt's history due to the death of King Fuad. His son Farouk inherited the throne, and in fear of an Italian invasion, he signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The treaty required Britain to withdraw all military forces; henceforward, Britain was only allowed to keep military troops at the Suez Canal to ensure its protection. At that time, Sudan was still considered an integral part of Egyptian territory, but the treaty, which gave wide-reaching independence to Egypt, left the governance of Sudan still entirely with the British. A further important notion was that the treaty eliminated the courts run by the British to handle the legal affairs of foreigners in Egypt (Dalziel 116-117).

Even though a novel does not need to reflect on historical events and it is not of importance to look at its “correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great

original” (Said, “Orientalism” 21), the novel’s complete sealing of Egypt’s and Britain’s colonial past cannot be neglected. For, every author that writes about the Orient

must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into this text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text – all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf (20).

The novel’s setting is a clear constructed and imagined version of Egypt; from an imperialist view, it is nevertheless striking how any political interrelation between Britain and Egypt is ‘silenced’. As Trouillot argues, these “bundle of silences” (27) are “active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis” (48). Only by reading its setting through a postcolonial lens and thus filling these ‘silences’, can a classification of the historical context occur. The novel’s modified imperial setting reinforces stereotypical Orientalist constructions and thereby depicts a simplified and ahistorical image of Egypt. In chapter 6, I will further elaborate on how this ahistorical image of the Orient provides an exotic shelter appealing to the armchair tourist between the wars.

If we now reassemble the ‘oriental backdrop’ consisting of the landscape as the largest element, the built environment, the natives as the extras, and the lack of depth created through the ‘silences’ – just like the two-dimensional representation on the painted panels in the theatre – on a first glance, we find a lively seeming representation of Egypt, which then crumbles on a closer look.

5.2. Encasement of the Detective Genre

The previous analysis has substantiated my claim that the novel's setting can be read as an interchangeable ‘oriental backdrop’, which in turn is detached from its murder plot. I argue that the ‘oriental backdrop’ encases the murder plot as well as tropes of the detective fiction genre in order to cater to the needs of the armchair tourist. As Bargainnier identified in his study of Christie’s work: “in her work plot occurs in a place but the place is never equal in importance to the plot occurring there” (22). Everything, including the setting and character construction, is secondary to the murder plot structure. As soon as the death of Linnet Doyle is discovered, all sightseeing stops, which underlined the Egyptian setting, come to a halt and ‘fall’ into the background in order for the murder investigation to take place. Again, referring to the stage analogy, the murder plot is paramount to the novel’s narrative. This closed circle setting “emphasizes the abnormality of the crime by isolating it from everyday matters of the world

around it” (22), so that the plots focus “is solely on the crime and its detection” (22). There is no specific interaction between the murder plot and the oriental backdrop. Through this predominantly spatial distance between the *SS Karnak* and the Egyptian setting, one can argue that the murder plot's action takes place in front of the backdrop.

6. Functions of the Oriental backdrop in *Death on the Nile*

Death on the Nile was published in 1937 during the interwar period, in which Christie was “considered to be the most-read novelist in air-raid shelters” (Gardiner 491). Following up this popularity, the fact that the scope of readership was so broad emphasises the Golden Age detective fiction’s large-scale appeal and relevance. Its appeal for the ‘armchair tourist’ during that time can be linked to political upheaval during the interwar period. Additionally, its dominant plot pattern may have reassured people that disruptive forces lay not in the social order, but just in one ‘evil’ person who could be removed from society. The Golden Age detective fiction novel appealed, for it showed a restoration of order (Rushing 89). In the 1920s and 1930s, “the very solvable nature of literary ‘puzzles’” of the detective fiction “after the social and political chaos and incoherence of wartime [was] key” (Kaplan 146) for its appeal. Functioning as a sort of ‘escape literature’, it “offered its readers’ [...] a reassuring world in which those who tried to disturb the established order were always discovered and punished” (146). Beyond that, literature functions as “an entry-point or escape-hatch to place altogether elsewhere” (Watson 1).

In *Death on the Nile*, this general appeal of the detective fiction genre is extended through an additional allure: the ‘exotic’ setting in Egypt. The attraction of the ‘exotic’, which the novel implies, is furthermore twofold. Firstly, from the armchair tourist's perspective during the interwar period, reading about somewhere foreign and exciting would have had a massive appeal (Pearson and Singer 4-5). Secondly, the appeal was created through a cultural fascination of the ‘exotic’ other, as discussed by Said (*Orientalism* 1). As already stated in chapter 2.1.4., the controversial term ‘exotic’ is wrongly connotated as “an inherent quality to be found ‘in’ certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception” (Huggan 13). During the 1930s, “the Nile was as exotic to the majority of Christie readers as Mars is to her current audience: [V]ery few travelled abroad for holidays, if, in fact, they took holidays at all” (Curran 136). Christie thus captures “a middlebrow world of burgeoning tourism” in her novel, “which at its most expensive could include Nile cruises and journeys on the Orient Express” (Curran 89).

The concept of armchair tourisms argues that through literature, a reader can explore “the earth without having to travel physically” (Baxter and Pieszek 171). This travelling through a “folding of space”, as Günzel defined it, made travel literature and novels with an ‘exotic’ setting the ideal medium to fulfil the attraction of the ‘exotic’ during the interwar period. As Egypt as a travel location was unattainable for the majority of Christie's readers, the novel made it to a certain degree reachable. Even though the Egyptian setting is merely staged, readers ‘truly believed’ themselves transported to Egypt.

Hence, it can be argued that *Death on the Nile*, with its construction of an Egyptian setting, in terms of its exoticism, fantasy, and mysteriousness along with its ‘otherness’ from the West, must have formed a biased image of the Orient in the Western readers' mind and reinforced stereotypical assumptions of the Orient. As Said concludes, “it seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human” (*Orientalism* 93). Reading about faraway places and cultures in foreign travel literature brought with it a danger of a distorted and biased image of the Orient (Clarke 1-2). During the interwar period, literature functioned as a significant source of information. With its reinforcement and repetition of stereotypical assumptions and ‘silenced history’, the novel contributes to the construction of biased images of the Orient in Western minds and discourse. The written word prevailed over ‘reality’, for at that time, it was a universal belief that “people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes” (Said, “Orientalism” 93). During the interwar period, the novel served “as a means of diffusing Oriental ideas, outlooks, and attitudes throughout the West” (Braden 165). According to Braden, the peak period for novels about “the Orient as a whole [...] was 1927-31” (168). The reading public was “deluged with books [...] purporting to bring the flavor of a different world” (165). This mindset of “different flavor” is, for instance, subsidised through utterances of the Western characters throughout the novel:

‘I don't mind telling you, Monsieur Poirot, I am partly here for local colour. *Snow on the Desert's Face* – that is the title of my new book. Powerful – suggestive. Snow-on the desert-melted in the first flaming breath of passion’. (Christie 56)

Such racist comments are woven throughout the novel's narrative. As Susan Rowland asserts, “Golden Age writers lived and wrote in a racist society”, and their works contain “unchallenged racist comments” (66).

I argue that the exotic setting in *Death on the Nile*, plus the general appeal of the detective fiction genre, functioned as an imagined ‘exotic shelter’ for the armchair tourist in

between the wars. The Egyptian setting is “marketed and distributed” (Huggan xi) for the armchair tourist as a travel destination. As stressed before, Christie conveyed to her readership that she drew her novel’s foreign travel settings from first-hand experience and knowledge, which suggested a false claim of ‘authenticity’ (Christie vii-viii). For literature is a commodity that needs to appeal to its readership. In this case, the otherness of the setting serves the consumption and appeal of a Western middle-brow audience.

To further underline the novel's appeal for the ‘armchair tourist’ between the wars and certify its function as an ‘exotic shelter’, I will examine contemporary national and regional newspaper reviews of *Death on the Nile* to stress its favourable reception during the interwar period.

The Scotsman review of 11 November 1937 concludes that “an Agatha Christie story [...] is always an event” and that “the author has again constructed the neatest of plots, wrapped it around with distracting circumstances, and presented it to what should be an appreciative public” (15). E. R. Punshon wrote in his review for *The Guardian* on the 10th December 1937:

To decide whether a writer of fiction possesses the true novelist’s gift is often a good plan to consider whether the minor characters in his or her book, those to whose creation the author has probably given little thought, stand out in the narrative in their own right as living personalities. This test is one Mrs. Christie always passes successfully, and never more so than in her new book, “Death on the Nile”. (6)

This focus on “minor characters” is interesting for as I discussed in previous chapters, these minor characters - servants, vendors, boatmen - are only part of the ‘oriental backdrop’ and are constructed as a ‘collective mass’ instead of “living personalities”, as Punshon wrote. In a later paragraph, he then defines what he means by “minor characters”. He is simply referring to the “odd collection of tourists who are making the Nile cruise” and is thus purposely neglecting the presence of the native characters entirely.

Another contemporary review in *The Tipton Daily Tribune*, published on 16 February 1938, underlines the appeal of the ‘exotic shelter’, as defined above. The writer states that he does not read detective stories, “but this last one has an appeal that is hard to resist. Typed with the pyramids and the Sphinx” (3). He then concludes by saying, “I do not know what mystery is, but the background is fascinating” (3).

The Gazette Saturday of 26 February 1938 published an additionally favourable review of the novel, which particularly elucidates on the foreign setting:

When you get Agatha Christie and Hercule Poirot putting their heads together first to create and then to unravel a mystery in the land of mystery, Egypt, which of itself exerts so formidable a spell, the most expert reader has very little chance. (10)

This exemplary ‘exoticism’ of the setting Egypt further underlines my thesis that the setting in *Death on the Nile* only functions as an oriental backdrop for the novel and its plot. Its appeal assents to its popularity during the interwar period as well as its continuous success today.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have proven that the classic detective fiction novel *Death on the Nile*, through the use of orientalist constructions in the setting and the character constructions, creates an ‘oriental backdrop’ that caters to the armchair tourist between the war. Through employing a theatre analogy, I showed how this backdrop is created as an interchangeable setting, which the genre's typical plot is not depending on, as illustrated in figure 1. By employing postcolonial theories, most notably Said's ‘Orientalism’ and Trouilotts ‘Silencing the Past’, I then demonstrated why this backdrop is a flat, stereotypical and simplified representation of Egypt at that time. Based on these ideas, I have shown what the ‘oriental backdrop's’ functions are and why it catered to the needs of the armchair tourist during the interwar period and served as a form of ‘exotic shelter’, building on the theories of Huggan’s ‘post-colonial exotic’.

As mentioned in my overview of the state of current research concerning Christie and her works, there exists a lack of investigation beyond the classic detective fiction genre analysis. I agree with Kaplan's notion that Christie’s work “should be considered and situated more firmly in the wider field of contemporary literature and its genealogy” (156). For her dominance in the Golden Age, the detective fiction genre has only increased, and in the present day, her name has become synonymous with the genre. The scope of possible research that the detective fiction narrative, as well as Christie as an author, provides, should be considered. My work emphasises again that the Golden Age detective fiction novel with its ‘exotic’ settings is a possible future field for research in postcolonial studies as well. Being the most read author of the time and the best-selling writer of all time, Christie created an image of the Orient like no other in the public eye of the early to mid 20th century and even beyond.

Even though I limited my analysis of the armchair tourist on the interwar period, I think a further investigation of the contemporary armchair tourist would be most insightful in understanding how it has changed over the last 90 years and how a more comprehensive accessibility of the places which were unreachable between the wars has impacted the role of

'armchair tourism'. Additionally, the created theory of the 'oriental backdrop' and employing it for a wider field of analysis could be of interest. The next step would be to examine other works of Christie through the presented ideas before testing them in a broader scope of literary works inside and outside of the detective genre. This deconstructive approach to understanding a novel's setting could give further insights on post-colonial constructions within literature and a new approach in examining the relation of setting, characters and plot.

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Appendix

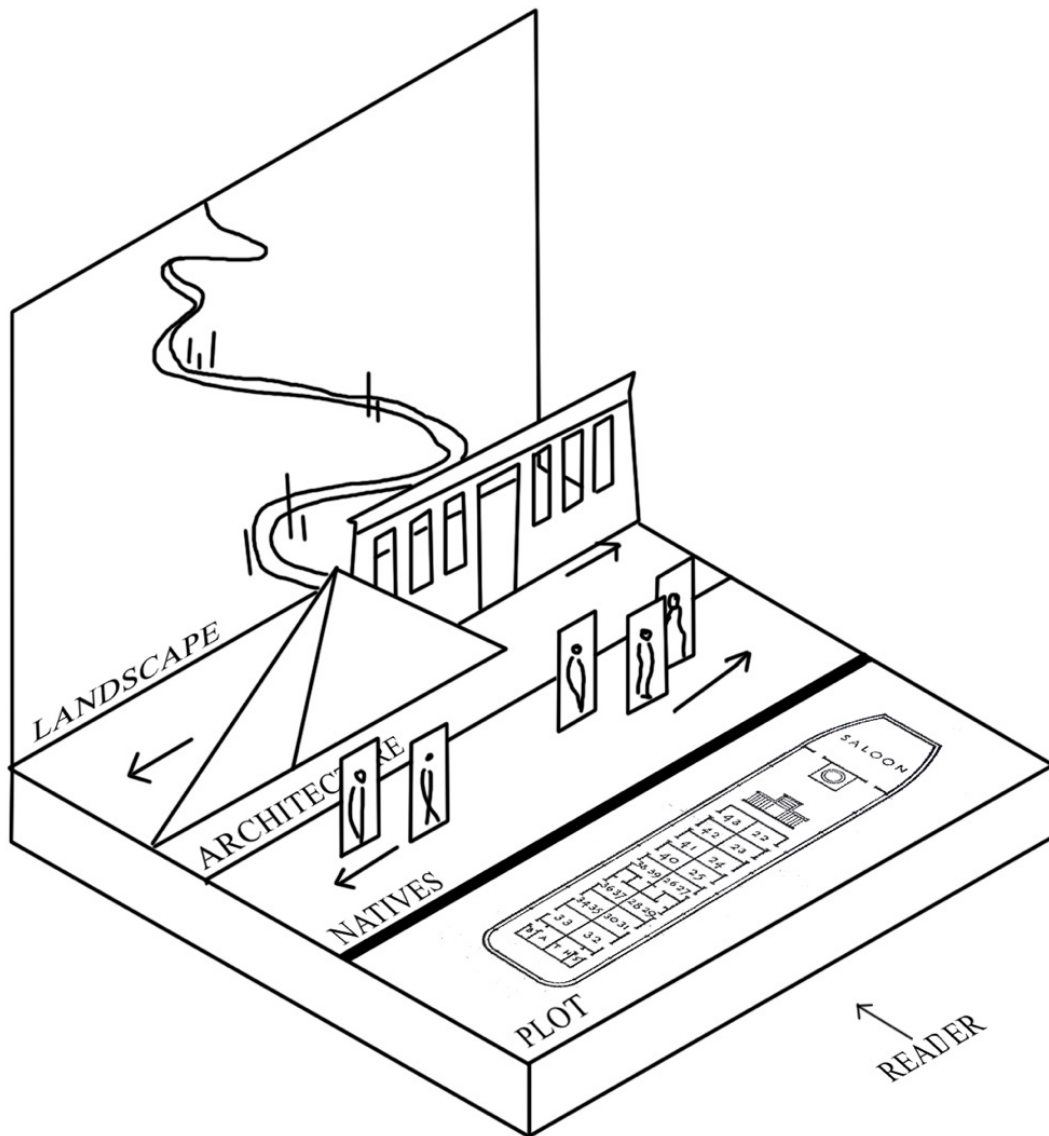


Figure 1 – Construction of the Oriental backdrop in *Death on the Nile* (Authors elaboration)

NEW NOVELS

James IV and Scotland's Golden Age

GENTLE EAGLE. By Christine Orr. (3s 6d. International Publishing Co.)

Anyone acquainted with *The Lord High Treasurer's Account* for the reign of James IV knows that historical atmosphere, inimitable and authentic, which retains the rich personality of the most attractive of Scottish Kings. Of this treasury and other Miss Orr's novel makes a use so ingenious that the effect is fascinating. Her portrait of James IV is the most convincing that she has so far produced. That it is a woman's interpretation of a man, and consequently well charged with creative emotion, only enhances its truth to life; the occasional feminine over-emphasis of phrase or scene is forgotten in the awareness of artistic justice giving reality to so many characters resurrected from Scotland's Golden Age, and notably to the women in James's experience: Mariot Boyd of Bonshaw, Margaret Drummond of Blair-Drummond, Jane Kennedy, and Margaret Tudor, the Queen so much his junior.

The Golden Age, so called, immortalised in the writings of Ambassador de Ayala and others, is in its material and intellectual aspects subordinated here to the emotional centre, the manhood. Will Dunbar, cynical and resourceful, is always ready in the wings with his emplacements, and they are more than literary. Angus, Bell-the-Cat, haunts the drama from Lauder Bridge at the beginning to Fledden at the end. There are glimpses of Alexander, the Archbishop son of James and Mariot of the *Debut* and Andrew Wood; of that fascinating attack of "quinta essentia," John Darnley, Abbot of Tongland; and of the baronial anarchy. But all serve to set forth the drama, James's emotional life, the masochistic drags of his iron chain, and his pilgrimages, to St Dunstons in the North and Whithorn in the South, to Jerusalem in aspiration: this is co-related to the James who at adolescent sixteen knew the unfilial sin of Sauchieburn, the James who knew that his one true love could not be all-f fulfilling, that of Margaret Drummond. The jostling fates separate them finally with the unloved poisoning of Margaret and her two sisters, Syb and Beatrice. But whether as her lover, or as her "Cousin James's" husband, or in the final tragic fulfilment of Fledden, James IV here is, with his Scottish setting, a vital recreation, satisfying artistically and historically.

THE FAITHFUL WIFE. By Sigrid Undset. (3s 6d. Corgi.)

Nathalie Nordgaard was very much in love with her husband, though she had been married to him for many years. She looked on him as rather a simple soul, but one who could be trusted absolutely. And then she made the appalling discovery, months after it had started, that Sigurd was unfaithful. Divorce followed, Sigurd went away, and Nathalie tried to forget him by starting an "affair" with Sverre Reistad. But she could not forget. Then, in a year or two, the woman with whom Sigurd had fallen in love was dead, and he was left with a child, and Sverre had been killed in an automobile accident.

men and women of feeling who find themselves in it. This author has done much fine work already, but nothing more moving than this.

RECAPTURE THE MOON. By Sylvia Thompson. (8s 6d. Heinemann.)

This is a novel about a lot of very disillusioned and sophisticated people living in this very sophisticated and disillusioned age. The time dealt with, to be precise, is the years from 1818 to 1837, and the people who move about in the pages belong, for the most part, to the upper strata of society. Bingen van Geldern—the chief person among the many—became Bianca Schuyt in the closing weeks of the war, but she was a widow before the war ended. Thereafter, she was never quite alive, until in the 1820s she fell in love again with Louis Scheurer. The intervening years were filled in with the birth of her son, her care of him till he went away to school, and, when he was no longer in the home, a determined and self-conscious but vain search through all the sensations for happiness.

But it is idle and useless to make any résumé of the "story," since this is not a novel of "escape" but of "ideas" and Miss Thompson's concern is not merely with a single individual, but with a little world of distracted, wealthy, biased and often very artificial people. The book not only holds its proper character, but is as well a very skilful chronicle of the times. That Miss Thompson writes with much skill and beauty is by now well known, and her talents are at their best here. For these qualities alone the novel deserves to be widely read. And that remains true even if one look, for all its wit, is a depressing one.

THE PENDLETON FORTUNE. By D. C. F. Harding. (3s 6d. Hale.)

Seven hundred and fifty-two pages and a family chart conduct the reader through the fortunes and relationships of the descendants of Josiah Pendleton, a mill manager in an English factory town, Lulstone. A hard, self-righteous man, born in 1805 and thus heir of the spirit of a harsh age, his iron rule drives his sons and elder daughter from home. Only to his youngest child, Ruth, does he show any tenderness, but on terms of the most complete submission to his will.

The others—Isaiah, Reuben, Deborah, and Benjamin—escape into the world, and all are aware that even if they desired it, no return to their bitter, unloving father is possible. Ruth is left to pursue a life of indulgence but no real liberty, and she dies in 1872 when she is 33, leaving the old man to complete loneliness during the last five years of his life. When Josiah Pendleton dies, it appears that he has left a fortune of approximately £250,000, and a fantastic will. The income derived from this capital is to be paid to his late housekeeper. After her death, but not before 60 years after his have elapsed, his descendants are to assemble in Lulstone Town Hall, where a banquet will be served in memory of him, while on the following day his wishes as to the further apportioning of his fortune will for the first time be made known. These wishes prove to be as vindictive as any other action of an embittered life.

family, it has been suggested, by way of least, "even from the crudest secular point of view."

The outlook, as Professor Roberts sees it, is dark and tragic. The nation, he holds, has been duped in the sense that it has been set on a road that can only lead to disaster; and he plainly fears war.

Two Dictators

To Mr Ward Price the two dictators, Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini, are wonderful fellows. He has talked with them, and he ought to know. To enter the presence of Signor Mussolini is like stepping into the dynamo-room of a power-station, when your scalp starts to tingle with the electricity in the air. He radiates will-power as a stove throws out heat, to use Mr Price's simile. His account of Herr Hitler is based partly on personal meetings with him, but mainly on Mein Kampf and the common stock of anecdotes. This book is in the same class as those which before the war described the great abilities and admirable qualities of the Kaiser. "Criticism of the Dictators and their works," Mr Price writes, "leads nowhere, but unprejudiced study of the energy and patriotism with which they have inspired their fellow-countrymen may provide valuable lessons for every nation in the world."

portraits marked by a caustic humour which softens the otherwise sober fidelity of their presentation. Human nature is not flattered, but neither are the shadows made unnaturally dark. This is a remarkable novel, and despite its length it has not a dull page.

DEATH ON THE NILE. By Agatha Christie. (3s 6d. Collins.)

An Agatha Christie story, and especially one with Hercule Poirot applying his "little grey cells," is always an event. It is a matter of opinion whether this author has a superior in giving an unexpected twist to concluding chapters, but it is arguable that she has none. In *Death on the Nile*, however, the solution of the mystery does not come with all that sudden shock of surprise to which Agatha Christie "fans" are accustomed. At least it should not, providing that one carefully reads a certain chapter and is willing to pursue to their ultimate implications certain hints dropped by Poirot. Whether or not the reader will succeed in naming the murderer, by which is meant discovering how the crime was committed, and not just guessing at one of the least likely persons, is another matter. In any case, here is a problem eminently worth trying to solve.

Of course a number of simplifications might be cleared away before even Poirot can be seen who killed Lionel Doyle, lovely and wealthy and on her honeymoon in Egypt. So many passengers on the Nile steamer, where the murder occurred, might have shot her, and so many of them had motives for doing it. In fact, it was just as well in the interests of justice, that Hercule Poirot happened to be on board; otherwise, one fears, the murderer would never have been caught. For in *Death on the Nile* the author has again constructed the neatest of plots, wrapped it round with distracting circumstances, and presented it to what should be an appreciative public.

Figure 2 – *The Scotsman*, published on 11 November 1937, p. 15

BOOKS OF THE DAY

REVOLUTION INCARNATE

Michael Bakunin. By E. H. Carr. Macmillan. Pp. x. 501. 75s.

By A. J. P. Taylor

Michael Bakunin, by birth a Russian noble, by nature a rebel, is the greatest expression in history of the spirit of revolution. Other men have worked to overthrow a hated regime or to establish a new system; Bakunin believed in revolution for its own sake—"The passion for destruction is itself a creative passion." He preached rebellion against his father to his brothers and sisters; he fought in the revolutions of 1848; he preached revolt against the Germans to the Slavs; he preached revolt against the Tsar to the Poles; and he led a revolt against Karl Marx and his domination of the First International. Whenever the barricades went up—in Prague in 1848, in Dresden in 1849, in Lyons in 1870—Bakunin would be found at the town hall pointing out the strategic points on a map.

In his fantastic career of revolution Bakunin was everywhere supported by great legions, the product of his own imagination. He was always ready to speak in the name of Russia or the toiling masses or whatever it might be. In 1863, at the time of the Polish revolt, he astonished a Swedish audience (Sweden was the nearest he got to Poland) by asserting that the society which he represented counted among its members "all classes of Russian society, all Russians of good-will, whatever their rank or position: generals and officers en masse, major and minor officials, aristocratic land-owners, merchants, priests and sons of priests, peasants, and millions of the dissenting sects." In his conflict with Marx he brought into being, to Marx's fury and discomfiture, a bewildering array of world brotherhoods, international alliances, national

brotherhoods, and "groups of five," which had no existence outside his own mind. A ceaseless stream of letters in code (usually with the code included in the same envelope) poured from his pen, and casual acquaintances or even complete strangers would be pressed into carrying back to their own countries an embarrassing burden of correspondence which often landed both the bearers and the addressees in gaol.

The most fixed of Bakunin's principles was a refusal to work. He lived for his mission, and it was the duty of others to support him by loans (not, of course, to be repaid) or by guaranteeing him an income; this duty someone was always found to perform, and one of his disciples ruined himself in building for the master a Swiss villa—complete with underground means of escape for the non-existent brothers. The wildest flights of the novelist's imagination pale beside the reality of Bakunin. He was almost a figure of farce; yet there was something great about the man who could write at the end of his life: "I want the masses of humanity to be really emancipated from all authorities and from all heroes present and to come."

To hold the balance between Bakunin's greatness and his futility appears an almost impossible task, but Professor Carr has accomplished it. His book is a masterpiece of scholarship and wit. It contains the best picture ever painted of revolutionary politics in nineteenth-century Europe; the style is brilliant; and Bakunin lives again as a real personality, at once absurd, charming, and overwhelming. This book should take its place among the great biographies of our language.

New Crime Tales

Death On the Nile. By Agatha Christie. Collins. Pp. 251. 7s. 6d.

To Wake the Dead. By John Dickson Carr. Hamillon. Pp. 201. 7s. 6d.

Proceed With Caution. By John Rhode. Collins. Pp. 254. 7s. 6d.

The Missing Aunt. By G. D. H. and M. Cole. Collins. Pp. 232. 7s. 6d.

Come Away, Death. By Gladys Mitchell. Michael Joseph. Pp. 416. 8s. 6d.

By E. R. Punshon

To decide whether a writer of fiction possesses the true novelist's gift it is often a good plan to consider whether the minor characters in his or her book, those to whose creation the author has probably given comparatively little thought, stand out in the narrative in their own right as living personalities.

The test is one Mrs. Christie always passes successfully, and never more so than in her new book, "Death On the Nile." True, it is a somewhat odd collection of tourists who are making the Nile cruise she tells of, including, as they do, a dipsomaniac, a kleptomaniac, an international spy, a jewel thief, a blackmailer, a fraudulent trustee, and, finally, a Communist who is not quite what he seems. But each and all of these, as well as their more normal fellow-passengers, are firmly and clearly sketched, even if they are all a little too much types rather than characters and so miss that full rotundity of life a Dickens or a Thackeray can give. Murder occurs, indeed continues, for at the end of the cruise there is a procession of corpses that must have made spectators wonder if the line would stretch out to the crack of doom. M. Poirot's little grey cells had indeed been obliged to work at full pressure to unravel a mystery which includes one of those carefully worked out alibis that seem alike to fascinate Mrs. Christie and to provide her with the best opportunities for displaying her own skill. A fault-finding critic may, however, wonder whether M. Poirot is not growing just a little too fond of keeping to himself such important facts as the bullet-hole in the table. If he is to enjoy all, a reader should also know all.

TRAVEL DIARIES

Seen in Passing. By Sir Austen Chamberlain. Cassell. Pp. xii. 177. 45s.

Even if Lady Chamberlain had not told us in the foreword, one would guess that this collection of travel sketches was written to be published. Yet why Sir Austen chose to put down these rather formal and imper-

A STUDY OF DARWIN

Charles Darwin: The Fragmentary Man. By Geoffrey West. Routledge. Pp. xii. 334. 45s.

By J. G. Crowther

This is an interesting and thorough book, though not fluently written. Mr. West has adopted from Werner

Figure 3 – *The Guardian*, published on 10 December 1937, p. 5

<p style="text-align: center;">LEGION DANCE.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">At New Legion Hall on Friday Evening.</p> <p>The American Legion has announced that it will have a dance at the new Legion hall on East Jefferson street, Friday night, to start immediately after the Kokomo-Tipton basketball game. Hook's Rythm Aces will furnish the music. This will be the first open dance since the Legion has taken over the old K. of P. hall.</p> <p>Extensive redecoration of the hall has not been completed but many changes have been made in the way of improvements and the floor has been waxed and will be in splendid condition for dancing. The dance will be chaperoned and conducted in such a way that everyone will have a very enjoyable evening.</p> <p>Committee in charge of this first dance is Garret Jackson, Paul Graham and Hugh Carter.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦♦♦</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Give Play.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦♦♦</p> <p>The junior class of the Sharpville high school will present its class play, Thursday, Feb. 17, at 8:00 p. m., in the gym-</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Library Notes</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">NEW MYSTERY STORIES.</p> <p>"The Nine Tailors," Dorothy Sayres.</p> <p>"The World's Great Crime Stories," Dorothy Sayres.</p> <p>"The Maltese Falcon," Dashiell Hammett.</p> <p>"Shudders and Thrills," Phillip Oppenheim.</p> <p>"Murder in the Calais Coach," Christie, Agatha.</p> <p>"Death on the Nile," Christie.</p> <p>I do not read mystery stories, but this last one has an appeal that is hard to resist. Typed with the pyramids and Sphinx, then the approach to the story—"it was a very peaceful river. The smooth slippery black rocks of the Nile lay half out of the water like vast prehistoric monsters, as the luxury steamer KARNAK pushed silently up stream." I do not know what the mystery is, but the background is fascinating.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦♦♦</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Remember every pound of our coal must give satisfaction. Coppock Coal Co. c-tf</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦♦♦</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Try a Tribune Want Ad.</p> </div>
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Figure 4 - *The Tipton Daily Tribune*, published on 16 February 1938, p. 3

Eternal Triangle

STRANGERS. By Claude Houghton. Toronto: Macmillan.

Claude Houghton has been hailed in the past, by discerning critics here and abroad, as "un romancier de grand avenir"; "the foremost, if not the most widely known, exponent of the metaphysical attitude in fiction"; and whatnot. He appears to be trading on this reputation in *Strangers*—as trite a tale of the mildewed triangle as one could find.

"This is not just the familiar story of husband, wife and mistress," says the jacket blurb. Maybe so, but it's the story of an undistinguished man in love with his wife and children and in love, also, with a beautiful but commonplace girl. It's the story of his efforts to adjust these two emotions satisfactorily. You must admit this has a familiar ring. The people lack quality, their talk is poor and consists largely of worrying about when will dinner be ready. Sort or: "You do love me a little, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, but let's have tea."

The hero vaunts his liaison and then is in a stew for fear one of his four confidants will tell his wife. He dies of heart disease, so the mistress herself calls on the widow, tells the whole story and—is asked to stay to tea! K.W.

Christie Murder

DEATH ON THE NILE. By Agatha Christie; Toronto: Dodd, Mead.

When you get Agatha Christie and Hercule Poirot putting their heads together, first to create and then to unravel a mystery in that land of mystery, Egypt, which of itself exerts so formidable a spell, the most expert reader has very little chance. If he is wise he gives himself up to the story and waits for Mr. Poirot to announce what his little grey cells have told him. In *Death on the Nile* the beautiful Linnet Doyle, passenger with her husband on the steamer *Karnak*, is shot to death—the end of a honeymoon. There are, of course, other passengers, including Miss Jacqueline DeBellefort, Doyle's former fiancée. So far as the reader can judge her presence has been very unwelcome to bride and groom, and this is one of the matters that engage the attention of Poirot.

There is much searching and watching. Doyle himself is wounded. The atmosphere of mystery deepens and one passenger after another becomes suspect. Poirot is perturbed. But in the end the little man does what everybody knows he will do, and if the reader is jerked back rather suddenly from the exploration of false trails, that, too, is what one must expect from Poirot, and it is what makes the story good, quite as good as any of its predecessors from Mrs. Christie's prolific pen.

Figure 5 - *The Gazette Saturday*, published on 26 February 1938, p. 10

Plagiarism Statement

I hereby declare that I,

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit von Name (Matr.-Nr.) zum Thema "Reframing Detective Fiction: Orientalist Constructions in Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937)"

Die Verfasserin hat zum Abschluss ihres Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema "Reframing Detective Fiction: Orientalist Constructions in Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937)" vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen sehr gut erfüllt.

In der **Einleitung** formuliert die Verfasserin ihre klare These, die die formale Analyse in vorbildlicher Weise mit der Untersuchung von deren ideologischen Implikationen verknüpft: "I argue that Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* encases the murder plot with oriental, racial, and cultural stereotypes. The Orientalist construction of the novel functions to create a simplified and ahistorical image of the Orient and thereby provides an 'exotic' shelter appealing to the armchair tourist between the wars" (S. 2). Mit ihrer These setzt sich die Verfasserin das Ziel, postkoloniale Perspektiven auf Christies Roman zu eröffnen. Wie sich im weiteren Verlauf der Arbeit zeigt, erweist sich die Verbindung von postkolonialen mit narratologischen Ansätzen als äußerst fruchtbar, da sie dem Roman neue Facetten abgewinnt und so einen wichtigen Beitrag zu seiner wissenschaftlichen Rezeption leistet.

Im **zweiten Kapitel** untermauert die Verfasserin ihr Vorhaben unter Bezugnahme auf postkoloniale und strukturalistische Theorien. Einer kurzen Auseinandersetzung mit dem *Postcolonial Criticism* als akademische Lesepraxis (S. 3) folgen vier Unterkapitel zu Saids Begriff des *Orientalism* sowie verwandten Konzepten (*silenced history*, *armchair tourism*, *exotic shelter*), die den theoretischen Interpretationsrahmen der Arbeit entwerfen. Hier referiert die Verfasserin einschlägige Sekundärliteratur (z.B. Said, Bhabha und Huggan aber auch Ashcroft et al. und McLeod), die sie überzeugend in ihr eigenes Argument einbindet. Das zweite große Unterkapitel entwickelt über die Diskussion der Genrekonventionen von Kriminalliteratur (als *middlebrow*, z.B. S. 10) und mithilfe der strukturalistischen Narratologie eine tragfähige Methode (auch wenn die Verfasserin fälschlicherweise die Anwendung der "analytical constituents" (S. 8) ankündigt). Angesichts der bemerkenswerten Treffsicherheit, mit der die Verfasserin den Roman in ihr komplexes Theorie- und Methodengerüst einbettet, handelt es sich hierbei jedoch um einen unwesentlichen Kritikpunkt.

Eine weitere Stärke der Bachelorarbeit liegt in ihrer sehr ausführlichen Analyse und Interpretation des Romans in den Kapiteln drei bis sechs. Im **dritten Kapitel** präsentiert

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die Verfasserin eine detaillierte Formanalyse, wobei sie insbesondere auf die Erzählsituation sowie die Plot- und Figurenkonstruktionen des Romans eingeht. Dabei wendet sie die entsprechende Terminologie aus der Narratologie gründlich und – sieht man einmal von der wiederholten Bezeichnung der Figuren als 'persons' (S. 12, 14) ab – korrekt an. Das **vierte Kapitel** mit dem Titel "Orientalism in *Death on the Nile*" beginnt mit einem Blick auf die kolonialgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Großbritannien und Ägypten. Ganz im Sinne der *Postcolonial Studies* kontextualisiert die Verfasserin ihre analytischen Befunde und liest den Handlungsort sowie die Figuren des Romans schließlich im Rückgriff auf Saids Konzept. Obwohl der Titel des **fünften Kapitels** ("Construction of the Oriental Backdrop in *Death on the Nile*") die Wiederholung zentraler Beobachtungen vermuten lässt, setzt die Verfasserin hier einen neuen Fokus, indem sie auf die dramatische Struktur des Romans eingeht (S. 11, 25). Die Lesart des Schauplatzes als Kulisse, der – ebenso wie den Nebenfiguren – keine maßgebliche Bedeutung für den *murder plot* zukommt und die somit einzig der Marginalisierung von Ägypten und seiner (kolonialen) Geschichte dient, ist ansprechend. Bedenkt man allerdings, dass der Handlungsort entscheidend zur Konstruktion der Hauptfiguren als herablassende Touristen (z.B. S. 25f) beiträgt, scheint er zumindest nicht gänzlich austauschbar (z.B. S. 27, 31).

Auf der Suche nach den Funktionen der 'Orientalist constructions' geht das **sechste Kapitel** der Arbeit schließlich über den Primärtext hinaus und bringt dabei die zwei verbliebenen theoretischen Konzepte zur Anwendung. Ihre postkoloniale Perspektive erlaubt es der Verfasserin, die gängigen Erklärungsmuster zur kulturellen Arbeit von Kriminalliteratur zu ergänzen. Auch wenn unklar bleibt, warum der Mord in Ägypten (und nicht in Großbritannien) stattfindet, stellt die Verfasserin nicht bloß Vermutungen zum "middlebrow reader" (S. 7, auch 30) an, sondern analysiert ausgewählte zeitgenössische Rezensionen aus nationalen und regionalen Zeitungen, um ihre These zu untermauern. Mit der Betrachtung dieser nicht-fiktionalen Primärtexte trägt die Arbeit in besonderem Maße zu den *Middlebrow Studies* als Leserforschung bei, die – wie im funktionalen **Schluss** treffend skizziert – innovative Möglichkeiten zur Erforschung von Christie und anderen 'queens of crime' anbieten.

Die knapp dreiseitige **Bibliographie** ist äußerst umfangreich und entspricht, wie die Arbeit selbst, den Vorgaben des MLA Stylesheet. Das **Englisch** der Verfasserin ist durchgängig flüssig und bedient sich eines akademischen Registers. Neben (nur) zwei Tippfehlern (S. 16, 25) unterlaufen der Verfasserin einige Grammatikfehler, die das Genitiv-s (z.B. S. 11, 28, 36) sowie die Verwendung von Zeitformen (z.B. S. 10) und Präpositionen (z.B. S. 2, 3, 16, 22) betreffen, das Verständnis und die Lesbarkeit der Arbeit aber in keiner Weise beeinträchtigen.

Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,3 (sehr gut)** bewertet.

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Englisches Seminar

WiSe 2021/22

Prof. Dr. phil. Jana Gohrisch

M.A. Hannah Pardey

24. Februar 2022

Bachelorarbeit:

Gender and Language in Grace Nichols's *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* (1989)

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1. Introduction

“[T]he 1970s were to be absolutely crucial in bringing to the fore a new generation of literary voices and laying the foundations for the creation of a new literary aesthetic which could be termed ‘black British’ rather than West Indian or West Indian-British” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 7). Since the ones in charge of the British literary canon were predominantly male, “the absence of women from the canon is not an objective fact but a constructed absence” (Montefiore 198). That is why the literary canon underwent critical changes at the end of the twentieth century because it neglected female, ethnic, and class minorities (Abrams and Harpham 39). During the late 1970s to the late 1990s, not only did women’s writing increase, but also “transnational feminist publishing houses like Virago” (Cummings and Donnell 5) emerged and published, among other black women, Grace Nichols’s poetry collection titled *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman (LTLW)* in 1989. Politically, Grace Nichols is part of “‘second-wave feminism’” (Montefiore 197). Concerning Caribbean poetry by women, to whom Nichols belongs, the “1980s saw a remarkable burgeoning of women poets” and “[t]ogether they have effected an act of woman’s self-definition, articulating woman’s concerns and culture and claiming woman’s necessary role in the social and historical process” (*Encyclopedia* 1242).

This political contextualisation is crucial regarding the analysis of Grace Nichols’s poetry because she emigrated from Guyana to Britain in 1977 and published her first and most famous poetry collection *i is a long memoried woman* in 1983. *LTLW* plays with constructed ‘realities’ and humorously criticises social and political commonly accepted views. In the past, scholars focused on poems such as “Configurations” (Nichols 31) and “My Black Triangle” (25). However, I shall also pay attention to less familiar poems which deal with contemporary topics and stereotypes that deserve a closer investigation. Such poems are “Who Was It?,” “For Forest,” and “Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‘Realities’ of Black Women” (6, 45, 52-54). When considering these poems, it becomes clear that similar to fighting racism, western society must recognise racism even during trivial, everyday experiences, which also applies to stereotypes.

Certainly, one woman cannot speak for a whole nation. Therefore, I claim that the speaker’s experiences *can* apply to other groups. However, they remain highly subjective and neither serve as a universal black female experience nor as a universal female experience. Consequently, although the perspective of a black woman is present in *LTLW*, every reader constructs her or his individual meaning. Yet, I shall contrast the speaker with a general (mostly male) western counterpart because of its dominance. This regards most European countries in the west, the US, and Canada as the main players of western society. As a western white woman,

I also agree with the speaker's perspective on topics such as unrealistic beauty ideals. The stereotypical categorisation of women is outdated and, with Nichols's poems, I shall stress the absurdity of degrading stereotypes which lead to inequality in many spheres of life. Additionally, I claim that the acceptance of creoles as a valid dialect of Standard English and language of the Caribbean and, thus, the acceptance of a multicultural society in Britain should replace the devaluation of non-standard languages.

In the following, I shall explain the current state of research regarding the representation of black women in history. Gohrisch's article on "Gender and Hybridity in Contemporary Caribbean Poetry," published in 1998, focuses on the poems' perspective of a self-confident and self-loving black woman as an active agent. She states that Nichols "deconstructs cultural stereotypes of femininity and constructs new images of women" (142). Almost ten years later, Welsh similarly argues that "Nichols stresses the diversity within the homogeni[s]ing category of 'black women'" (*Grace Nichols* 20). The author of *LTLW* denies western society's one-dimensional view on black women and their experiences and rather highlights black women overcoming the victim stereotype by exploring "a continuum of cultures, times, psychic and territorial spaces" (12). Thirteen years later, Alexander correspondingly points to the diverse Caribbean feminist criticism that the "embrace of multiple perspectives in Caribbean feminist criticism registers resistance to singular normative and prescriptive paradigms, allowing for new innovative, variegated, yet cohesive ways of feminist theorizing to emerge" (195).

Furthermore, Welsh claims that "Nichols [is] frequently constructing gendered voices" ("Vernacular Voices" 333) and shows "effort[s] to define a Black British literary aesthetic" ("Black British Poetry" 185). Nichols embraces her heritage and thus enjoys writing in nation language (English Creole) since nation language and Standard English are constantly interacting (Welsh, "Vernacular Voices" 347). Welsh's final claim concerning black British poetry puts forward that "multi-voiced poetic languages can also be read as signs of resistance against residual monologic ideologies of Englishness" (336). Devonish and Thompson address two approaches of describing the relationship between Standard English and Guyanese Creole. Firstly, this language variety exists on a creole continuum "which has conservative or basilectal Guyanese Creole on one end and acrolectal Standard Guyanese English on the other end" (Devonish and Thompson 265). Secondly, creoles can be viewed as "having a diglossic relationship with English, inclusive of the convergence features characteristic of languages in a diglossic relationship with each other" (265). I agree with the opinion that these approaches are complementary rather than exclusive which the speaker concludes as well. Welsh also adds

the perspective that creole is “in part a language of intimacy, familiarity and sincerity” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 16).

I examine the poems in *LTLW* regarding gender and linguistic peculiarity such as agency, patterns, and English Creole. I employ Gender Studies to analyse the stereotypical representations of femininity and their implications as well as how the poems deconstruct these stereotypes. Further, I use Stylistics to analyse the stylistic devices and their respective functions. Mostly focussing on the agent of a poem, I determine the speaker’s criticism of various topics. Concerning English Creole, I analyse the tension between acrolectal variety and Standard English since the speaker predominantly employs an acrolectal variety.

My research questions focus on how the poems represent black and working-class women. Regarding femininities and masculinities, I analyse how *LTLW* encodes cultural norms of femininities and masculinities and what gender stereotypes and relations question the poems in what way. Finally, I answer the question if the poems can be read as a deconstruction of a universal black female identity. This leads to my last two research questions of how the use of English Creole constructs meaning when the speaker employs a higher degree of English Creole as opposed to Standard English and what functions it serves.

Consequently, I argue that Grace Nichols’s *LTLW* challenges white patriarchal structures and norms in 1980s Britain by encouraging women readers to reclaim agency. The poems deconstruct stereotypical representations of gender by questioning totalising standards regarding black women’s beauty, body, sexuality, and ethnicity.

2. Theory and Method

2.1 Gender Studies

Gender Studies does not focus on the biological sex, but the social gender that refers to the culturally specified gender roles which a society provides and declares obligatory through prohibitions, punishments, and rewards (Schößler 10). Schößler continues, defining gender by mentioning Judith Butler’s claim that gender is performative. Therefore, gender becomes a social construct. Femininity and masculinity belong to the concept of gender; however, the construct of femininity is not limited to women and masculinity to men. Femininity and masculinity define themselves complementarily (11). Schippers adds that “masculinity is always defined through its difference from femininity” (90). With Schippers’s text, I shall expand the allegedly fixed binary concept of femininity and masculinity by offering more than this binary opposition.

Schippers uses Connell's model as her basis for identifying more than one femininity. First of all, "[i]nstead of possessing or having masculinity [or femininity], individuals ... produce masculinity [or femininity] by engaging in masculine [or feminine] practices" (Schippers 86). Connell's model presents a gender hegemony of a superior masculinity and a subordinate femininity ("emphasized femininity") whose main goal is to serve the desires of men (86-87). Accordingly, the mixing of levels which equates men and masculinity and women and femininity legitimates patriarchy. Connell also mentions "subordinate masculinities" (87) referring to gay men, but I shall only elaborate on the reason for their marginalisation and inferior treatment. "Connell suggests that subordinate masculinities are often conflated with femininity" (Schöbler 88). Therefore, the white, middle-class woman is the only socially acceptable western femininity (12). Similarly, Connell defines the hegemonic masculinity as white and middle-class as well (Schippers 88), which I shall refer to as western masculinity to avoid an assignment of dominance. Regarding the poems' context, I shall define western femininity as prettifying for men, intellectually and politically subordinate to men, and sexually abstinent yet teasingly secretive.

Nevertheless, I shall use Gender Studies not as Eurocentric (Schöbler 17) and ignorant of other perspectives, but rather to initiate the discourse and interplay with gender, race, and class (12). It is crucial to consider and reject the view of this 'universal' (male) subject and the generalisation of western constructs. I find Connell's model highly problematic and agree with Schippers's criticism. Schippers's model

encourages an additional exploration of how a naturali[s]ed complementary, and hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity is produced and deployed as a rationale or legitimating discourse for social practice, policy, or institutional structure that result in or ensure inequality and domination, not just along the lines of gender, but along the lines of race, class, sexuality, age, region, or nation. (93)

Another important aspect about gender hegemony is that it deals with power relations which ensure the dominance of western masculinity. As already established, it is socially unacceptable if a woman leaves the space of her femininity and performs masculine characteristics (or the other way around). For example, if women embody being promiscuous, they "contradict or deviate from practices defined as feminine, threaten men's exclusive possession of hegemonic masculine characteristics, and most importantly, constitute a refusal to embody the relationship between masculinity and femininity demanded by gender hegemony" (Schippers 95). They threaten the male dominance and are therefore considered "socially undesirable and contaminating to social life more generally" (95). Another example is that when "a woman is authoritative, she is not masculine; she is a bitch – both feminine and undesirable" (95).

Masculine hegemony becomes different when enacted by women and is socially sanctioned in order to ensure this trait for men exclusively. Consequently, this conclusion alone proves the social construction of femininities.

In this thematic context, I shall briefly mention body politics in comparison to, and dependent on, the described gender hegemony (Schmincke 30). “The new social movements in the 1970s, first and foremost the feminist movement, ‘invented’ body politics as a way to both critici[s]e politics and the control of the (female) body and its reproductive capacities and to create a new notion of the political as well as activist politics” (15). I shall elaborate on body politics with regard to western femininity in more detail when analysing the poem “Who Was It?” (Nichols 6).

I shall construct a self-defining femininity that questions and challenges this allegedly fixed gender hegemony, specifically the western femininity. The differentiation of a binary femininity and masculinity divides society into two dependable, constructed social categories. However, the self-defining femininity shall not depend on the subordination to masculinities and its hegemony – and vice versa. Schippers offers an example of a redefined western masculinity, given by Matthew Gutman, that is positioned in the context of the working class of Mexico City. It attributes nurturing children to western masculinity, although Connell claims this as a characteristic of male femininity (Schippers 97). This example proves the instability of gender hegemony and offers the possibility of ideological changes or changes of constructed norms – specifically because social relations change constantly.

2.2 Stylistics

After defining my main context-oriented approach, I shall elaborate on the text-oriented approach: Stylistics. Abrams and Harpham offer two modes of Stylistics: “In the narrower mode of formal [S]tylistics, style is identified, in the traditional way, by the distinction between what is said and how it is said, or between the content and the form of a text” (352). The second mode also “insists on the need to be objective by focusing sharply on the text itself and by setting out to discover the ‘rules’ governing the process by which linguistic elements and patterns in a text accomplish their meanings and literary effects” (353-354). However, I disagree with the scholars’ take on being objective because I suggest that every scholar is led by his or her ideologies. For example, I view *LTLW* through the perspective of Gender Studies.

Combining Stylistics and close reading, I shall analyse the style of “everyday language,” which includes tropes such as irony (Barry 211). I shall describe stylistic devices on several levels. For instance, on the morphological and syntactical levels, I shall analyse patterns and

their respective function regarding the entirety of the poems. Moreover, I shall include Post-structural elements such as disunity and breaking with patterns. Certainly, the semantic level plays an important role since poems in *LTLW*, such as “For Forest” (Nichols 45), extensively use metaphors. Regarding Gender Studies, agency is crucial for a self-defining femininity because western masculinity claims to own agency solely. By reclaiming agency on a semantic level, the speaker adds to constructing the self-defining femininity.

Stylistics also employs rhetorical parts which originally “taught its students how to structure an argument, how to make effective use of figures of speech, and generally how to pattern and vary a speech or a piece of writing so as to produce the maximum impact” (Barry 207). Concerning *LTLW*, the poem’s topic and their respective arguments are well-structured in stanzas and patterns. Additionally, the poems not only linguistically, but also visually support their arguments by using indents. In the following, I shall explain a particular grammatical feature that requires its own chapter to fully understand its importance.

2.3 English Creole

The speaker uses English Creole in ten out of 46 poems in *LTLW*. For the analysis, I shall define creoles, explain their history, their linguistic features, and the attitudes towards creoles.

First of all, it is crucial to differentiate between creoles and pidgins. Sebba suitably defines pidgins as “languages without native speakers; in other words, they are learnt (often in adult life) by people who already have a first language. Creoles, on the other hand, are first languages for a community of speakers; of course, they can also be learnt as second languages as well” (388).

This definition leads to the history behind pidgins and creoles. When colonisers transported West Africans to the Caribbean from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century to work as slaves on plantations, the colonisers’ English encountered “speakers of a fairly heterogeneous group of West African Niger-Congo languages” (Devonish, “Speaking the Caribbean” 169). I shall focus on the language contact between Standard English and West African Niger-Congo languages, since the creole used in the poems is English-based (though language contacts between other colonising countries, such as France, occurred as well).

Characteristics for creoles are the use of “lexifier language which provides most of the vocabulary” and a “simplification and reduction in their grammar and vocabulary, when compared with the lexifier language” (Sebba 389). By creating creoles, slaves were able to communicate among each other and with colonisers too, and over time, creoles became the native language of the people living in the Caribbean. However, *The Dictionary of Caribbean*

*English Usage*¹ launched to narrow the expansion of creole and set norms and degree of formality in order to preserve the ‘correct’ usage of an official nation language which resembled Standard English (Devonish, “Speaking the Caribbean” 172). Certainly, this was an approach to exert power and control over the colonised countries and their varieties of creole. Indeed, creoles exist in a continuum of varieties. Welsh defines the “continuum of different forms within a single creole ... from the broadest (*basilectal*) varieties at one end of the spectrum, through *mesolectal* varieties in the middle, to those which most closely resemble standard British English at the other end (*acrolectal* varieties)” (Welsh, “Vernacular Voices” 335, emphasis in the original). I shall focus on the tension between the acrolectal variety and Standard English because this code-switching between these varieties occur in *LTLW*. Additionally, I shall elaborate on specific differences between English Creole and Standard English when analysing the poems.²

Consequently, creoles were crucial for the communication in the past, but evolved to become a nation language. “It is through orality and as a medium for reproducing traditional cultures and societies that Caribbean vernacular languages have been transmitted and survived through the centuries” (Devonish, “Speaking the Caribbean” 185). Although the need for written standards risks losing its peculiarity, globalisation advocates the need for a standard writing system of creoles. In Devonish’s book *Language and Liberation*, he advocates to integrate creoles also as a written language and advises western society to “be prepared to tolerate written forms of these non-Standard dialects” (18). The poems in *LTLW* are great for performing orally. Simultaneously and ironically, they were published in a written form through which they achieved their popularity.

Works, such as *LTLW*, draw attention to creoles and the emerging “‘languagehood’” it deserves (Devonish, “Speaking the Caribbean” 175). Nevertheless, the attitudes towards pidgins and creoles is “very low in terms of open prestige but is in no danger of being eradicated because of its strong covert prestige” (Mair and Sand 192). Sebba argues that the reason for this low prestige resides in the assumption “that the speaker of a pidgin or creole is trying to speak the lexifier language, and failing very badly” (399). Creole, however, does not intend to ‘be’ Standard English and needs to be viewed accordingly – as a language of the Caribbean or at least a commonly accepted dialect of Standard English. Sebba continues that these views “were more widely held in colonial times, and were part of a racist attitude towards the indigenous

¹ Allsopp, Richard and Jeannette E. *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

² For further information on the differences, Devonish explains this more thoroughly in his article “Speaking the Caribbean” (2007).

people who were the speakers of pidgins and creoles” (399). I partially agree with this statement, but this social reputation has not fully changed yet and serves as an argument for prejudices against speakers of creole, for example, as evidence of a lack of education. This is why it is so important for literary works, such as Grace Nichols’s poetry collection, to employ English Creole confidently. Pretending that it is Standard English would neglect the literary potential of English Creole.

3. Grace Nichols’s *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman*

3.1 Deconstruction of Black Female Stereotypes

This chapter deals with the deconstruction of stereotypes regarding the body, sexuality, and personality of black women. Nichols readdresses topics such as the incorrect perception of one black female experience, which she already mentions in her poetry collection *i is a long memoried woman* (1983).

In the first sub-chapter, the selected poems criticise one-dimensional views on black women as the victim and the male dominance in political power. The effects of this patriarchal power appear in the second sub-chapter in which the poems question and challenge western femininity and beauty standards, such as body hair, tanned skin, and the aversion to female laziness. Continuing with challenging western femininity, the third sub-chapter deals with sexual feminine empowerment by explicitly addressing topics like menstruation and vaginas.

I shall analyse these poems from the perspective of a white female reader and refer to the poems’ speaker as a black female speaker because the explicit subjectivity suggests a black woman. The speaker reveals this in “Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‘Realities’ of Black Women” (Nichols 54) since she identifies as “we black women” (l. 60).

3.1.1 Rejecting the Subordination of Black Women

The first topic of this chapter appears in “Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‘Realities’ of Black Women” (Nichols 52-54). This poem serves as a summary on the deconstruction of one-dimensional stereotypes of black women as sufferers. The lyric persona “represent[s] different angles on tradition and experience, writing ... directly and indirectly from ... her own otherness as [a] black or mixed-raced wom[a]n” (Montefiore 209-210).

In the title, “[t]hey,” as in the majority of white males, categorise black women as one entity. “They” do not differentiate between black ethnicities and expect suffering and poor black women. This poem addresses the stereotype of the victimised black female and questions their accuracy. In order to do so, it creates two sides: the side of the lyric persona/we and the side of

you/they. The lyric persona positions itself on the side of black women and against “them” because she is a black woman (l. 60). The opposition, you/they, represents the majority of patriarchal white males with “abused stereotype[s]” (l. 10). “They” are white because the poem describes them as a group who seeks superiority and power which can be compared to white male colonisers. Additionally, women of different ethnicities (ll. 17-19) on the side of the lyric persona/we suggest the male counterpart which becomes “they.”

The first three stanzas concern themselves with the opposed “they” and their preferred view on black women. They want and need black women to be a “mother-of-sufferer / trampled, oppressed” (ll. 5-6) in order to validate their exertion of power. The ellipsis in these lines suggests these few aspects of black women and also denies any female agency, as there is no verbal agency. This also leaves black women passive, in need of help, and inferior to men. In the fourth stanza, the lyric persona disagrees with “their” position by saying that “no poem [is] big enough / to hold the essence / of a black woman / or a white woman / or a green woman” (ll. 15-19). The lyric persona declines “the one-dimensional stereotype of the black woman as just being a sufferer or a person who’s a victim or who’s had a very oppressive history” (Butcher 19).

The speaker differentiates between women’s skin colours (ll. 17-19) and concentrates on the variety of black female experiences. When talking about skin colours, the green woman differs from categories of skin colours since black and white are the two extremes, but a green skin colour does not exist. Although green is reminiscent of an alien creature, the parallel structure of lines 17-19 and 45-47 shows that – no matter, whether white or black or any colour – every skin colour carries their share of mis-categorisation in stereotypes. Therefore, a skin colour does not fix the individual person’s experience and background.

A praising declaration about the diversity follows in lines 20-23 and also reappears later on. The simile “like a contrasting sky / of rainbow spectrum” (ll. 22-23) contradicts the one-dimensional view on black women as sufferers. The next two stanzas offer examples of these contrasting characteristics of black females in the form of metaphors. The stanzas in line 24-27 and 28-31 change in type of agency, as the speaker demands interaction with black women on a personal level with the beginning imperatives “[t]ouch” (l. 24) and “[c]radle” (l. 28). Whereas line 25 portrays the one-dimensional view on a tough black woman who is solid as a “rock,” lines 26-27 shift from solid to liquid and underline the sweetness of black women. Strikingly, the personal pronoun “you” is used in this context instead of “they.” This creates a certain intimacy and contact needed to appreciate or comprehend a black woman (as one would any other individual). Similarly, the poem restates the image of a sweet, “soft black woman” (l. 28),

but immediately opposes this image with fire, resulting in danger, and revolution (ll. 29-30). This constructs one perspective on black women, and a different composition directly deconstructs it.

Another shift in the use of pronouns takes place; this time the agent becomes “we” as in black women. By employing the anaphora “and yes” (ll. 32, 35, 38), the speaker introduces various actions of black women such as “clear[ing] paths” (l. 33), “catch[ing] whale” (l. 37), and even “trad[ing] a piece-a-pussy” (l. 40) for the sake of their children’s safety and health. These black women’s actions contradict the view of black women as the sufferers by creating the image of women actively engaging in the shaping of their own lives.

Additionally, “Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‘Realities’ of Black Women” (Nichols 52-54) employ another characteristic of Nichols’s poems and other Caribbean women: English Creole. In this poem English Creole only appears in lines 40-43, e.g., “de” and “ain’t no.” The phrase “pickney dem” (l. 41) shows one characteristic of English Creole: the indication of pluralisation. The online *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines, in its entry on “piccaninny,” “pickney” as a Caribbean word for a black child. The noun is pluralised “by placing the third person plural pronoun, *dem* ‘they, them’ after the noun phrase” (Devonish, “Speaking the Caribbean” 176, emphasis in the original). Therefore, the speaker states in these lines that she would trade “a piece-a-pussy” (l. 40) in order to feed black children. The phrase to ‘trade the pussy’ implies her sleeping with men to protect black children. I agree with Welsh when she argues that “creole tends to occur within a strong celebratory context in which creole is validated not only as the language of intimacy, ... of tenderness[, of familiarity, and of sincerity,] but also of confident identity, vitality, solidarity and strength” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 16-17). The speaker uses English Creole in this context to address an intimate topic and show the strength of her personality, which she expresses through code-switching to English Creole.

The following stanzas continue with the aforementioned “there are” phrases, referring to the rainbow spectrum of black women that deconstructs the totalising stereotypes of black women as sufferers or fighters. The rainbow as unity and its colours as diversity similarly bring

attention to unity in diversity across the interrelated histories and cultures of the anglophone, hispanophone, francophone, lusophone and Caribbean Dutch territories, and suggests that shared concerns across the Caribbean remain central to any serious study of the region. (Alexander 190)

With the newly introduced characteristics, the speaker clarifies that still no category can summarise all black women and women of different skin colours and ethnicities. Beginning with the anaphoric parallelism “there are black women” (ll. 48, 51, 54), these stanzas deal with

black women being an intellectual, a victim, and a threat. The enumeration appears to continue by listing more and more character traits of black women, but the speaker stops and concludes her message in the last two stanzas.

At first, the poem starts with the perception of white males and their agency, but, over the course of the poem, the agency transitions to “we black women” (l. 60); the only agents left at the end of the poem. This shifts the focus from the people who implement degrading stereotypes to the people who reject those stereotypes and show, in this case, black women’s diversity. The last stanza picks up this “twisted self-negating / history” (ll. 64-65) as black women were not always victims, but rather victimised by white male colonisers.

The last two lines repeat lines 62-63 and oppose this victimisation. The visual representation is important and presented as indents in lines 67-68. This also occurs in lines 17-19 and 45-47, moving black, white, and green women to the same level as “[c]rushing out / with each dancing step” (ll. 67-68). Gohrisch fittingly argues that this poem “deconstructs cultural stereotypes of femininity and constructs new images of women” (142). The meaning of these lines applies to the victimised black women who break free from this stereotype and show that they are more than sufferers, for example, dancing while following their ambitions. Moreover, the visual representation allows all women who suffer from stereotypes to break free from the latter by breaking free from the poem’s linear structure as well.

Although “Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‘Realities’ of Black Women” (Nichols 52-54) occurs further back in *LTLW*, it is suitable as an introduction to stereotypes about black women and uncovers the patriarchal power in those stereotypes. Patriarchal power plays an important role in the following poem as well. The speaker employs a strong political perspective in the poem “Spell Against Too Much Male White Power” (18), in which she criticises governments for not breaking their pattern of installing white men as leaders. She aims to enchant and change the current male-dominated political situation by constructing this poem as a spell and offering several solutions to overthrow male dominance.

As the title already implies, the speaker uses the rhythms of spells, usually cast by witches, to create the structure of this poem which consists of several patterns. The first pattern is the sentence “There is too much male white power at loose in the world,” reoccurring as an immediate repetition in the form of two lines, three times throughout the poem (ll. 1-2, 19-20, 31-32). This not only serves to structure the content, but also demonstrates the current political state. The speaker employs irony in these lines because these white men do not rule the world, but they are “at loose in the world” (l. 1), which implies a *lack of control* in their actions while *being in control*. The following lines show the current political situation because white men ran

military institutions positioned in South Africa (“Pretoria” l. 3), the USA (“Pentagon” l. 4), and Russia (“Kremlin” l. 5). As the poems were published in 1989, I shall refer to the contemporary leaders briefly before 1989, i.e., Chief of the South African Defence Force, Johannes Geldenhuys in South Africa, secretary of defence, Frank Carlucci in the USA, and Chairmen of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Mikhail Gorbachev in Russia. These men are only three examples of countless white men in leading positions in different periods and countries.³ In this context, the speaker names three senses regarding “smell” (l. 3), “breath” (l. 4), and “eye” (l. 5). Interestingly, these nouns and the ellipses only assign little agency to the military institutions; moreover, the omission of the predicate indicates no agency at all and rather describes a consistent state. The speaker even transfers the agency to herself by using explicit subjectivity and introducing the “How can I” questions, which is the second pattern in this poem.

These “How can I” questions always follow the same parallel structure, beginning with “How can I,” followed by a verb and an object. The speaker establishes this pattern to reinforce the rhythm of a spell. Furthermore, these questions consist of different metaphors and form a stanza. The first group of questions deals with a drastic method of eliminating white male power, such as killing. The second group of questions offers a milder option, introduced by the phrase “[o]r at least” (l. 11, 24, 37). The target domain is the power relation between humans and the tenor white men in power. The source domain and the vehicle differ in each stanza. The first metaphor (ll. 6-11) deals with Egyptian traditions as the source domain and the mummification of dead bodies as the vehicle (“embalm” l. 7, “roll it up” l. 8), additionally supported by the simile “like a burial shroud” (l. 9). Therefore, the speaker pleads to bury ancient views on the distribution of power in a nation which set white men as their leaders. Further, the “How can I” questions show an intertwining pattern regarding the verbs, exemplified in the following. The first verb “persuade” (l. 12) rhymes and ends with the same last five letters as the next verb “dissuade” (l. 13). Then again, the latter shares the first four letters with the last verb “dissipate” (l. 14), which creates an interconnection of these verbs and lines. The speaker wonders how to influence or rather infiltrate politics or dismantle the current white male dominance.

I shall analyse one more metaphor in detail. The pattern of rhyming verbs, “bemuse” and “confuse,” reoccurs in lines 25 and 26. The simile “like the tower of Babel” (l. 27) refers to the eponymous story which appears in Gen. 11.1-9. The speaker acts as the agent and

³ In 2021, the first black secretary of defence in the US was employed.

attributes herself the power to split the white male dominance by assigning different languages (“salter of tongues” l. 30) which shall confuse them. By using this comparison, the speaker foresees the failure of white male power as well as patriarchy. This is similar to the failure of ignorantly building a tower high enough to be on the same level as God, which the lesson of the Tower of Babel narrative represents. With this, the speaker also criticises the greediness of patriarchy to gain more and more control over political and cultural affairs, such as gender roles. By condemning this greediness for power to fail, the speaker offers a hopeful ‘prophecy’ for the future. However, the poems certainly imply the failure of male dominance, but the speaker only offers possible solutions in the form of these “How can I” questions with no definite solution.

The speaker’s main claim appears in the last stanza and aims to withdraw power from white men, who behave like “multinational octopuses” (l. 36) and want to intervene in and control other nations’ businesses. Finally letting them retire (l. 41) enables equality to flourish – possibly in form of black people and women in power.

This sub-chapter questions political and cultural stereotypes and deconstructs them by employing several tropes, such as irony, and reclaiming women’s agency. Even though these poems serve as a summary of the problem of patriarchal power and the stereotypical representation of black women, in the following sub-chapter, I shall examine more poems dealing with these topics and further elaborate on them.

3.1.2 Western Beauty Standards

The following poems question the western beauty standards associated with the western femininity and discuss the origin of these standards.

For example, “Who Was It?” (Nichols 6) is part of these poems and criticises shaving women’s bodies completely, which western beauty culture expects from women. The poem consists of four stanzas and neither follows a strict stanza structure, nor a rhyme scheme although rhymes and parallel structures appear.

In the first stanza the speaker declares her intentions. She does not want to shave her body hair, but rather, searches for the origin of this “hairless habit” (l. 2), highlighted by the alliteration. The rhyme “habit” (l. 2) and “armpit” (l. 4) shows that the armpit is one part of the body that western beauty standards demand to be clean-shaven. Sarah Hildebrandt elaborates on the development of body hair removal for women and men. She argues: “Because body hair is a sexually dimorphic trait, the removal of body hair by women is often seen as exaggerating this difference, and thus the absence or removal of body hair has come to signify femininity”

(60). I partially agree with this statement, but I would like to add a more drastic perspective. Even though women have less body hair than men, hair is still a natural feature for women's bodies that they simply do not present in public. However, a completely shaven body usually resembles the body of a child, as the hair has not yet developed or has only grown in a few places. A child stands for innocence, purity, and also obedience. Comparatively, shaving conveys this image of sexual purity that patriarchy demands of women to fulfil its patriarchal western femininity. When considering shaving as a standard practice that basically imitates the characteristics of children, this view becomes very problematic because it sexualises children.

For my further analysis, I shall elaborate on Schmincke's article about body politics as already mentioned in chapter 2.1. Michel Foucault coined the term biopolitics and used it to describe a new dimension of political power: the individual human body on the one hand, and 'the population' as the sum of these bodies on the other, became the subject of political measures and regulations (Schmincke 16). This eased the way for politicising and objectifying the female body and ascribing it economic value. The objectification of the female body in the context of sexuality became the basis for feminist critique and self-organisation (28). Collective body self-examinations with speculums enabled a more conscious and affirmative relation to one's own sexual organs, which until then had been almost invisible and strongly taboo (28). Therefore, body politics has led to both the development of a strengthened relationship with the female body and the collective womanhood and also the (male) political takeover of freedom of choice regarding the female body.

Thus, "as changing clothing styles exposed more and more of the female body throughout the past century, visible hair was problemati[s]ed, and consequently removed" (Hildebrandt 61). This applied to armpits, legs and pubic hair as shirts became sleeveless, and pants/skirts and bikinis shortened. Therefore, social pressure forces women to shave because it controls "her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (67).⁴ Since the change in fashion at the beginning of the twentieth century, patriarchal society sees publicly shown body hair as obscene which is supported by rhyming "bikini," "indecenty," and "free" in the same stanza (ll. 7-9) and resembles the sound of disgust (/i:/).

In the last stanza the speaker answers the question posed at the beginning. The anaphoric listing of three women in lines 10-12 refers to the correlation of fashion (and the beauty industry) and body hair, and the repeating "O" accuses and blames these women. Society problematises women's hairy armpits, but this was only implemented from 1915-1919, which

⁴ This does not exclude social pressure on men, but for my analysis I shall focus on women.

is “linked to new fashions that revealed a previously hidden part of the body” (Hildebrandt 61). One item of clothing that Mary Quant altered was the skirt which became the mini skirt. The shorter the skirt, the more leg was shown revealing previously hidden hair. Estée Lauder and Helena Rubinstein did not design fashion, but both founded their own cosmetic companies. So, all three women worked in the beauty industry and influenced beauty ideals. On the one hand, these women freed women in the twentieth century from patriarchal restriction regarding physical beauty invented by men and clothes which had to cover the whole body. These women claimed their agency by running their own companies and becoming successful female entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, the speaker criticises the consequences of their inventions by slightly varying each surname. Although miniskirts became a symbol of sexual revolution and female freedom in 1960s Britain, similar to the birth control pill (Sichtermann and Rose 115), Mary Quant disliked aged, corpulent, and short-legged women who wore her mini skirt because they were not ‘capable’ of this fashion idea. In other words, if a woman did not fulfil the ‘requirements’ to wear a miniskirt, society shamed her, so she would feel uncomfortable wearing one. Mary Quant’s surname turns into “Mary Cant” (l. 10). This pun is ambiguous in two ways: the verb ‘can’t’ and the noun ‘cant’. The verb ‘can’t’ hints at the aforementioned inappropriateness of women with ‘unsuitable’ legs to wear a miniskirt so that they should not or *cannot* wear one. The second possible interpretation as the noun ‘cant’ is a synonym for a hypocritical statement. Therefore, Quant’s liberation of women first turns into an exclusion of everyone who does not fulfil the beauty ideals and second into an imprisonment in monotonous, unachievable beauty standards.

Similar to Quant, the speaker names Estée Lauder “Estee Laud” (l. 11), a smaller variation than before; however, the ending is missing which turns her surname into the verb ‘to laud’. Lauder improved her environment because she herself was dissatisfied with the available cosmetic products at the time. Therefore, she invented all sorts of cremes and lotions to offer lifelong youthful grace and appearance for all women (Sichtermann and Rose 124) – at least in theory. Although Lauder is praised (or lauded) for her entrepreneurship, she participated in encouraging women to change their natural looks in order to fit into unrealistic beauty standards since humans in general will not stay youthful forever as she claimed before. She says in her autobiography that “in an ideal world, we would all be judged by the beauty of our souls, but in this not-so-perfect world, a good-looking woman has advantages and – usually – the last word” (qtd. in Sichtermann and Rose 123). Instead of changing society’s perception to allow women to have flaws and wrinkles as they age, she took part in creating an illusion that women

could, and need to, stay young forever. Thus, the lyric persona's alteration of Lauder into praise is an ironic statement about Lauder's participation in unrealistic beauty standards. Whereas Lauder praised her own beauty standards, the lyric persona criticises her ignorant 'pioneering'. Helena Rubinstein's alteration of her surname is the biggest and most revealing in terms of the speaker's opinion. The pun of turning Rubinstein into "Frankenstein" (l. 12) assigns Rubinstein the role of Dr Frankenstein who created the monster. Rubinstein believed women *must* learn to beautify themselves (Rubinstein 120) in America at the beginning of the twentieth century, similar to Lauder. Thus, Rubinstein implemented these beauty standards and norms of a hairless, 'perfect' body, still known a century later, and took part in creating the social pressure on women regarding their beauty and body.

Certainly, these three women are simply the product of the dominating beauty industry and western capitalism. In his review "Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry" about the eponymous book by Geoffrey Jones, Fields writes about how western capitalism and the beauty industry forms western femininity. Commercials are a successful means to determine what is deemed universally 'beautiful'. "Television advertising intensified concerns about youthful as well as clean and modern appearances and served the industry in persuading more people to enjoy, if not require, soaps, skin care regimens, cosmetics, and additional hair care products, such as dyes" (Fields 444). Therefore, the beauty industry earns a fortune by controlling western beauty standards.

This finally answers the speaker's question in the title. The speaker deconstructs the hairless body as an unrealistic ideal which does not represent women's bodies, but rather, artificial standards which are difficult to achieve. Ironically, these three women are part of the reason for the imprisonment which they aimed to escape.

Continuing with the absurdity of totalising beauty ideals, "Dead Ya Fuh Tan" (Nichols 11) intensifies this topic, now focussing on tanned skin. Translating the title into Standard English already gives away the topic and criticism of this poem: 'Dead here for tan'. This questions the excessive need of white western people to have brown, tanned skin while they discriminate against black people for exactly this. The speaker in this poem, for instance, consistently uses English Creole to support this irony.

Formally, this poem is very structured with each stanza consisting of three lines and ending with the same sentence, "People a dead ya fuh tan" (ll. 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18). By repeating this sentence, the speaker adds irony to the meaning because the speaker is black, which she clarifies in the first stanza. Consequently, the lyric persona points out the irony in "[p]eople" as

in white people wanting to be tanned even though they discriminate against black people for it and would have never known about tanned skin if they had not met black people.

The irony continues in the second, third, and fourth stanzas by listing efforts white people, represented by “[d]em,” endure to tan their skin. These stanzas are structured identically in an anaphoric parallelism: an anaphora of “[d]em a” in the first two lines, followed by the same verb per stanza, and a noun at the end. This transfers a very simple routine to tan a body but with a great deal of effort involved in tanning. First, white people lie on uncomfortable surfaces such as “sand” and “rock[s]” (ll. 4, 5). Additionally, they spend money on an artificial sun (“sunbed” l. 7), so the tanning process takes less time, and on protection from the sun (“lotion” l. 8). Tanning without lotion causes skin cancer. The latter is medically proven. People are aware of the risks of excessive tanning that “prolonged exposure to solar UVA and UVB radiation and occasional sunburns are risk factors for all three types of skin cancer” (McCright and Vannini 311). While clothes shorten, as already established, body parts that were hidden before are now ‘in need’ of a tan. Therefore, the skin around “breast[s]” and “bum” (ll. 10, 11) needs to be without tan lines because beauty standards call for brown skin without imperfect stripes which expose the natural paleness. After underlining the great effort white people endure, the lyric persona repeats the first stanza (ll. 13-15) to recall the necessary previous presence of black people for white people’s beauty standard. By repeating this stanza, the speaker mocks white people’s excessive need for a tan while rejecting black people. Similarly, if white people had never encountered black people, the exotic tanned skin as an attractive ideal would not exist.

Suitably for the context of the exotic, the black speaker employs English Creole throughout the poem. The white people’s hypocritical attitude towards black skin as inferior is also represented in the use of English Creole. “[B]lack vernacular forms were *inherently* inferior to standard English and reflected the moral, cultural, intellectual, and technological inferiority of their speakers” (Welsh, “Vernacular Voices” 331, emphasis in the original). Indeed, this was/is the social perception of creoles, but the speaker plays with this perception by calling out white people for their hypocrisy. Ironically, this discovery indicates intellect.

Significantly, the last stanza alters the meaning of the last sentence which appears in each stanza. In lines 16-17, the speaker continues mocking white people as they are able to receive tanned skin and be satisfied with it. However, I find it more apparent that with these lines the speaker describes the ironic situation that in western societies white people are actually allowed to have tanned skin – and are even complimented for it. With the adverb “[a]nyway” and the auxiliary verb “can” (ll. 16-17), the speaker clarifies this juxtaposing phenomenon that

white people are in any way allowed to have brown skin whereas black people ‘can’ not. Thus, the same sentence “People a dead ya fuh tan” (l. 18) suddenly receives a different meaning; not white people are dead, but black people die for their skin tone (as history proves).

To completely comprehend this topic, I shall address McCright and Vannini’s article “To Die For: The Semiotic Seductive Power of the Tanned Body,” which deals with reasons for artificially tanning white people’s skin. They correctly state that, in eighteenth-century Europe, the upper class saw paleness as an ideal in order to distinguish themselves from the working class who “would be tanned from protracted sun exposure during the workday” (McCright and Vannini 310). When outdoor leisure activities, such as lawn tennis or golf, became popular, upper-class people spent more time outside and were, therefore, exposed to the sun. McCright and Vannini conclude that “bronzed skin was no longer merely indexical of exposure to UV rays; it connoted sign-value” (311) and considerably, “in a specific historical, political, economic, and cultural context tanned skin *connotes* value” (329, emphasis in the original). Tanned skin became a status symbol of having enough money to engage in leisure activities. Yet, they solely quote Coco Chanel who advocates for tanned skin, and further, they claim that tanned white skin conveys healthiness, beauty, empowerment, and self-confidence (313) without once mentioning black skin. The only term used to name a colour is “bronzed” to clearly describe tanned white skin. Therefore, their article lacks the aspect of “bronzed” (or black) skin due to people’s ethnicity and blindly focuses on the definition of “bronzed” skin as tanned white skin.

“Dead Ya Fuh Tan” (Nichols 11) addresses this topic and questions the changing perception of “bronzed” skin as a beauty ideal. When darker skin tones become increasingly appreciated by western society, racism should lose its foundation, since racism is based on the colour of the skin. Ironically, this exposes the construct of racism. White people are favoured either way, and black people were never discriminated against for their skin tone, but because of a construction which helped to enslave them.

An appeal to accept an aging and lazy body describes “The Body Reclining” (4-5). With regard to the aforementioned standards of women’s bodies, now the speaker sings a love song to a reclining body, praising the laziness of the body. Similar to “Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‘Realities’ of Black Women” (52-54), this poem offers two opposing agents: the lyric persona and “those” (l. 20). However, the lyric persona predominates “those” in speech, focussing on the body’s praises.

In general, two interpretations are possible for the meaning of “the body reclining” (l. 1): aging and excessive cleaning. Aging is socially unacceptable – especially for women. This

means that skin is not allowed to have wrinkles and must be soft, tight, and smooth. Here, the parallel to the beauty industry and commercials becomes evident; women in magazines and in commercials for beauty products predominantly look flawless. This creates an excessive need to buy these products to look socially acceptable which the beauty industry determines. Conversely, the poem begins with an anaphora of “I sing” (ll. 1-3) and immediately sets an atmosphere of well-being, which enhances the followed description. The speaker lists parts of women’s bodies that are socially regarded as unpleasant and therefore, create insecurities for women because without medical surgery the body of a human is inevitably going to age. Additionally, laziness is socially unacceptable for a woman at home because, among other activities, she is meant to clean the house. This idea originated from the separate spheres ideology in the nineteenth century. Steinbach summarises in her book *Understanding the Victorians* that “[w]omen remained at home, in the domestic sphere, where they ran their households, raised their children, and cared for their husbands” (166). At the end of the twentieth century, however, especially working-class women could not afford to stay at home. As a result, they often worked and did the household simultaneously. Nevertheless, society, specifically providing men, expect women to fulfil the tasks of nineteenth-century middle-class (and upper-class) housewives who did not work to earn money. The logical conclusion therefore is: Either a man provides enough money, so the woman does not need to work, or he has to participate in the household as well.

The “fallen arm” and the “lolling breast” (ll. 4-5) are examples of women’s inert body and also a sign of aging. The ellipses intensify the focus on the unideal body description and again links it in the next line with a compliment. By describing the body as an “indolent continent” (l. 7), the body receives importance, since the continent is the sole basis for humans to live on. Yet, a continent is not judged by its structure such as wrinkly mountains, denting lakes, or ripping rivers, but is accepted as it is by the people living on it. Transferring this to a body, the speaker declares that the way nobody cares about the structure of a continent should also be represented in what people think about the ‘structure’ of a body. Therefore, the continent in the poem is “indolent,” which shows the laziness in movement, but also as a lack of motivation to care for other people’s opinions. So, women should not care about what others have to criticise about women’s bodies or actions.

‘Singing the body’ continues in the second and third stanza. While the speaker repeats the exact words of the first line in line 8, she alters the body parts and adds her approval of laziness. Consequently, the “easy breathing ribs,” “horizontal neck,” “slow-moving blood,” and the adjective “[s]luggish” (ll. 9-12) create an image of a resting or relaxing body. The speaker

continues by praising the “weighing thighs,” “idle toes,” and “liming knees” (ll. 14-16) which again refer to women’s cherished laziness. The simile of a woman’s body as a “wayward tree” (l. 18) is interesting because it justifies the women’s laziness. The definition of the adjective “wayward” in the *OED* states the following: “Disposed to go against the wishes or advice of others or what is proper or reasonable.” Thus, the speaker rejects the western society that expects women to work on themselves and not neglect their looks or household by deciding for herself what she wants to do. Thus, she ironically reclaims her power and agency to be lazy.

Necessarily calming the mind (“restful” l. 19), the speaker takes time to rest and accepts a woman’s body and choice as it is. Conversely, the speaker criticises “[t]hose” (l. 20, 23) women who fight against the aging of the body or excessively clean the house. The epanalepsis of “scrub” (l. 20) and “dust” (l. 23) shows that no matter how often women try to clean or ‘fix’ their body, according to western standards, it will never be enough and will keep “corrupt[ing] the body” (l. 22, 25). The speaker ends this poem with a metaphor about self-imprisonment. I translate “asylum” (l. 26) as mental institution rather than its other meaning of protection and shelter. The source domain punishment and the vehicle imprisonment transfer salient features to the target domain human and the tenor human mind. Therefore, the imprisonment of “[t]hose” women is self-inflicted by wanting to conform to social beauty and behavioural standards. This drives “[t]hose” women insane, hence the asylum.

Instead, women should accept their body as it is and be lazy rather than becoming insane because of a constant dissatisfaction based on social standards. In this context, the title of the poetry collection, *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman*, suits well as it summarises the content of this poem with “humour and irony” (Gohrisch 152). The lazy woman shows no efforts in taking actions to ‘improve’ her body, surrendering to the pressure of being a housewife, and even caring about the opinion of western society. Humorously, this is praiseworthy.

3.1.3 Sexual Female/Feminine Empowerment

This chapter deals with the sexual female empowerment in Grace Nichols’s poems. This topic indicates significance because many poems in *LTLW* hint at female sexuality, such as the vagina and the monthly cycle. Beforehand, I shall add that Nichols does not shy away from writing about topics that are socially considered taboo and she dedicates a poem to crotches, called “On Poems and Crotches” (Nichols 16). Thus, poems like this, but also “My Black Triangle” (25) reclaim sexual agency and female power.

The most explicit praise towards periods and vaginas is present in “Ode to My Bleed” (24). As the title already gives away, the speaker dedicates this poem to her period. Usually,

odes are sung, comparable to “The Body Reclining” (4-5), in which the speaker sings and praises the lazy female body. Therefore, the praise continues for every part of the body, even those parts which are socially frowned upon.

In order to understand the need for praising menstruation, I shall contextualise the crucial knowledge and myths about menstruation in the twentieth century. Whelan gives examples for the historical western attitudes towards menstruation, continues with the Orthodox Jewish and Muslim attitudes, and I shall add biblical references. In 1920, Schick apparently discovered a ‘menotoxin’ in menstrual blood; Macht further supported this hypothesis by ‘proving’ menstrual blood contaminated plants. Whelan correctly criticises that “[t]he experimental designs of Schick and Macht, however, made no allowance for a control fluid – for instance, nonmenstrual blood” (Whelan 106). She continues:

This concern about the dangers of menstrual blood prevailed until as late as 1945. In that year, Ford, in a review of cross-cultural attitudes toward menstruation, cited data confirming the presence of a toxic material in menstrual blood that could lead to contamination of the penis if sexual intercourse took place during menstruation. After 1945, no published reports either confirmed or denied the existence of such a menotoxin. (106)

These medical findings show the ridiculous western perception of menstruation in the first half of the twentieth century. Whelan adds the Orthodox Jewish and Muslim attitudes which view menstruating women as unclean and impure (107). Similarly, the Bible provides references about the impurity of menstruating women and that men should keep their distance from them (Lev. 15.19-30). These regulations are extreme, but were, in part, hygienically necessary at the time. Hygiene products such as tampons and pads did not exist until after Christ. Thus, with regard to hygiene and the prevention of infections, there is a reason for the restrictions of menstruating women. Nevertheless, due to a lack of education, the stigma stuck with menstruation long after hygiene products prevented health risks. The lack of education can still be encountered in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Already in 1985, in his article “What They Should Know About Menstruation,” Warren McNab promotes the need to talk with girls and boys and to educate them on menstruation. Significantly, he starts by teaching students “proper terminology” in order to break down the barrier of embarrassment and reduce the fear of talking about menstruation (McNab 27). In surveys, boys usually knew significantly less about menstruation than girls and “[t]wo thirds of the men and women believed that menstruation should not be discussed at work or *socially*” (27, emphasis added). This led to feeling ashamed or embarrassed when asking for a pad at work which automatically excluded

the topic of menstruation from the workplace. This secrecy is highly problematic because ignorance leads to misinformation.

Returning to “Ode to My Bleed” (Nichols 24), the lyric persona does exactly what McNab expects people to do: publicly talk about this topic and free it from its taboos. First, the lyric persona begins this poem by describing the colour of period blood which differs from woman to woman, cycle to cycle. The terms used for description are different shades of red which names connote comfortable familiarity, such as “autumny” (l. 4). Autumn colours refer to the colour of leaves, which naturally shift from green to every shade of light to dark red when seasons change. Afterwards, these leaves fall off, and nobody dooms this cycle as something that needs to remain secret.

However, the speaker does not want to “part / with ... [her] cyclic bleed” (ll. 5-6) as trees part from their leaves. She even personifies her period in line 9 (“it tells me”), giving her period the power to constitute parts of her personal identity. Therefore, like a person appearing once a month, her period reminds her of simply being a woman of which the speaker is not ashamed. Line 10 is quite ambiguous and offers one visual and one grammatical interpretation. The latter allows for the grammatically correct interpretation that the present participle “reclaiming” refers to the subject of the sentence which is “it” (l. 9), the speaker’s menstruation. This corresponds with the sentence structure of the simile in the following two lines. The “tides” (l. 11) resemble the period “reclaim[ing] the sands” (l. 12), which resemble the speaker herself. The *OED* defines the verb “reclaim” as saving “(a person) from ... an undesirable state, course of action.” Consequently, tides nourish the sand with nutrients, reviving the sand. Similarly, menstruation saves the speaker from a state of rejecting menstruation as a natural part of women only because society seeks to restrict menstruation to personal matters and not to public discussions. Nevertheless, line 10 offers another interpretation through the indent. Visually, this line can also be read as “I am / reclaiming me” (ll. 9-10), which conforms with the first interpretation of this line. By celebrating menstruation as a crucial part of the personal identity and “an integral part of womanhood” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 51), the lyric persona saves herself from a state of insecurity. The speaker purposefully provides this ambiguity in order to show the various facets of her personal identity and the importance of addressing and discussing the topic of menstruation.

For the speaker, menstrual blood means much more than bleeding once a month. Presented in an insistent anaphoric parallelism, it reminds her of “birth” (l. 13), “death” (l. 14), and “the birth in death / of seasons” (ll. 15-16). The association of birth with menstruation is rather obvious because the menstrual cycle indicates the fertility of women’s bodies. Blood and

death are also quite readily associated with one another; however, death and menstruation are not – at least not at first. Biologically, each period, unfertilised eggs leave the body and are, therefore, killed off so that during the next cycle the probability of fertilisation is possible again. More revealing is the third line in this anaphoric parallelism which represents the consistent reoccurrence of periods through the death of seasons (“birth in death / of seasons” ll. 15-16). The indent again signals the visual interpretation that menstruation in general reminds her “of seasons” (l. 16). The speaker compares menstruation to seasonal changes. The death of one season is the birth for another. Therefore, this change and the continuation of this cycle are necessary in order to ensure the natural cycle.

Consequently, the speaker openly writes about menstruation, deconstructing the stigma of shame attached to this topic and praising the capabilities of the female body. She explains with the help of the season metaphor the natural mechanism of the female body and aims to establish a healthy relationship with menstruation.

In general, *LTLW* does not condemn menstruation and the resulting pain, but interprets it as a present. Similarly, the speaker mentions several women in “Eve” (Nichols 14) who appear in the Bible. She judges them differently according to their actions. Already in the first stanza, the speaker declares whom she prefers: It is Eve because she was the reason for women receiving their period, according to the Bible. Therefore, the theme of praising menstruation continues here as well. She names seven women “haunting” (l. 1) the Bible and criticises them for their lack of agency or ability to stand up for themselves.

I shall only elaborate on one of these women as the focus is on Eve. The first woman is “Virgin Mary” (l. 4), mother of Jesus. An angel told Mary that she will bear the saviour (Lk 1.26-38). However, as the passive construction “got stuck” (l. 4) shows, Mary did not have any choice in this and, thus, lacks agency. In comparison, Eve took and ate the apple before Adam, which gave her the ability to distinguish good from evil. She, then, was able to make choices on her own. “Eve is reclaimed from phallogocentric renderings of her merely as the precipitator of original sin” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 51). She gained agency, was gifted with menstruation, and protected her newly acquired present like a new-born suggested by the description of “[n]ewly hatched” and “[c]oyly clasped” (l. 20). Although the Bible represents this as a punishment “as the marks of difference and shame” (51), the speaker ascribes gratitude to receiving her menstruation.

Gratitude and praise again continue in “On Poems and Crotches” (Nichols 16). Menstruation is not the focus, but the crotch itself. Nevertheless, the speaker expresses the same opinion about crotches and menstruation as in the two poems before. Interestingly, this poem

shows no sign of explicit subjectivity and assigns the agency to poems and women. This poem is dedicated to Ntozake Shange whose poem is quoted at the beginning. Shange sees the need for writing poems and the source for that need is a woman's crotch.

The speaker agrees and elaborates further on this aspect, "reali[s]ing the creative power of the erotic" (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 37). Again, she draws upon the birth metaphor, which was already mentioned in "Ode to My Bleed" (Nichols 24). Poems are not written, but "born" (l. 7) from a woman's "crotch" (l. 8) which indicates that "the link between women's literature and women's libido is even more explicit" (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 37) than in other poems. In the following, the speaker describes this creational process of poems.

In spite of birth being a passive procedure for the baby, the speaker personifies poems in this quatrain creating the poems as agents of their own fortune. Line 11 is still part of this creational process, yet it starts differently and includes an ellipsis of the subject. Only the verb "[k]iss" and the noun "[i]ntellect" occur in this line which narrows down the creational process of writing a poem guided by the crotch to these two words before finishing by 'birthing' the poem. For example, the poems function as a fortune teller. The capitalised "Visionary-Third-Eye" (l. 10) indicates the birthing of the future. Women represent this announced future because lines 14-20 are written in future tense, and the rising of poems (l. 9) show a parallel to the future rising of women (l. 14-15). This "destabili[s]es the patriarchal binary opposition that conventionally links women to the body and to physicality, and men to the intellect or mind and to spirituality" (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 37).

Besides "[p]oems" being the agents in the first stanza, "[w]omen" (l. 14) take agency in the next stanza; specifically, those women who are sexually aware of themselves ("who love their crotches" l. 14). By stating that these women "will rise" (l. 15), the poem foretells and empowers these women to praise their sexuality and vaginas, rather than be ashamed of and hide them behind stigmata. The speaker lists the possibilities of women with an anaphora of "will," followed by a verb (ll. 15, 17, 18, 20). Therefore, those women will not only rise, but also "hover" (l. 17), "drink" (l. 18), and "create" (l. 20). Lines 16 and 19 break with the anaphora because they further describe the previous lines. The case of line 16 specifies with an epanalepsis that women will rise "higher and higher." This line and the epanalepsis show that there is no limit for women who accept their sexual identity. The Blue Mountain Peak, also home to Blue Mountain coffee, is the highest mountain in Jamaica and one of the highest in the Caribbean. Women will rise beyond these mountains, but remain there for a while, as "hover" (l. 17) indicates, to "drink black coffee" (l. 18). During this trivial action, women "[w]ill create out of the vast silence" (l. 20).

Incidentally, the speaker leaves what women create unanswered, which opens the possibility of several creations. Welsh suggests that female “poets will carry a tremendous political force as they emerge from a perceived ‘vast silence’ of women’s voices” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 38). Thus, this poem functions as an empowerment of women, both sexually and politically.

This theme continues in the poem “My Black Triangle” (Nichols 25) which combines sexuality and colonisation in the metaphor of the speaker’s crotch as the triangular trade. I shall only briefly refer to an interpretation of this poem by Welsh because she interpreted this poem very well already and its content is necessary for subsequent interpretations.

First, she offers a summary of the triangular trade, through which Europeans traded their goods for “African slaves along the west coast of Africa” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 38). They were then transported to the Caribbean as the labour force to produce goods such as “sugar, tobacco, cotton and coffee” (38). These goods were then transported back to Europe, closing the triangular trade. Connecting this to gender, “the ‘black triangle’, in Nichols’s poem, is also a reference to the female pudenda” (38) and slave experience was “importantly also a gendered experience, one which encompassed quite specific fears, losses and oppressions for the female slave” (38). The children of female slaves kept their status as slaves which lead to a “widespread sexual as well as racial abuse of black slave women at the hands of the white overseer and plantation owner” (39). Regardless of “the dry fears of parch-ri-archy” (l. 22) and history, the poem “employs the perspective of a self-confident black woman who accepts her gender, her sexuality, and her race as important components of identity” (Gohrisch 151).

This poem offers a comprehensive transition for the next chapter which combines the concepts gender and colonisation. Concluding this chapter, Alexander summarises that Audre Lorde convincingly “proposes the erotic, empowered self-knowledge as critical in dismantling the social, racial and political hierarchy of white heteropatriarchal power structures” (185). Therefore, the selected poems open the sexual discourse of the black female body within a white patriarchal context. They empower women to reclaim their sexual agency which also strengthens self-defining femininity.

3.2 Gender and Colonisation

This second thematic chapter deals with the significance of African descendants for the black female speaker, to which I previously referred. Undoubtedly, colonisation has had a great impact on the ‘migration’ from Africa to the Caribbean and to Britain. In this chapter, the speaker deals with topics such as slavery, the ethnic diversity in every individual, and questions

about home. The last poem elaborates upon the tourist gaze of the Caribbean and one-dimensional stereotypes about black Caribbean femininity and masculinity.

3.2.1 African Roots

In the previous chapter, I introduced the topic of colonisation and the related triangular trade which fuelled colonisation. Many following poems thematise the coherence of humanity's origin and the injustice to black people that happened over the past decades (and is still ongoing).

One of these poems is called "On Lucy" (Nichols 17) which deals with the related origins of humanity. This poem situates the reader in the field of archaeology and more specifically in the Afar region, Ethiopia, in 1974 (Johanson 468). At this location a "partial skeleton dubbed 'Lucy'" was found who is ascribed to the "First Family" (468). The speaker begins with an anaphora of "[a] bundle of" (ll. 1-2) and an ellipsis through which the consonance of the labial plosives /b/ and /p/ dominate the first two lines. These patterns add rhythmical features to the lines and also limit the letters to a minimum. The noun "premises" (l. 2) is ambiguous in two ways. First, the premises are defined as land owned by someone else which hints at colonisation of American land. Europeans claimed this land as theirs, despite the native population, and also claimed black people as a European good.

Second, another meaning of the noun premise is an assumption of previous events. In the case of Lucy, this is more accurate because she is part of the "First Family," as the second stanza indicates. The agent of this poem is the "archeologist" (l. 3) who uncovers and reveals the origin of humanity. Yet, these bones are merely white and do not indicate skin colour. However, due to the location, Africa, it is highly probable that she must have been black, but this information is often purposely left out. The second stanza only consists of one sentence which is divided by a relative clause which calls Lucy "our first little African Mother" (l. 4). The selection of these attributes is quite interesting because – as already mentioned – the adjective "first" indicates that Lucy was indeed part of the "First Family." Additionally, the adjective "little" is not a belittlement by the speaker but rather meant literally because Lucy was smaller than humans today (Johanson 477). By far, the most interesting attribute is the possessive pronoun "our" which also leads to the speaker's main and final claim in this poem: all humans originated from Lucy. She proudly states that she stems from "mixed race descent but strongly identif[ies] with ... [her] African heritage" (Gohrisch 142). The speaker repeats the verb "unearths" in line 5 to parallelise the objects of the verb which is "our first little African Mother" in line 4 and "me" and "you" in line 5. However, the speaker presents the latter

differently. She is certain that the “archeologist” unearths her which implies that the speaker acknowledges her roots in Africa. Afterward, she reveals, with the ellipsis of “and you too” (l. 5), that “you” also originated from Lucy and stem from Africa. Therefore, the lyric addressee is humanity itself; predominantly white humans who have African roots.

With this in mind, racism itself sounds ironic, as the concept is based on different races from which one is superior. With these few lines of “On Lucy” (Nichols 17), this construct starts to collapse because of the same descent, proven by Lucy and the “First Family.”

3.2.2 Migration and the Stereotypical Representation of the Caribbean

This sub-chapter deals with a variety of topics which can best be summarised by its title. More precisely, it deals with the Caribbean diversity regarding ethnicity and the migration regarding movements from Africa to the Caribbean to Britain. Migration also implies the question of the migrant’s belonging as he/she is ‘not fully Caribbean’ anymore, yet different from the constructed Englishness. The stereotypical representation points to the Caribbean tourist industry and the profit from performing stereotypes.

The topic of mixed races and no clear-cut division of races continues in “Tapestry” (Nichols 57) and “celebrates the Caribbean subject as racially hybrid” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 117). Accordingly, the title already constructs a picture of a colourful textile fabric which hangs on walls as decoration. I shall expand this perspective from the Caribbean hybridity to a worldwide hybridity as well. Linguistically, this poem is interesting as it shows various phonological structures such as rhymes, alliteration, and anaphoras, which create the repeating patterns of a tapestry. Moreover, there are only two beginning letters of the poem’s lines: ‘a’ and ‘t’.

The first stanza begins with each of these letters as an introduction and already indicates humanity’s widespread “family ties” (l. 2) by the alliteration “long line” (l. 1). Regardless of the metaphorical meaning of “ties” and “line,” these nouns also have a literal meaning being the material and methods for creating tapestries. Consequently, the speaker employs the metaphor of tapestry in which tapestry is the source domain and humanity the target domain. The material and colours serve as the vehicle and the geographical descent of humans as the tenor. I shall discuss the salient features in the following. Precisely, this poem works as a description of the colonial history of the Caribbean and humanity.

As a side note, I shall name the different groups of people as mentioned in the poem, such as Africans and Europeans, because this is what the speaker calls them. Additionally, humans did not travel much across continents – and therefore ‘mix’ their ethnicities – until

certain travel methods had been invented, specifically in contrast to the twenty-first century's globalised standards. Therefore, I am aware of the difficulty of categorising people in groups nowadays.

The first four lines of the second stanza deal with four different origins of people. The parallelism in lines 3 and 4 and the end-rhyme “here” and “there” reveal the simultaneous existence of African and European people. Nevertheless, “countenance” (l. 3, 4) also means facial expressions or “bearing, demeanour, comportment” (*OED*) which are synonyms for behaviour. Considering this meaning, the parallels between white and black people becomes inherent. Yet, history treated them differently – more specifically, Europeans treated Africans far worse.

Subsequently, the speaker names the next big group of people in the world besides Europeans and Africans: Amerindians and Asianics (ll. 5-6). She mentions in a parallelism the “Amerindian cast of cheek” and the “Asianic turn of eye” (ll. 5-6). Both of these metaphorical expressions of Standard English refer to the human face. The Amerindians, American natives, metaphorically receive a slap on the cheek, which is a very mild expression for the exploitation and strategic eradication of Amerindians from 1492 until the end of the twentieth century. This is when the “last residential school closed in 1996” (Woods 174). Residential schools intended to assimilate “Aboriginal children into the working classes of Euro-Canadian culture” (173) by distancing them from their aboriginal culture. Tragically, these schools “were often poorly built and unsanitary” and led to “death[s] from disease” (174). Although the last school closed in 1996, the topic regained public attention in 2021 when hundreds of bones from children were found in Canada's former Kamloops Indian Residential School. This recent example proves that colonial history has not yet been sufficiently reviewed.

In spite of the proximity of the Asian and American continent, the Asian presence in the Caribbean is often undocumented as indicated by “turn of eye” (l. 6). Yet, “[t]he presence of Asians in Latin America was duly recorded in official documents, such as contracts and censuses as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Hu-DeHart and López 10).⁵

Concerning creoles, “African languages were effectively pushed underground as forbidden” (Welsh, “Vernacular Voices” 329). Resulting from the need for communication and the encounters of Standard English and West African Niger-Congo languages, the slaves developed the “claiming of nation language” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 117) as the “tongue's salty

⁵ For further information on Afro-Asian relations, see Luis, William (ed.). *Afro-Hispanic Review*. Vol. 27, no. 1, Vanderbilt University, 2008.

accommodation” (l. 7). This results in a means of communication meant as a bridge that became ‘home’ and was declared the nation language for the Caribbean inhabitants.

The lyric persona acknowledges this history and claims her “tapestry” (l. 8) by using the only predicate in this poem, “is” (l. 8). However, the verb ‘to be’ is a weak verb with little meaning which suits this poem of ellipses and the highlighting of keywords and pauses. After using a verb for the first time, the mood darkens even more. The speaker employs this shift by using a different beginning word than the lines before. The beginning words follow an almost perfect pattern of ‘the, and, an, a, an, an, and, the’ (ll. 1-8) which indicate a frame by the definite article “[t]he” at the beginning and end (ll. 1, 8) and a decrease of letters of the conjunction “[a]nd” (ll. 2-7). Thus, the Europeans either represent the peak or bottom of history.

The pattern breaks in line 9 with the beginning word “[a]ll” and gives this line an intensified focus. The “bloodstained prints” (l. 9) refer to the slaughter the African and Amerindian people had to endure. The speaker visualises this repercussion in this tapestry. Considering every line that starts with the determiner “the,” the speaker creates a content pattern of her acknowledging the black people’s “long line of blood” (l. 1), their individual tapestry (l. 8), and their “black persistent blooming” (l. 12). The last line claims the endurance of black presence across a history of surviving and injustice. This creates a very powerful and confident appearance in this tapestry.

The poem “Cosmic Spite” (Nichols 34) suits this context as it deals with the injustice happening to black people. However, as this injustice also refers to the natural environment, I shall return to this poem in Chapter 3.3.

Next, I shall briefly refer to the poem “Out of Africa” (30) that also addresses the topic of descent and the triangular trade already discussed in previous poems. The poem summarises the journey of slaves transported from Africa to the Caribbean as a cheap labour force, e.g., for sugar plantations, and views Africa, the Caribbean, and England through migrants’ eyes. It is “often overlooked as a relatively ‘light-weight’ poem” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 96), but aligns excellently in poems about the triangular trade and the resulting cultural and personal discrepancies.

First of all, this poem lacks agency because verbs only appear in the last lines and there is no explicit subjectivity which creates an apparent distance from the speaker and the content. Although the prepositions “[o]ut” and “[i]nto” imply movement, the sentence structure is consistent. The three stanzas always begin with an anaphoric parallelism of “[o]ut of Africa” (ll. 1-6), “[i]nto the Caribbean” (ll. 7-10), and “[i]nto England” (ll. 13-17). Each of these phrases are followed by an object that describes stereotypical peculiarities of these regions.

The first stanza deals with Africa's distinctive characteristics such as "baobab" trees (l. 4) which only grow in Africa and, therefore, represent a peculiarity. However, the speaker not only describes the beauty, but also the sorrow Africa has to endure, such as exhaustion ("tired" l. 2) or starvation ("dry maw of hunger" l. 5), due to the exploitation suffered from colonisation. The "first mother" (l. 6) hints at Lucy, who is considered to be the first mother and part of the "First Family" as previously discussed. Colonisers transported slaves "out of Africa" and "into the Caribbean." Yet, the migrants' perceptions vary from stereotypical to very personal experiences. Therefore, I agree with Welsh's suggestion that "Africa, the Caribbean and Britain, are, in the migrant's consciousness, essentially constructed through and by the ways they are represented in dominant discourses" "because of its ingenious mingling of truths and cultural stereotypes" (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 96). However, the 'truths' mentioned should not be overgeneralised but refer to a very personal experience for slaves, even if slaves have shared similar experiences.

The poem breaks with the pattern of the anaphoric parallelism in the second stanza about the Caribbean by adding two lines at the end, similar to the third stanza about England that adds three lines. Again, the speaker describes features of the region, but this time she adds more information which suggests that she lived in the Caribbean and England and, therefore, has more personal information on these regions. In the stanza about the Caribbean, the speaker also points to a topic concerning "the baleful tourist glare" (l. 8), on which I shall elaborate later. The exotic thrills tourists; nonetheless, the "tourist glare" (l. 8) only sees one-dimensional stereotypical representations that aim to entertain tourists instead of representing facts and history about the transportation of slaves. Therefore, colonisers claimed the Caribbean resources ("ackee," "saltfish" l. 11) as well as the Caribbean inhabitants for their "happy creole so-called mentality" (l. 12) for tourist entertainment.

Continuing with the last stanza, the speaker describes England as a very dreary place, implied by descriptions such as "meagre funerals" (l. 16). This poses the question of why people would migrate to England when it is dreary. Yet, the speaker currently lives in England as the last three lines indicate. These tell of a trivial event in which a person loses an umbrella and a man chases and shouts after that person, representing one of the most mundane experience of daily life.

This poem summarises the ambivalent experience migrants live through. They encounter stereotypes, as well as everyday-life experiences, which impede settling in a new country because of the outside perspective of stereotypes. As the speaker lived in at least two

of these regions, and these regions differ immensely in their mentality, the question of home and belonging arises, which the speaker also discusses in “Wherever I Hang” (Nichols 10).

Whereas “Out of Africa” (30) employs a distant and hidden speaker, “Wherever I Hang” shows explicit subjectivity and a personal and experiencing lyric persona. Moreover, the speaker employs English Creole which is “in part a language of intimacy, familiarity and sincerity” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 16) because the question of home is very personal.

The poem begins with an enumeration of what the speaker had to leave behind when migrating to England, including her “people,” “land,” and “home” (l. 1). Despite her euphoric expectations (“like in a dream” l. 8), she describes Britain again as a quite dreary place of dullness, indicated by descriptions such as “misty greyness” (l. 9), “pigeons” (l. 17), and the “cold” (l. 18). The speaker creates a “new-world-self” (l. 6) and gets “accustom to de English life” (l. 25). By accustoming, the speaker challenges the constructed Englishness as it can be learned. Nevertheless, she declines acquiring it completely because she misses her “back-home side” (l. 26). This explains her use of English Creole and shows its importance as a reminder of her old home. Since she carries customs of her old home and does not fully acquire the customs of her new home, she is in a political dilemma because society labels people, categorising her as either a Caribbean woman or an English woman.

She answers the questions of belonging in the last line. I share the following opinions that the “poem ends, boldly and unexpectedly with the brilliantly simple compromise” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 93): “Wherever I hang me knickers – that’s my home” (l. 31). “The issue of making oneself a home appears ironically as a trivial question ... [and] a Caribbean woman celebrates home as the place where she hangs her knickers” (Gohrisch 152). I agree with these interpretations, but both disregarded the interplay of English Creole and Standard English in line 31. When considering the usage of English Creole throughout the poem, the speaker employs code-switching as a sign of the conflict of her Caribbean and English home. The speaker solves this conflict by employing both English Creole and Standard English in the form of the possessive pronoun in the last line. First, the speaker writes “*me* knickers” and she uses “*my* home” (l. 31, emphasis added) and refuses “the old binary of *either* standard English *or* creole” (Narain 530, emphasis in the original).

Therefore, she solves the conflict by combining both varieties in one line. She offers the possibility for migrants not to leave their past homes behind, but to remain as a complementary part, and still be able to integrate into a new culture successfully. For the latter, the construct of Englishness has to be renewed or expanded by multiculturalism.

The collection of poems refers to the time of the “First Family,” 3.2 million years ago (Johanson 465), and also to the fifteenth to nineteenth century, the time of colonisation. The following poem neither refers to the first, nor the second period, but to the twentieth century. Briefly, I shall elaborate on the perception of black people at the end of the twentieth century in which the rising tourist industry in that time plays an important role. Contextualising Caribbean tourism, Nair proposes that the

glamour of tourism marketing suppresses the fact that mass tourism in the 1970s was virtually enforced on the dependent island economies, which never quite ‘adjusted’ to punitive austerity measures supposed to enable their ascent into modernity. As the Caribbean sugar industry and other trade crops began to decline in the 1960s, tourism and the sweatshop labour of the so-called Free Trade Zones replaced them in a process of neoliberal economic restructuring. (300)

The poem “On Receiving a Jamaican Postcard” (Nichols 23) criticises the one-dimensional and stereotypical view on Jamaican inhabitants (or Caribbean inhabitants in general) which the western tourist industry initiates. Suitable for this stereotypical view, the speaker uses English Creole in this poem. The use of English Creole reinforces these stereotypes at first, but clearly mocks it by employing irony, evident in the last lines (ll. 24-25), and “cuts through the staged absurdity of the dancers on the postcard” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 102). Ending this poem by repeating the sentence “Anything fuh de sake of de tourist industry” (ll. 24-25), the speaker presents the aforementioned descriptions as a play performed to enrich the tourist industry. This elevates the speaker on a meta-level because she uses the tourists’ prejudices and turns them against the tourists themselves by profiting from their naivety and ignorance. Unfortunately, this reinforces the tourists’ stereotype. They leave the location thinking this is all the country has to offer, while the performers conspire against these ignorant tourists.

Concerning gender, the fifth and sixth stanza draw upon the stereotypical Jamaican masculinity and femininity from a western perspective, which also coincides with western gender roles. On the one hand, the speaker describes the man as being muscular (l. 18). His actions are overly active (“prance” l. 14) and aim to impress the woman by beating drums (ll. 16-17). On the other hand, the woman wears a red dress (l. 19) and exposes her “brown leg” (l. 21) which adds to the secretive sexual part of western femininity. Her dancing suits the rhythm of the drums because she follows the beat given by the man. This representation aligns with the western femininity as subordinate, described in the theory section.

When investigating thoroughly, the speaker certainly mocks this representation and considers the described actions as a performance, “clearly satiri[s]ing the spurious construction of ‘cultural authenticity’ within the scene, and the postcard’s tired rehearsal of racial

stereotypes” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 103). The man and the woman are aware of their stereotypical performance and of this “dream of de tourist industry” (l. 5), which also includes the setting of blue water and sky (ll. 8, 9) and golden sand (ll. 10). The verb “staging” (l. 14) hints at the man performing this behaviour and his appearance. Already in the second stanza, the speaker reveals the performers’ intentions by exposing their “conspiracy” (l. 6) to present the stereotype. Therefore, Nair’s description for the play *Smile Orange* also suits this poem in that it “mocks both locals and tourists, each scamming the other” (Nair 301). The speaker clearly mocks and criticises the tourist industry, but interestingly, she does not reject it because she presents the inhabitants as free agents fooling the tourist industry to gain profit.

Thus, the business with the exotic is very profitable. The exotic attracted colonisers to settle down and still attracts tourists after colonisation to experience otherness. Opinions differ whether Caribbean inhabitants should support or reject tourism. I propose that it depends on the freedom of choice of the Caribbean workers and the tourist’s awareness of this stereotypical performance. Unfortunately, both are not necessarily given. Nevertheless, in this poem, the speaker determines the agency of the performers of the Caribbean tourism industry. The performers are aware of these stereotypes and scam the tourists, which demonstrates an approach to the decolonisation of the Caribbean (Nair 312).

The selected poems in this chapter aim to surpass the surface of stereotypical representation by connecting with every individual’s African heritage, recognising the otherness in every individual, and accepting it as an enrichment.

3.3 Gender and Nature Metaphors

I shall acknowledge two more poems in my analysis. They deal with topics such as the exploitation of the natural environment and the position of poor countries in a world-wide context. While the previous poems concern themselves with intrapersonal or interpersonal relations, the following poem considers the relation between nature and humans and draws from metaphors about nature.

“For Forest” (Nichols 45) focuses on the relation between “we” (l. 24) as earth’s inhabitants and the forest, presented as a female agent (“her” in l. 5). Therefore, the poem constructs gender metaphorically as a female protagonist. However, “For Forest” deals with the beauty and danger of rainforests in South America, while also drawing upon the danger *for* forests. The speaker encourages female agency, represented by the female protagonist “Forest,” and simultaneously raises awareness of nature’s beauty and exploitation in order to respect and protect this ecosystem, as well as female agency.

The poem consists of 24 lines with a few rhymes, but no rhyme scheme. Starting with a repetition, the speaker introduces the forest's ability to "keep secrets" in the first stanza (ll. 1-2) and reiterates the same words in the last stanza (ll. 22-23). This creates a frame on which I shall elaborate later. As the main stylistic device, the poem personifies the forest and specifically provides it with female traits. The noun "Forest" functions as the name of the rainforest because no definite article appears in front of the noun and "Forest" is capitalised throughout the poem. By granting the forest a name, regardless of its eponymous ecosystem, the poem creates an individual character because "[n]ames are seen as having the dual character of denoting the individuality of the person, and also marking social connections" (Finch 709).

Biologically, trees are considered living beings. Thus, forests consist of many ecosystems, to which the poem refers in the second stanza. Here, "watersound," "birdsound" (l. 4) and "teeming" (l. 6) create a lively and harmonious atmosphere. Rhymes support the interconnection of the forest: From birds in the sky to insects on the ground (ll. 4, 6) – that is where "Forest" metaphorically lets "her hair down" (l. 5) since a forest extends from treetops to roots. Going into detail, the source domain of this metaphor is a human being and the target domain is nature. A woman's body serves as the vehicle and the forest as the tenor. Western femininity considers long open hair as 'natural' and a standard for women and short hair for men because they are "complementary opposites" (Schippers 90). This representation ironically suits the context of the forest being 'natural'.

By repeating the adverb "down" (ll. 5, 8) and connecting it to the noun "gown" (l. 11), which rhymes, the speaker connects the second and the third stanza. Although "Forest" might be beautiful and seemingly peaceful, she does not want everyone to enter and see what happens in her woods. This results in "Forest" covering herself up (ll. 7-8). In contrast to the previously described beauty, the poem turns "Forest" into a dangerous woman with a dark gown and calls her a "bad dream woman" (l. 12) in order to hide from "sky and fast-eye sun" (l. 9). Transferring this to the forest, at night it turns into a dangerous and mysterious place which not even the endless sky and sun can reach.

The phrase "bad dream woman" (l. 12) contains two meanings depending on the allocation of these words. On the one hand, "bad dream" is a noun phrase and describes the woman as a woman in a nightmare. On the other hand, "dream woman" is a noun phrase and the adjective "bad" describes a dream woman who behaves badly. Both interpretations are possible; however, the first interpretation implies that someone else dreams, imagines, and assigns certain attributes to a woman. These attributes prove to be incorrect and, even worse, the opposite, which creates a nightmare woman. I shall focus on the second interpretation, as it

represents the forest as the agent deciding to behave differently than is expected of her. Similar to the representation of women in *LTLW*, forests neither depend on, nor disappoint another person's imagination because neither do women. Although humans can control forests by cutting them down and planting new trees, this metaphor constructs an autonomous forest because of the forest's agency.

Indeed, the forest obtains a secretive atmosphere as many mysteries can hide in its darkness, which occurs in the next stanza. Attributing human traits to the forest also entails feelings and dreams, which mainly function to create sympathy for the forest as a living ecosystem. The private and secretive forest carries all sorts of mysteries such as the golden empire of Eldorado. The phrase "when earth was young" (l. 14) refers to a time when the forest was untouched and unexploited before European colonists settled in the sixteenth century. The myth of a golden town, Eldorado, is just one of many quests "during the Spanish conquest of South America [that were] ... one of the driving forces in the occupation and settlement of the Spanish colonies" (Acemoglu et al. 5). While many people, specifically slaves, died during these conquests, the quest for Eldorado is not the only reason for the exploitation of forests causing fatal damages. General mining of gold, iron, and other valuable metals can have severe

environmental and social consequences ... [if] poorly managed and regulated. Studies have shown that poorly managed mining can create significant impacts through deforestation, accumulation of mercury in rivers, wildlife, and people (10-15), heightened suspended sediment loads (16), transmission of malaria, HIV, and other diseases (9, 17); and significant cultural erosion and social conflict in neighboring rural communities that often capture only a nominal share of financial benefit but bear the weight of environmental and social costs (18, 19). (Hammond et al. 661)

Consequently, colonisers destroyed the environment and often the accompanying social welfare only to gain (possible) riches. Five centuries later, scavenging remains one of the problems that endangers forests and erases their beauty. Moreover, industries of all kinds, such as agriculture, livestock, and forestry, destroy or exploit existing forests in order to gain profit, for example by creating palm oil plantations, cattle farming, or by deforestation to produce paper. Therefore, the perception of forests as something that humans own and exploit continues.

However, hardly any industry advocates for forests since forests are solely seen as a means to serve their profit with which the speaker disagrees and thus, assigns the forest agency. This again functions as a humanisation; therefore, a forest is a community of different sorts of lives, inhabited by different species of animals. The speaker aims to ascribe human traits to forests which evoke emotions and feelings of pain and sorrow caused by the exploitation. Psychologically, this works well, as it is easier for humans to sympathise with a living being which exhibits similar traits. Lines 17-20 add to the perception of forests as living beings,

creating an innocent character waking up from slumber. Additionally, this stanza creates this auditive atmosphere of being in the forest in the morning by the polyptoton of “howl” (ll. 17-18). The line “Forest just stretch and stir” (l. 19) offers hope for the future that a peaceful, new day will begin and the forest will recover from the exploitation.

The morphological repetition of the same sentence in ll. 1-2 and 22-23 in the last stanza explains the urgency for the final claim in the last line. The repetition is necessary as the speaker has to repeat it twice, or four times, because hardly anybody listens. Interestingly, the speaker changes tenses in this phrase. Instead of the present tense ‘can’, the speaker chooses the past tense that “Forest *could* keep secrets” (ll. 22-23, emphasis added). Thus, the speaker not only praises the beauty of forests, but also mourns its past beauties of which some have been destroyed. This interpretation also explains the last line.

It breaks the aforementioned frame: firstly, because the speaker appears for the first time as “we” (l. 24) and secondly, because it is indented. The focus of the poem shifts from the talking and acting “Forest” to the hitherto silent “we,” simultaneously shifting the agency. Additionally, by indenting the line, the shift becomes visual as the poem spatially opposes “we” to “Forest.” Therefore, the forest kept mysteries of old civilisations and natural phenomena before humans started exploiting them for their resources and treasures. Because human imagination depends “on other species and the nonhuman environment for our very conceptions of identity and imaginative self-expression” (Triffin 152), it is time for humans to act and protect the forest since its secrets enable life as “we” knows it. This positions the speaker on the same level as the reader which creates a collaborative feeling and an urge to work together. Without forests, life on earth will most likely go extinct, especially because climate change advances. Constructing the 24 lines as 24 hours of the day to stop the worst outcomes of climate change, “we” only appears in the last line. Thus, humanity is currently in the last hour if not last minutes/seconds before nature cannot be saved anymore.

Finally, this poem not only functions as praise of the beauty of forests, but also as a wake-up call to stop the exploitation, which demonstrates “social and ecological commitment” (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 101). The metaphor of the forest being a woman shows several features and unsolved mysteries of forests which adheres to the *LTLW*’s overall rejection of one-dimensional and stereotypical views on women and other groups, here now including forests.

After praising nature and warning about destroying forests, “Cosmic Spite” (Nichols 34) suits well in this context because the poem deals with the consequences of climate change. Moreover, the poem concerns itself with poor countries which carry the consequences and the

relations of rich and poor countries. The speaker addresses a problem that still exists in the 2020s and offers final remarks for my analysis.

The speaker begins the poem with the personal pronoun “we” (l. 1) and she uses this pronoun throughout the poem. By using “we,” she creates the antithesis of ‘we’ versus ‘they’ although the poem does not mention ‘they’ explicitly. The speaker determines “we” as “‘third in the world’” (l. 1). Interestingly, she does not use the ‘usual’ label for developing countries ‘third world countries’, now named developing countries. The renewed label of the speaker ranks the importance of these countries belonging to the category of first, second, and third which was invented during the Cold War. Roughly summarised, western and Asian main players are first and second and blooming, whereas the third, mostly previously colonised countries, suffer the consequences and receive leftovers.

The aforementioned plea to protect forests and the environment in “For Forest” (Nichols 45) turns into a presentation of consequences resulting from the lack of protection. I share Triffin’s argument that “[i]t is axiomatic in ecological or environmental discourse to emphasise – quite correctly – the disproportionately destructive pressures brought to bear on the planet’s shrinking resources by so-called first- and third-world societies” (152). Driven by “[c]apitalism and rampant consumerism” (152), the ‘leading’ countries or companies, who are mainly responsible for the climate change, do not carry the consequences, but countries with extreme weather conditions do – often third world countries. The speaker continues listing “natural disasters” (l. 3) such as “the hurricane, the floods, the famines” (l. 4), the “droughts and foreign debts” (l. 5). The latter contradicts the term ‘natural disaster’ because debts regard business relations between humans, and not nature. Foreign debts describe the total debt of a country to all others or worldwide banks. Yet, the speaker counts this as a natural disaster because the colonising countries exploited (and still exploit) the resources of the indebted countries. This led to an inferior economy which needed the support from the countries that exploited them beforehand. The third world countries were helpless in these events, so they see “foreign debts” as a force of nature unable to be controlled.

Following the list of disasters, the speaker criticises first world countries for imposing western “biblical philosophy” on the third world (l. 6). In line 7 and 8, the anaphoric parallelism alludes to the parable in Matthew 13.12. The line with the ellipsis (l. 8) originally continues “from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Mt 13.12). By omitting the last part and replacing it with three dots, rich countries leave nothing worth mentioning, not even the rest of the sentence. However, in the Bible the phrase refers to the purpose of the parables and explains that the ones who believe in Jesus Christ will gain from the parables, but

those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will be confused even more. The speaker refers this sentence to the unequal distribution of material goods or other riches. The countries who exploited and still exploit third world countries will keep profiting from them. Ironically, the third world countries' resources, such as "sugar, tobacco, cotton and coffee" (Welsh, *Grace Nichols* 38), and a cheap labour force enriched the first world countries. Instead of repaying third world countries for the oppression they encountered, this process continues today. In June 2021, Torreele and Amon published an article about the inequitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. They state:

Yet 75% of vaccine supply has gone to just 10 countries. Fewer than 25 million vaccine doses have been administered in the whole African continent, whose total population is 1.36 billion. While wealthy countries are competing to buy sufficient stocks to vaccinate their entire population multiple times over, many of the poorest countries are unable to procure enough vaccines to protect even their health workers. (273)

For example, in March 2021 rich countries such as the United States with approximately 330 million inhabitants administered around 115 million doses, whereas countries such as Nigeria with approximately 210 million inhabitants administered 8,000 doses (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser, "COVID19 vaccine doses administered"). Even if those numbers are imprecise, they stress the tendency that poorer countries receive less vaccine doses in relation to the number of inhabitants. *LTLW* was published in 1989, and thirty years later, the injustice described in "Cosmic Spite" (Nichols 34) has not changed.

Yet, the poem continues with a lighter tone that "we keep on stirring rich dreams" (l. 9) and continue "the rhythm of our hard sweet lives" (l. 11). The antithesis of "hard" and "sweet" imitates the ups and downs (or the sweet and sour moments) of life, but the speaker stays optimistic. She disregards the "cosmic spite" and, with the polyptoton of "[d]espite" and "spite" (l. 12), she transforms the spite to create a strong black society.

"Cosmic Spite" serves well as a final claim on the unjust treatment of colonised countries. Colonising countries profited from them, barely repaying reparations for the almost permanent damage they have caused (also regarding the perception of third world countries). Nevertheless, the speaker criticises colonising countries by employing humour and irony. She states her arguments and reclaims the lost agency of black people through confidence and self-assurance.

4. Conclusion

The selected poems cover several topics, and yet, *LTLW* offers an even wider range of topics. I would like to quote Welsh's summary on Nichols's poetry collections as a concluding statement:

What links the disparate poems in these collections is a central focus on the black woman's body and voice, the links between female sexuality and creativity, an interest in recovering and reworking black histories and in revisiting European and gender myths in some highly or inventive ways. Nichols is particularly interested in the intersecting racial and gender politics of representations of the black female body (in both historical and contemporary contexts). ("Black British Poetry" 186)

The speaker covers many topics showing several facets of Caribbean women. The selected poems question western femininity and one-dimensional stereotypes about black women as victims. They deconstruct a universal black female identity and open the discourse for a self-defining black British femininity. Self-defining black British femininity does not restrict itself to an imposed stereotypical victimisation, but humorously presents several characteristics of what a black feminine identity can be. This self-defining femininity claims confidence as one of its characteristics and does not exist as a binary opposition to the hegemonic masculinity anymore. The speaker rather constructs a self-defining femininity that possesses exclusive feminine traits, such as the literary and political power of the vagina. Simultaneously, the self-defining femininity shares characteristics with a possible self-defining masculinity, which could be a subject for further research. The speaker questions the power of the western beauty industry, western capitalism, and white male power that all aim to control the expectations and behaviours of femininities and female bodies.

Moreover, the speaker challenges patriarchal power relations and represents them as a breakable construction by reclaiming her agency as a black woman. Specifically, she succeeds in deconstructing white male power by assigning sexual agency to women and praising vaginas and menstruation as a gift, not a punishment. The speaker creates a sexually empowered female agent through which she deconstructs the subordination and sexual restraint of the imposed western femininity.

The speaker's praise does not stop with sexuality but continues with African heritage, such as archaeological discoveries. The selected poems were difficult to categorise into chapters, as they draw upon different topics and constantly combine race, gender, and class. Similarly, the poems reveal the diversity of the Caribbean ethnicity and femininity and expose the construction of Englishness. This shows the interdisciplinary range *LTLW* provides, lastly

also combining gender, race, and class with English Creole. The poems praise English Creole as a valid dialect of Standard English and as a language of the Caribbean that conveys intimacy and sincerity. The use of English Creole in different thematic areas proves that speaking creole is not restrained to certain thematic areas either.

The combination of gender and race reappears in the last chapter that works with nature metaphors, describing feminine features and concurrently raising awareness of the beauty and power of nature.

Finally, the poems are applicable to many current issues regarding social inequality such as the distribution of vaccines between rich and poor countries and the discovery of hundreds of dead children's bones in residential schools in Canada. These examples expose the patriarchal colonial power some countries hold today. *LTLW* raises awareness of this inequality and combats it with humour simultaneously.

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit von ...

Frau/Herr hat zum Abschluss ihres/seines Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema "Gender and Language in Grace Nichols's *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* (1989)" vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen sehr gut erfüllt. Die Arbeit besteht aus einer Einleitung, einem Theoriekapitel, einem dreiteiligen Interpretationskapitel und einer Zusammenfassung. Die **Introduction** präsentiert den Ansatz der Arbeit, die die Herangehensweisen einer auf die Mikroebene der Texte ausgerichteten Stilistik mit den kontextbezogenen Gender Studies kombiniert, um ausgewählte Gedichte aus der Sammlung *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* zu analysieren und interpretieren. Die/der Verf. wählt als eine/r der ganz wenigen Studierenden die Gattung der Lyrik zum Gegenstand ihrer/seiner Bachelorarbeit und zeigt, dass sie/er das dafür unerlässliche Handwerkszeug und Analyseinstrumentarium ausgezeichnet beherrscht. Lyrikanalyse lebt vom Blick für Strukturen und Details, die nach funktionalen Deutungen verlangen. Diese bietet die/der Verf. auf den 40 Seiten ihrer/seiner Arbeit sehr überzeugend. Sie/Er präsentiert den überschaubaren Forschungsstand zu Grace Nichols und formuliert dann ihre/seine eigenen Forschungsfragen sowie eine klare These: „I argue that Grace Nichols's *LTLW* challenges white patriarchal structures and norms in 1980s Britain by encouraging women readers to reclaim agency. The poems deconstruct stereotypical representations of gender by questioning totalising standards regarding black women's beauty, body, sexuality and ethnicity." (3)

21.03.2022

Im **2. Kapitel** stellt die/der Verf. in drei kurzen Unterkapiteln anhand passender Texte wie Lehrbücher und Aufsätze ihre/seine Theorieansätze vor und erklärt die zentralen Begriffe. Da die Dichterin in zehn ihrer 46 Gedichte Elemente des Creole benutzt, führt die/der Verf. in **2.3** in die soziolinguistische Überblickliteratur zu Anglophone Creoles ein, die in der Arbeit irritierenderweise als „English Creole“ bezeichnet werden (3, 10, 16ff), obwohl die Forschungsliteratur von „English-based Creole“ spricht.

Das mit 30 Seiten sehr lang geratene **3. Kapitel** widmet sich 15 gut ausgewählten Gedichten, die die/der Verf. unter drei thematischen Schwerpunkten behandelt, obwohl die Texte sich schwer kategorisieren lassen, wie sie/er später in der Conclusion feststellt (39). Sie/Er arbeitet durchgehend kritisch mit der Sekundärliteratur, die sie/er gezielt zur eigenen Meinungsbildung einsetzt (4f, 14, 31). Kapitel **3.1** befasst sich mit der Dekonstruktion von Stereotypen über schwarze Frauen und untersucht zunächst in **3.1.1**, wie die Gedichte den Gedanken der Unterordnung schwarzer Frauen mit Humor unterlaufen und damit zurückweisen. In **3.1.2**

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geht es um die Auswirkungen westlicher Schönheitsideale auf schwarze Frauen und in **3.1.3** um die kulturelle und politische Aufwertung und Stärkung dieser Personengruppe. In **3.2** behandelt die/der Verf. den Zusammenhang zwischen Geschlecht und Kolonisierung, diskutiert in **3.2.1** das afrikanische Erbe sowie in **3.2.2** Migration und Stereotype der Karibik bevor sie/er sich abschließend in **3.3** dem Verhältnis von Geschlecht und Naturmetaphern zuwendet. Es gelingt der/dem Verf. sehr gut, die Vielzahl der Texte jeweils zu einem analytisch-interpretatorischen Narrativ zu bündeln, in dem sie/er die Mikroebene der stilistischen Analyse gewinnbringend mit der Makroebene der geschlechterorientierten Interpretation verbindet. Die einzige Leerstelle hier ist die Positionierung der ausgewählten Gedichte der Sammlung selbst, deren Bedeutung leider nicht erschlossen wird, z.B. bei „Tapestry“, dem letzten Gedicht im Band (27).

Bereits die detaillierte Analyse des ersten Gedichts, „Of Course When They Ask for Poems About the ‚Realities‘ of Black Women“, das auch eines der bekanntesten von Nichols ist, führt die Arbeitsweise der/des Verf. anschaulich vor. Sie/Er beobachtet und beschreibt genau, wie der Text auf der sprachlichen Ebene funktioniert, welche Muster er erzeugt und deutet dann die hier sichtbare Auflösung syntaktischer Strukturen als poetische Befreiung von beengenden Zuschreibungen (8ff). Immer wieder kommt sie/er auf Strukturen und Metaphern zurück, mit denen die Gedichte die Handlungsfähigkeit schwarzer Frauen transportieren. Ausgehend von Anspielungen in den Texten, reichert sie/er ihre Ausführungen mit Zusatzinformationen über Modemacherinnen und die Rolle von Werbung für die Konstruktion von Frauenbildern an, die die Gedichte dann ironisch distanzierend demontieren (14ff). Später treten Körperpraktiken hinzu (17ff), die die Sprecherinnen in den Gedichten lächerlich machen, während sie tabuisierte Themen der weiblichen Biologie und Sexualität einschließlich der Bezeichnungen von Körperteilen aufwerten und normalisieren (20ff). „On Poems and Crotches“ (23f) bezieht sich nicht nur auf Ntozake Shange, wie erwähnt, sondern verhandelt auch die Idee des körperlich-weiblichen Schreibens im Sinne von Hélène Cixous. Die historischen Bezüge der Gedichte werden gewinnbringend (wenn auch manchmal etwas vereinfachend, 33, 35) ausgelotet. Sehr gut gelungen ist die Interpretation von „Wherever I Hang“ zum Thema der Migration, wo sich die Verf. mit Welsh und Gohrlich kritisch auseinandersetzt (31f). Die/Der Verf. bemüht sich dann, aktuelle Bezüge herzustellen und verweist auf die Folgen der Corona-Pandemie für die Länder des globalen Südens, denen der Norden mit seiner neokolonialen Haltung die benötigten Impfstoffe vorenthält (38).

Die **Conclusion** fasst kurz die Ergebnisse zusammen, reduziert die Vielzahl der Befunde jedoch auf Weiblichkeit mit allein neun Wiederholungen des Begriffs „femininity“ (39). Hier wäre Gelegenheit gewesen, den in der These explizit genannten zeitlichen Bezug der Gedichte zu thematisieren und auf den literaturhistorischen Kontext im Großbritannien der 1980er Jahre einzugehen, auf den sich – bei aller Allgemeingültigkeit – doch viele Themen und Formen der Gedichte beziehen. Auch die Sekundärliteratur (wie mein eigener Aufsatz von 1998) sollte historisiert, d.h. in ihren Anliegen auf die damals aktuellen Diskussionen hin bewertet werden.

Die **Bibliographie** entspricht dem *MLA Stylesheet* und enthält eine Vielzahl passend ausgewählter Sekundärxte, die die wenigen Texte zu Nichols sinnvoll um literaturwissenschaftliche Texte mit einem größeren thematischen Zuschnitt ergänzen. Die Arbeit wurde sauber Korrektur gelesen und entspricht auf formaler Ebene sehr gut den Vorgaben. **Das Englische** liest sich flüssig, wenn auch nicht ganz idiomatisch, und ist im Wesentlichen korrekt. Es enthält gelegentliche stilistische Unebenheiten sowie Grammatikfehler bei Präpositionen (1, 8, 14, 18, 20, 27, 35), Artikeln (4f, 8, 14, 32, 36), Pronomen (8, 22) und in der Syntax (2, 14, 16), die den Lesefluss jedoch keineswegs stören. Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,3 (sehr gut)** bewertet.

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**“Style, not sincerity is the vital thing!” -
Irony and Wit in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*
(1895)**

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1. Introduction

When discussing Oscar Wilde's most famous play, scholars agree on the play's obvious humour. For many, the fascination with it lies in its wit and genius which is made evident in Wilde's use of language and style, but few have made the effort to investigate thoroughly the humorous components that the play is composed of. A rhetorical device that contributes greatly to the humorous appeal is Wilde's extensive use of irony. In fact, since the play is more ironic than sincere, but since there is always some truth to irony, the play is often regarded as a parody of the Victorian society Wilde was a member of. The characters (a portrayal of figures/types to be found in the Victorian society) are constructed as being concerned more with appearances than with the truth and facts and this is exactly what Wilde takes advantage of. It is essential to keep in mind that the play is a work of art and should be regarded as such - its artificiality is indispensable.

Whereas Wilde's early plays, such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* are usually considered society plays, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde's final play, he departs from this generic tradition and creates a "comedy of manners" (Foster 19). With the telling subtitle „A trivial comedy for serious people", the play already implies to the Victorian readers, that its contents should not be taken seriously. Trivial and serious are concepts which appear to be mutually exclusive, but by uttering them in the same frame, some meaning of the opposite is being added to the other concept. This opposition prepares potential readers or audiences to examine the play within this dichotomy and already points to the ambiguity stressed through the comedy's playful use of language.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when talking about morality, Lord Henry comments that "being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know" (Wilde 11). That fits adequately with the mindset of the Victorian upper class as presented in the text and already shows how deeply engrained the concept of "keeping up appearances" is. Everything in life is simply a pose of one kind or another, implying that no one is genuinely natural or authentic but putting on a show to not let slip through their personal misery. All this is simply a farce, and irony is a well-used device to hide that fact. Irony is not sincere, because it hides one's true statement by implying the opposite. In act 3 of the comedy, Gwendolen Fairfax captures the essence of the play in her exclamation of "style, not sincerity is the vital thing!" (Wilde 47), as irony is more a stylistic device than a feature of sincerity.

I contend that Wilde's play highlights the double standards and double moral of the upper-class Victorian society by employing stereotypical characters who contradict themselves constantly in speech and action. This effect is produced through the plays' frequent uses of concepts of irony, wit, sarcasm and paradoxes that reveal the hypocrisy in the Victorian upper class that Wilde himself, as a well-known dandy, was familiar of.

In this bachelor thesis, I will work with an approach that combines linguistics and literary analysis since it has been famously proclaimed by one of the leading female characters in the play, it is (linguistic) style that matters. In chapter 3, I will employ linguistic concepts from the field of pragmatics to analyse humorous elements: Grice's Maxims and the Cooperative Principle will be used to demonstrate how Wilde's characters flout patterns of usual conversation. The concept of Social Functions will identify how irony works on the social level of a linguistic exchange. On the findings of the linguistic analysis I will base a literary analysis using a new historicism approach to examine the prevailing morals and values of the upper classes and their potential for social criticism. I will show how irony in *The Importance of Being Earnest* can be read as a means of constructing and perpetuating class hierarchies. Moreover, my analysis will prove that not only the aristocratic protagonists but also their supposedly inferior servants make use of verbal humour and can be read as insincere and hypocritical.

2. Theory and Methodology

Oscar Wilde's dramas of the 1890s are widely known for being rich in his famous witticisms. In the play at hand, irony is noticeably found since the characters act contrarily to what they preach. As irony can be located in both the paradigmatic field of linguistics, as well as in the field of literature, where it is more context-oriented, the combination of a linguistic and a literary analysis allows for a thorough analysis of the dualistic theme that manifests itself in the language and the literary context and for an investigation of their interplay.

Since irony is defined in linguistics, pragmatics to be precise, as well as it is used in literary analyses, a linguistic definition will be presented first, before the next subchapter defines the irony as a literary term. In this chapter I will present the Cooperative Principle alongside the Gricean maxims and the Social Functions of irony, before turning to the literary theories of Structuralism and New Historicism as they provide the background for my literary analysis in chapter 4.

2.1. Irony and Wit in Linguistics

König and Pfister claim that the origin of the concept of irony lies in the “Greek comic character type of the ‘Eiron’, who engages in verbal contests with his opponent ‘Alazon’”, by using this certain “discursive strategy, his *eirōneía*” (95). This strategy is defined as working on the basis of a “self-belittling understatement” (95). In its literal meaning, *eirōneía* is translated to ‘pretence’ or ‘deceit’. Yet, for irony to unfold its full potential, it requires physical communication tools like gestures and mimics, as well as intonation accompanying the remark that can only be conveyed vis-à-vis (96). This might be a reason for the strong appeal of irony in dramatic literature, since this medium does, in performances, not only convey text, but also visual codes such as facial expressions and gestures (Nünning 84).

Terms linked with irony are sarcasm and cynicism, as well as parody and satire, since irony is not limited to a single remark but can be applied to a longer scene. The illustration or imitation of someone else’s mannerism oftentimes contains parodic or satiric elements, and in this regard, irony is linked to satire, as both concepts simultaneously conceal and disclose “an aggressive tendency in the speaker towards the opponent he addresses” (König, Pfister 101). Even though irony can be considered a means of displaying aggression, in its subtlety, this device can “exhibit sympathy for its target and distance towards it is of humorously bemused tolerance for its weaknesses” (101) which is called self-irony, and in its other extreme is called sarcasm, which is considered far more hurtful and sharp-cutting.

2.1.1. Communication Model of Dramatic Texts

According to Nünning, in any drama the communication situation is made up of two communication levels for the dramatic dialogue, the extra- and the intratextual level: the characters of the drama function simultaneously and interchangeably as addresser and addressee on the intratextual level, whereas the historical author as the addresser and the audience or reader as the addressee are located on the extratextual level (79). The dramatic dialogue is needed for the communication between the characters and the exchange of information to ensure the progressive unfolding of events in the drama. Additionally, this model allows for discrepant awareness and dramatic irony, which occurs when

the audience or the reader [is] privy to information that is not available to the character concerned. This superior level of knowledge grants the audience or reader an insight into the character's errors of judgement, which imbues his or her remarks with an unconscious or unintentional additional meaning. (Nünning 90-1)

A necessary distinction regarding dialogue is that of everyday life and the artificial literary construct that “perform[s] specific roles within the play” (Nünning 86). Its artificiality manifests itself in the form of wit, which was central to the popular genre of the comedy of manner that came into existence in the late seventeenth century, where witty, intellectual verbal duels were the key style of conversation. As a rhetorical figure, wit in the form of paradox, puts two mutually exclusive concepts on the same level (87).

In chapter 4, I shall analyse the dialogue in *The Importance of Being Earnest* according to its artificial construction of witty exchanges.

2.1.2. The Cooperative Principle, the Gricean Maxims and Conversational Implicatures

When analysing dialogue and stylistic devices such as irony, Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle and the resulting maxims for successful communication are an inevitable source. According to Grice, conversation participants should “[m]ake [their] contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [they] are engaged” (Grice 26), while ideally adhering to the following four maxims:

The first one, the maxim of Quantity, refers to the extent of shared information and requires the contribution to be balanced: to be “as informative as required” while not being “more informative than is required” (26). The second maxim refers to the Quality of the contribution, its accuracy and truthfulness, and hence requires the speaker to “try to make your contribution one that is true” (27). The third maxim for a successful exchange of information requires the statement to be “relevant” (27) to the exchange, thus being called the maxim of Relation. The last maxim, the one of Manner, demands the utterance to “be perspicuous” (27) and simultaneously being precise, brief and orderly, in order to avoid misunderstandings, obscurity and ambiguity. The concept works because

Anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication (such as giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participation in

talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the maxims. (Grice 30)

In natural conversations, speakers tend to instinctively adhere to the Cooperative Principle and the maxims, as they have learned to do so from an early age onwards, and it would be cost-ineffective to depart from the established pattern, yet, sometimes the exception proves the rule (29). Adhering to the Cooperative Principle and the maxims do not necessarily need to align, as in a conversation, a remark can comply with the Principle, without adhering to the maxims and is in fact a frequent occurrence in a conversation, in which a partner

may *flout* a maxim; that is, he may blatantly fail to fulfil it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfil the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out and is not, in view of blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall Cooperative Principle? (Grice 30)

Additionally, so-called “conversational implicatures” follow the flouting or exploiting of a maxim and establish the contrast between “what is said” and “what is implicated”, as conversations consist of more information conveyed than are obviously shared:

A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q, may be said to have conversationally implicated that q, PROVIDED THAT (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say p (or doing so in THOSE terms) consistent with this presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) IS required. (Grice 1975 49–50)

Accordingly, my analysis will not only focus on the literal statements that are part of the dramatic dialogue, but I shall analyse utterances of the characters in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and determine in how far they violate the maxims and consequently interpret the produced effect.

Aligning with the conversational implicatures, König and Pfister state that there are two messages conveyed in an ironic remark, “one of which is said explicitly and corresponds exactly to the meaning of the sentence uttered, the other one being implicit but expressing what the speaker really means (speaker meaning) and intends to communicate” (101). Thus, the linguistic definition of irony proposes a duality in speech, which lends itself to conclusions to the personalities and moral judgement of characters uttering sarcastic or ironic remarks. Language as a stylistic device has the power to construct and deconstruct.

2.1.3. The Social Functions of Irony

Other than the already mentioned linguistic functions, Dews, Kaplan and Winner have described and categorised the social functions that irony possesses. These functions mitigate the effect of the meaning of the statement made:

Humour: One of the social functions of irony is to wrap criticism into a humorous remark to soften the criticism, since “irony may be funnier than literal language because of the surprise yielded by the disparity between what is said and what is meant” (299).

Status elevation: When a speaker utters a critical remark, he or she heightens his own status above the addressee’s status and belittles the listener. By the added component of irony, on the one hand, even more judgement is introduced as the speaker enhances the elevating capacity of the criticism by pointing out the false behaviour and providing a better alternative conduct. On the other hand, irony has the characteristic of reducing the status elevation due to its joke qualities (299).

Aggression: Because of its contrast in meaning and literal statement, irony is often perceived as even more humiliating and hurtful than an unfavourable remark, since it not only points out the negative aspect but intensifies it by mocking. Other definitions propose that ironic criticism to be regarded as less destructive than direct criticism, due to its indirect and less confrontative qualities and thus provides more room for interpretation for the insulted person (299).

Emotional control: Here, irony appeals to its comic function and shows the ironist’s self-control, since through the joke, the negative remark is almost turned into a positive one. Therefore, the relationship between the conversation partners is not jeopardized to such a great extent (300).

In the course of the linguistic analysis of dialogue extracts in chapter 3, I will refer back to the here established social functions when examining the implications of a witty remark.

2.2. Irony and Wit in Literature

In this thesis, I shall use both linguistic analysis and literary analysis to investigate irony and its function for the play. In chapter 2.1.3, I have already addressed linguistic perspectives on irony. In this sub-chapter, I shall firstly define irony, as used in the academic discipline of literary studies. Afterwards, I will consider the second concept in my title, namely wit. I shall define the concept and provide reasons for my selection of “wit” instead of similar terms.

2.2.1. Literary Definitions of Irony

In ancient times, rhetoricians used the term *ironia* to describe “a manner of discourse in which, for the most part, the meaning was contrary to the words”, hence displaying a “double-edged nature” (Cuddon 371). The word irony entered the English language in the sixteenth century and denoted in grammar that a man says one thing but through the use of irony makes it evident that he means the opposite. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, intellectuals explored irony as a “mode of thinking, feeling and expressing” (371). In the eighteenth century, German philosophers and writers detected irony in theatre plays and “by the end of the 18th c. irony was not just a rhetorical device but denoted an entire way of looking at the world” (Cuddon 372).

According to Meyer, in literary studies, irony can be reduced to basic definitions which are as follows: (1) **verbal irony**, which denotes “the opposite of what is said is meant” (41) or simply “saying what one does not mean” (Cuddon 372), whereas in (2) **situational irony** “the opposite of what is expected occurs” (Meyer 41) or when someone first laughs at the misfortune of others while being unaware that the same misery is upon him (Cuddon 372). To detect irony, a “frame of reference and the underlying values” are necessary (Meyer 42). **Intentional irony** “expresses the opposite of what is meant” (117), while **dramatic irony** defines the “difference between external and internal communication” and refers to the disparity of knowledge and information that the characters and spectator possess. The audience is knowledgeable of the fact that the character is unaware of the consequences of his or her remarks or actions – and yet, dramatic irony does not always “serve a comic purpose” (Meyer 118), but can have serious effects for the unfolding of events. This difference in knowledge of the spectators and the play’s characters is called discrepant awareness, as the spectator usually knows what kind of genre he

or she is going to witness, but the characters do not know if the events unfold tragically or comically (116).

2.2.2. Literary Definitions of Wit

Associated with irony is the concept of ‘wit’ which used to refer to sanity or ‘sense’, in the Middle Ages, then changed its meaning to ‘intelligence’ or ‘wisdom’ in the Renaissance era and described something or someone ‘genius’, since someone quick-witted must possess a high mental capacity (Cuddon 773). Poets, such as Dryden and Pope, made great use of the concept and called something witty when it was well expressed or well phrased, while a hundred years later critics denounced that wit lacked sincerity. Nowadays, wit is more positively regarded and refers to verbalism and “intellectual brilliance and ingenuity” (Cuddon 774).

‘Wit’ does not describe a single literary phenomenon. Instead, the use of different stylistic devices is often referred to as witty. One example of wit is paradox, which is defined as an “apparently self-contradictory (even absurd) statement which, on closer inspection, is found to contain a truth reconciling the conflicting opposites” (Cuddon 510). A paradox can be particular by manifesting itself in form of a “pithy statement which verge on the epigrammatic” (510) or contain a more structural meaning which is often used in poetry.

In Wilde’s case, his witty remarks are often referred to as epigrams, which denote “a short, witty statement in verse or prose which may be complimentary, satiric or aphoristic” (Cuddon 242/243). The popularity of Wilde’s epigrams is displayed in the modern media coverage, for instance by *The Guardian* that featured in 2012 an infographic by Vasiliev and Frost, enumerating the “most enduring epigrams”, containing at least seven from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, one being the title of this thesis.

Another term used to describe Oscar Wilde’s comedy is farce, namely a “charming and whimsical farce” (Gillespie x), which describes the “exaggeration of character and situation; absurd situations and improbable events (even impossible ones and therefore fantastic); and surprises in the form of unexpected appearances and disclosures. In farce, character and dialogue are nearly always subversive to plot and situation” (Cuddon 270).

Despite lacking definitional clarity as a literary studies term, I have decided to use the term “wit” in this paper as it is a term that is used in Victorian England as a central category for aristocratic and middle-class value judgement (Gohrisch), a term that is frequently associated

with Wilde's humour. So much so, that in their sketch "The Oscar Wilde Sketch" Monty Python have parodied Wilde and other Victorian characters who proclaim witticisms such as:

Oscar: (Graham Chapman) Your highness, there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.

(There follows fifteen seconds of restrained and sycophantic laughter.)

Prince: Very witty Wilde. Very very witty.

Whistler: (John Cleese) There is only one thing in the world worse than being witty, and that is not being witty.

(The Oscar Wilde Sketch, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* Series 3, Episode 13)

2.3. Literary Theory: Structuralism and Cultural Materialism

The theory of Structuralism as explained by Peter Barry denotes the concept that "things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of (hence the term 'structuralism')" (38). The advocates of Structuralism propose that the "things" in this world do not carry meaning in themselves, but that the meaning is imposed on them from the outside. They seek "to establish a model of the system of literature itself as the external reference for the individual works it considers" (Scholes 10). Instead of 'zooming in' on literary texts, structuralists 'zoom out' and attempt to place a text inside genre conventions as well as historical and philosophical contexts that are associated with it (Barry 39).

Structuralism follows the assumption that structures and contrasted elements organise the world we live in and are vital for our understanding of it. Examples for these kinds of structures are recurrent patterns or motifs in the literary text, be it on the linguistic level, the cultural context or encoded in symbols referring to binary oppositions. Structuralism looks for parallels, patterns, contrasts, repetitions, etc. in the plot, the characters, the situation, the structure and the language used in the literary text at hand (Barry 51).

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism take the concept of parallelism as established in Structuralism to a new level, as these theories demand the parallel reading of a literary text next to a non-literary text from the same era to place it within its authentic historical and political background in order to be able to make legitimate claims for the analysis. Unlike other theories that value the literary text higher than non-literary texts and read it biased by former literary critique, New Historicism refuses to follow suit as it assumes both texts to "constantly inform

and interrogate each other” (166) and juxtaposes them. New Historicists also look for structures but not necessarily on the internal level but more on the external one with regard to cultural mind-sets and prevailing political or historical ideologies and practices (173).

I will stray from the New Historicist convention to read a non-literary text alongside the literary text, which is the drama at hand, but will apply the notion of the literary text being informed by its non-literary surroundings, as I see the significance of reading it in its historical and cultural context for my literary analysis.

3. Linguistic Analysis

In this chapter, I will consider verbal irony in *The Importance of Being Earnest* from a pragmatics standpoint. I will recite different humorous exchanges between the play’s characters and relate their humour to the Gricean Maxims they flout. I will show the implications of each of these floutings and analyse how they establish the characters as witty and verbally superior to their surroundings. Afterwards, I will apply the social functions of irony as established in chapter 2.1.3. to the uttered statements in a specific scene of the play and place them in the context of the scene.

3.1. Flouting the Gricean Maxims

A witty exchange, as an artificial conversation construct, necessitates the flouting of the Gricean maxims while still requiring the conversational implicatures to work. Even though the Gricean distinction suggests that only one maxim can be flouted at a time, “it is quite common for a contribution to a conversation to break more than one maxim at a time” (Leech and Short 296). In the following exchanges, I will thus attempt to identify all the maxims violated with the presented speech act:

The play at hand starts off with such a flouting, when Algernon, the master in this specific relationship, is heard playing the piano, before entering the stage and addressing his butler:

ALGERNON: Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE: I didn’t think it polite to listen. (Wilde 5)

Here, the maxim of Quality is flouted as he provides Algernon with more information than he had asked for – a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ would have been sufficient. Yet, by raising the topic of

politeness, he refers to their master-butler relationship and class difference, as an obeying butler is expected to be polite and not comment on his master's behaviour. Thus, Lane is also violating the maxim of Quantity, as he shares more information than necessary.

The irony here lies in Lane's answer, since the members of the audience were clearly able to listen to Algernon's melody, it must be inferred that Lane would have heard his master play, as well. One would assume that that as a healthy human being one is incapable of not listening to tunes that reach the ear, but Lane presents it as if it was in his power to decide what he wants to listen to and what not. And that, being a faithful servant, his politeness overcomes even physical limitations of humans.

At the same time, the master seems to intend to consult his butler about his opinion on his musical abilities. Therefore, instead of being polite for not listening, Lane would then oppose his master's request. Accordingly, this interchange between butler and master questions the very concept of obedience; at the one hand by suggesting that obedience is stronger than human capacities; on the other hand, by mocking obedience as being impractical in certain situations.

In a different scene, Algernon asks Cecily to comment on the Dr. Chasuble's competence as a rector of the church; whether he is "thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church?" (37).

CECILY: Oh yes, Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows. (37)

With that ironic and witty remark, Cecily demonstratively flouts the maxim of Quality, as she obviously does not hold Dr. Chasuble in high regard and considers him incapable of writing a book because of his lack of knowledge. As pointed out in the theory and methodology chapter, wit links two concepts or terms that tend to exclude themselves, and here Cecily associates the term "learned man" with "never having written a single book". The exaggeration of the additional comment is ironic, as one usually associates a knowledgeable person capable of writing a book. At the same time, this remark may be read as criticising current literary developments, suggesting that someone who is in fact knowledgeable cannot be part of the contemporary scene, when uneducated people perform literary criticism as Algernon suggests (11).

A different interpretation could read the previous interchange as an example of the flouting of the maxim of Relation, since Cecily's answer does not actually provide information about

the rector's qualities as a member of the church, but rather about his intelligence and writing skills that do not necessarily have an impact on his correct adherence to "rites and ceremonials".

In the following scene, the male protagonists discuss Jack's lies concerning his "Aunt Cecily". These remarks follow after a conversation, in which "Ernest" has already admitted to lying about his name. After confessing that his name is, in fact, not Ernest but Jack, the conversation continues as follows:

ALGERNON: Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come on, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

JACK: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression. (Wilde 10)

The maxim being violated here by Jack is the maxim of Manner, who tries to avoid a direct answer by speaking a simile, where he sets up the image of him being in a dentist's office and blaming Algy for pulling out the information of his mouth like teeth – based on the assumption that both the removal of foul teeth as the extraction of uncomfortable information are generally accepted to be an unpleasant, yet necessary, experience. In the case of the dentist the simile works literally; in the sense of the information extraction it works figuratively for telling an unpleasant truth.

In this exchange, the dramatic irony lies in the fact that neither Algernon nor Jack are any better than the behaviour they criticise, since, through their Bunbury-ing, both do not speak the truth but revert to "false impressions". Only a few lines earlier, Jack had already admitted that his "name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country" (10), purposely producing a false impression and deceiving the people with whom he interacts depending on his geographic location.

Another interchange concerned with geographic location occurs in the first scene, when Jack describes his motives for coming to town:

ALGERNON: How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town? JACK: Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should one bring anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy! (6)

In this welcoming scene, again Jack is the one flouting the communication maxim of Quality, by saying that his quest for pleasure justifies his visit to London, when in reality it is essentially his intention to propose to Gwendolen, that he reveals a few moments later and Algernon refers to as “business” instead of pleasure (7). One would assume, that a proposal itself is a pleasurable experience and in this case, Jack would not be speaking an actual lie but rather omit part of the truth, making this an example of the maxim of Quantity, since Jack only communicates the bare minimum. He also deviates from the maxim of Relation, as he swiftly changes the topic by commenting on Algernon’s eating behaviour. This dialogue is a clear example of how an exchange can still fulfil the cooperative principle despite flouting three different maxims within a single utterance.

In the following exchange, Jack and Algernon continue their dialogue by discussing the merits and disadvantages of town and country.

JACK: (*Pulling off his gloves.*) When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country, one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON: And who are the people you amuse?

JACK: Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

ALGERNON: Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK: Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

ALGERNON: How immensely you must amuse them! (*Goes over and takes sandwich.*) By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

JACK: Eh, Shropshire? Yes, of course. Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea? (Wilde 7)

In this conversation, Jack flouts the maxim of Quality twice: firstly, by saying that he entertains his neighbours in the country and an instant later declares that he never converses with them, so one of the statements must necessarily be untrue. Secondly, when he agrees that his country address is Shropshire, although he later tells Gwendolen to find him in Hertfordshire (23). He additionally flouts the maxim of Relation as he inquires after all the effort Algernon has made and after the expected guests, instead of revealing the additional information on his country home that Algernon had hoped for.

In the extract above, the irony lies in the linking of the idea of entertaining neighbours, preferably ones whom one likes to entertain, and its immediate reversal when Jack exclaims that his neighbours are far from agreeable and he in reality never talks to them. Algernon's following exclamation is ironic in so far, in that he wants to point out that does not believe Jack, since one is hardly able to amuse one's neighbours without speaking to them. Here, the verbal irony Algernon uses in his ironic remark serves obscurity, thus intentionally flouting the maxim of Manner and relying on the conversational implicatures.

So far, the linguistic analysis has shown, that the characters, especially Algernon and Jack, are hardly serious when conversing with each other, delighting in outdoing each other with their witty remarks, regardless of their truth or sincerity:

ALGERNON All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

JACK Is that clever?

ALGERNON It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilized life should be. (Wilde 21)

Here, Algernon puts emphasis on his witty remark, instead of the content of the statement. Hence, the ambiguity of their statements allows them to twist and turn the truth as it suits them, either being interpreted in their favour or disfavour.

Another concept alongside irony is cynicism, which is made evident and overtly pointed out by the characters in the following excerpt on the construction of marriage in French drama:

ALGERNON [...] You don't seem to realize, that in married life, three is company and two is none.

JACK (*Sententiously.*) That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

ALGERNON Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.

JACK For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical. (Wilde 12)

The epigrams above state that cynicism is easier to be achieved than a sincere and truthful statement. Jack criticises the lax moral propagated in the French drama, whereas Algernon believes them to be inevitable for a happy married life. Jack is annoyed by the linguistic style that his friend delights in displaying.

As established throughout this chapter, one of the functions of irony is to reveal two (or more) sides of meaning of the uttered statement, thus allowing language to construct and deconstruct concepts simultaneously. The concept of duplicity, deceit and dishonesty can not only be found on the linguistic level, but also, and even more so on the literary level which I will investigate in a following chapter.

3.2. Social Functions of Irony

The social functions of irony become excessively evident in the tea ceremony scene between Cecily and Gwendolen, which takes place in the frame of social etiquette but ridicules the same through the exaggerated behaviour of the ladies performing it. The scene starts off quite serenely and the ladies agree on getting along very well, but after the revelation of their engagement to the same Ernest, the tension rises and they perform a contest of quibs and jibes. The at first innocent portrayed ladies turn out to be not so innocent after all but to be masters of repartee. Throughout the play, Wilde does not shy away from making use of stage directions to indicate how he wants a statement to be conveyed to produce the intended effect.

In this scene especially, the intended ironic meaning is indicated in the stage directions. Gwendolen calls Cecily ‘darling’ (Wilde 40), when she is about to try to prove her wrong. The belittlement by calling her an endearing term evokes the status elevating function of irony and thus strengthens Gwendolen’s following argument. After being accused, Cecily’s friendly feelings to her now-rival Gwendolen turn into the opposite, yet she manages to control her emotions by ironically stating that it “would distress [her] more than [she] can tell [her], dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish” (40) before disappointing her. Gwendolen’s answer is staged as “meditatively” and her following exaggerated description of the “poor fellow” who “has been entrapped in any foolish promise” (40) is thus turned ironic as she attempts to take the wind out of Cecily’s sails.

Cecily outperforms Gwendolen’s performance by making her next response sound “thoughtful and sad” (40). Both almost theatrical performances allude to the social function of aggression - which is thus restrained here -, as well as emotional control. With Gwendolen’s next response staged as “satirically” (41), Wilde emphasizes her understanding of Cecily’s preceding statement as ridiculous.

Subsequently, Cecily informs Gwendolen about the geographical specialities of her home area and answers “sweetly” (41) to Gwendolen’s silly exclamation that this justifies her city

residence. The use of the “sweet” intonation reveals the intended irony and makes Gwendolen’s remark appear even more absurd. After all the accusations, one would not expect the ladies to stay in each other’s company for much longer and start drinking their tea, yet by doing so they remain closely in the outlined societal conventions and by having them keep up appearances Wilde mocks the strict social protocol. He furthermore indicates in the following stage directions that the ladies continue to converse “very politely” or even “with elaborate politeness” (42). Cecily and Gwendolen hide their aggression behind the “shallow mask of manners” which they simultaneously criticise (41). Situational irony occurs in this scene when - as foreshadowed by Jack in the beginning of the play - the ladies forget their initial quarrel and negative feelings towards each other immediately, upon learning that they share the same misfortune and soon start calling each other sister after having called each other a lot of other things first (Wilde 43).

The already analysed dialogues and following ones of Algernon and Jack do not necessarily serve status elevating or aggression-mitigating social functions but are intended for humorous appeal and do not need to be enumerated here again. Contrarily, Lady Bracknell’s satirical remarks certainly serve a status elevating purpose to prove her moral superiority and to show her disregard of society.

4. Literary Analysis

The linguistic analysis only offers a method to identify the irony as a pragmatic device and its artificiality on the intratextual level, and is by no means exhaustive. A linguistic analysis does not take into account the political and historical context in which the utterances are made and is less interpretive and more observant and categorising. A literary analysis offers a wider perspective on the plot, taking into account more information from the extratextual level and includes the historical and political context, thus offering more room for interpretation. In the following chapter I will present a literary analysis of the play at hand and consider it in the context of the time, shining a different light on the irony and witty remarks that amuse the audience.

4.1. Construction and Deconstruction of Victorian Upper-Class Norms and Values

Wilde’s drama is set in Victorian Britain; a time that is often associated with a distinctly structured society and a focus on morality and discretion. In contrast to these ideologies that

were particularly prominent in the upper classes, Wilde's play suggests that the upper-class protagonists do not, in fact, adhere to the morals they themselves proclaim as important.

In the following sub-chapters; I will outline four means by which the text constructs the Victorian aristocratic society as immoral. Firstly, I will analyse the importance of the title of the play, questioning the "earnestness" of the main protagonists. Secondly, I will focus on Lady Bracknell, whose hypocritical statements call into question the decency and morality with which she characterises herself. Thirdly, I shall explore in how far "decorum" can be seen as a supplement for politeness and affection and, lastly, I will investigate the functions of witticisms and witty remarks as a contrast to concise and truthful language.

4.1.1. Ernest and Being Earnest

Wilde poignantly titled his comedy „*The Importance of Being Earnest – A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*”. The title itself is already witty, as the definition of comedy generally contains comic and humorous elements which contradict the play's alleged appeal to "serious people". This light-heartedness and comic purpose contradicts the titular seriousness. In the following analysis I will show that there is a certain amount of social criticism to the play that targets the characters' earnestness. All social commentary is softened by the title's claim, that the content of the play should not be taken too seriously, allowing the author more freedoms with his voicing of social criticism.

In his play, Wilde plays with the female characters' obsession with the name Ernest, since the "importance" in the title can be associated with the importance of being a person called Ernest or with displaying the character trait of earnestness. Furthermore, the term 'earnest' refers to both the characteristic of seriousness and sincerity, where serious means earnest and sincere refers to an honest character. Especially with regard to literary conventions, the name Ernest can be read as irony, since telling names are usually used to "draw attention to a [typical] feature" of a certain character (Nünning 195). Readers would, therefore, expect the Ernests of the play to exhibit these particular characteristics.

When discussing dinner arrangements, Jack and Algernon comment on seriousness:

ALGERNON: [...] may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

JACK I suppose so, if you want to.

ALGERNON: Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them. (Wilde 12)

The irony here lies in the fact that Algernon is not serious about a lot of things in his life and is more concerned about making perfectly phrased statements, whether they be true or not, but demands sincerity in others. Moreover, Algernon expects seriousness concerning a potentially trivial aspect of life, which again points to the dichotomy already hinted at in the play's sub-title "A trivial comedy for serious people".

While Algernon demands seriousness when it comes to his dining experiences, both characters who are referred to as Ernest, are generally seen to oppose sincerity and seriousness as indicated in the following scene:

ALGERNON: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

JACK: That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

ALGERNON: Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that people who haven't been at university. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know. (11)

This scene introduces the first obvious structural irony in the play, namely that the main characters, Algernon and Jack, practice the art of Bunburying, by inventing alter egos that allow them to undertake activities which might be disregarded by the society they live in. Jack invents a naughty younger brother called Ernest that allows him to embark on journeys to London from his country home more often than usual to supposedly rescue him from inconvenient situations, whereas Algernon contrives a poorly friend called Bunbury who resides in the countryside so he can escape London whenever he pleases under the pretence of caring for his friend (Wilde 11). Both feigned reasons are perfectly plausible and socially well regarded, so the gentlemen do not feel guilty about their deceitful behaviour. Yet, Jack admits that this deceit ought to come to an end, should he marry Gwendolen, Algernon's cousin. Algernon seeks to continue the pretence for as long as possible and finds it especially useful for married life, lecturing Jack on how if he does not see the advantage of Bunburying, then his wife will want to make use of it (12). With his statement of the "happy English home" (12), Algernon suggests that double lives – and double morals - are necessary for domestic bliss. A certain dramatic irony arises with the

fact that both characters, who call themselves Ernest are the ones that are predominantly associated with ironic remarks that often contradict literal truths. In the previous chapter, I have analysed different statements from the play, showing how each of them flouts one or several of Grice's maxims. As has become obvious, the exchanges between Algernon and Ernest formed a major part of my linguistic analysis since both of them are frequently insincere or at least not literally earnest. For readers or the audience, this would lead to a certain humour based on the discrepant awareness of the audience who knows Algernon and Jack to be dishonest despite their proclamations of being E/earnest.

Moreover, situational irony with regard to the two male protagonists arises in the latter part of the play when Jack's invented brother Ernest is contrasted with the later revelation of the play that Jack actually has a brother, who strangely turns out to be his best friend, so while pretending to have a brother, he actually had one all the time. The second irony is that Jack calls his fictive brother Ernest, and later finds out that he is actually the one who had been christened Ernest, after his father's name (Wilde 58). With regard to Jack's/Ernest's character, Degroisse states that "in embodying a man who is initially neither "earnest" nor "Ernest" and who, through forces beyond his control, subsequently *becomes* both "earnest" and "Ernest", Jack is a walking, breathing paradox and a complex symbol of Victorian hypocrisy" (42). The irony on the literary level thus reveals the prevalent hypocrisy in the Victorian society, becoming apparent in Wilde's "epigram-spouting dandies" (Mackie 148). They apply two systems of moral codes: one for the country and one for the city. Whatever is said in one of the locations, does not need to apply in the other. When discussing marriage, Algernon lectures Jack on the value of knowing how to Bunbury, inferring that married men should (and do) live a double life. Degroisse remarks, that the "moral values are reversed" (25) in Jack's explanation to Algernon for his reasons of feeling the need to create a fictional brother in the following exchange:

ALGERNON [...] Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK My dear Algy, I do not know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of a guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple. (Wilde 10)

In this explanation, Jack links his lie of having a brother to the truth, which in itself is highly ironic and paradoxical. Jack is aware of his immoral behaviour, yet he gets away with it by insisting on the strict need of morality and his duty as a guardian that is society's expectation towards him. The hypocrisy that comes to light here is that as long as plausible reasons are provided and the lie is wrapped in a proper appearance, immoral behaviour is completely accepted in the Victorian society.

Generally, the concept of living a double life was well-known in the Victorian society and is associated with gentlemen entertaining a mistress next to their wife, which Wilde exaggerates extremely in the case of Jack, who "literally splits in two" (Degroisse 26), where one personality is morally impeccable and the other one is the wicked one, yet without ever actually naming the immoral activities he gets entangled in. Degroisse argues that the obsession with the name of Ernest reveals another Victorian conviction, the one of determinism, with the flawless part of the double persona being called Ernest, as if only the name would make him behave accordingly (27).

The female characters in the play are more in love with the idea of Ernest than with the men themselves, as "there is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence" (Wilde 15) and Gwendolen was "destined to love" the man she assumes to be called Ernest. According to these observations concerning the name Ernest, it becomes clear that the play questions the very concept of being earnest. Poague argues that

"The final clause completes the deflation of Victorian values: Gwendolen's highest ideal, in an age of ideals, is to marry a man named Ernest. Ideals are thus a matter of labels. You invest moral value in something by putting a proper name to it; a proper name, like a proper address, assures one of success in a society of surface appearances and superficial values." (252, 253)

By constructing those characters who are supposed to be the most earnest ones as being deceitful, the play suggests that all other character must be just as lacking in earnestness as the male protagonists are.

4.1.2. Victorian Morality and Hypocrisy

Throughout the whole play, Wilde's main target of irony is clearly the conventional Victorian morality as he continues to mock the Victorian morals in the character of Lady Bracknell, who

follows a strict societal protocol. According to Degroisse, Lady Bracknell impersonates a member of the conventional and prejudiced Victorian upper-class, who is subsequently a victim of the concomitant hypocrisy (43).

LADY BRACKNELL I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. [...]

ALGERNON I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. (Wilde 13)

Lady Bracknell follows the societal obligation to look after someone who is in mourning and is surprised to find the widow looking rejuvenated instead of exhausted from grief. One would assume that if one's husband had died one would most probably find traces of grief in the face of the left-behind, but the comedy lies in the addition that the widow looks completely freed from negative emotions, which suggests that she is better off without him. The second assumption here is that hair turns grey in phases of stress, grief or anxiety, yet surprisingly the widow's hair has turned gold instead of grey, which is a euphemism, since the hair did obviously not change colour from grief, but she had probably done something to it (13). Yet Lady Bracknell dismisses the fact that Lady Harbury does not adhere to the societal conventions and acts opposing to them (Degroisse 43).

As a Victorian upper-class character, Lady Bracknell is greatly concerned with social status and her main occupation is to find a suitable husband for her daughter. According to her definition, suitable means firstly that the prospective partner has to have the right address, although both the fashion or the actual address could be altered if need be (Wilde 18). This remark is in so far ironic, as Lady Bracknell does not possess the power to change either of the two. Secondly, the eligible young gentleman, in this case Jack, has to align with her political views, which he does, before she moves on to "minor matters" (18), such as his origin, which is ironic, as it turns out to be a major matter which the whole play revolves around. In this scene, a conventional feature such as an origin story is turned into the absurd when Jack declares to "have lost both parents" (Wilde 18) which is an incident that is conventionally received as a tragedy. Against expectations, Lady Bracknell does not empathise with Jack but chides him for his "carelessness" (18). Thus, Lady Bracknell finds fault with Jack's unfortunate origin, without knowing who his actual parents were. She does not withdraw from her principles - principles

that look like morality and adhering to societal norms, but are ultimately nothing more than arbitrary standpoints that support whatever argument she wants to make - even if they do no one any good, neither her nor her daughter or her nephew. When interviewing Jack she approves of many of his answers, but when he fails to provide a sound financial record which was important as “during the Victorian era, it was unthinkable to marry below one’s own social class” (Degroisse 43) and furthermore fails to provide an appropriate family origin, Lady Bracknell displays snobbish and superficial characteristics, as she is more concerned about money as the key to success and not a good character (42). She thus deems Jack as socially inadmissible and calls the situation a “social indiscretion” (Wilde 19), and this points out the “ever-looming threat of social scandal” in the Victorian upper-class which motivates her protective behaviour (Mackie 151).

Jack’s social background proves to be no more than a hand-bag and for her “constitute[s] a violation of decorum in their vulgar *literalness*”, since in her understanding she asked for his social, not his literal background (159). In this scene, Wilde discloses the flaws of the Victorian upper-class who are concerned with the wrong matters, namely “their greed, their cold-heartedness, their narrow-mindedness and their snobbery” (Degroisse 49), instead of a good and upright character. As established in chapter 2.1.3, ironic and witty remarks possess the quality of mitigating criticism and especially in this scene Wilde’s wit uttered by the characters themselves “lightens the harshness of the criticism as his audience was also his target” (49).

When Jack asks what he can do to satisfy Lady Bracknell in order to be good enough for her daughter, she advises him on “produce at any rate one parent” (Wilde 20), while not caring about how he achieves this as long as the appearances are kept up and society does not have a reason to disapprove (Degroisse 46). This further reveals the hypocrisy and the irony in the behaviour of the upper class where the members dread giving society reasons to call them a liar, even if this is to be achieved through immoral behaviour such as openly lying, which Degroisse calls “a form of cynicism” (46).

The irony here lies further in that Lady Bracknell criticizes Jack for not being able to provide a respectable background, while she herself “had no fortune of any kind” (Wilde 51) – but that did not stop her from marrying wealthy Lord Bracknell. Wilde mocks Lady Bracknell’s obsession with money as one would not assume that her social and financial disposition would be a legitimate reason to not marry someone with a higher financial background – quite the opposite. Lady Bracknell’s obsession with money becomes evident when she interviews Cecily

as a prospective wife to her nephew, who only becomes attractive when she hears about her fortune (50). Lady Bracknell acknowledges, but regrets to say that they “live, [...] in an age of surfaces” (51), yet is quite superficial herself. She furthermore deplores “the two weak points in our age” that “are its want of principle and its want of profile” (51), when in the next sentence she approves of the “distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew’s profile” (51). Concerning her earlier criticism of a want of principle, she herself can be seen as a good example of that. She strictly observes Victorian upper-class norms when it comes to a possible marriage between Gwendolen and Jack. She opposes a marriage between them based on his supposedly inferior family background. However, when she later argues in support of Algernon’s wedding, her only concern is for his appearance:

JACK: I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

LADY BRACKNELL: Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

JACK: It pains me very much to have to speak to you frankly, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve of his moral character. I suspect him to be untruthful. (*ALGERNON and CECILY look at him in indignant amazement.*) (52)

Here, Lady Bracknell does not adhere to her own principles and thus reveals her hypocrisy.

Lady Bracknell’s views are not only inconsistent when it comes to social status and marriage but also on education. Gwendolen’s comments to Cecily can be read metaphorically as well as literally when talking about her mother who brought her up strict but also “short-sighted” (39). The fact that her upbringing was short-sighted could suggest that it was not founded on durable principles but only concerned with the immediate future. At the same time, being short-sighted suggests that her horizon is rather narrow – metaphorically – and read literally that she has a physical condition and requires glasses. These glasses can also be read as that she desires to adopt a new perspective or admits that she has her own certain way of looking at things.

4.1.3. Politeness and Decorum

Moreover, the social criticism can be observed in the way the play constructs questions of decorum. In his article “The Function of Decorum at the Present Time: Manners, Moral Language, and Modernity in an “Oscar Wilde Play”,” Gregory Mackie examines Wilde’s unique style of “pithy witticisms of aphoristic speech that artfully suggest an unexpected fluidity between the respective vocabularies of ethics and etiquette” (145) at a time when manners and morality were in constant rivalry and stylised dialogue conducted “the staging of decorum accomplishes more than an ironic mockery of the conventional moral shibboleths” (146).

This “staging of decorum” manifests itself in the quintessentially British tea-time scene between Cecily and Gwendolen where “all conventional attitudes are pushed to their hypocritical limits” (Degroisse 51). Upon arrival, Cecily and Gwendolen being complete strangers, Gwendolen immediately expresses fondness of Cecily just by learning her “sweet name” (Wilde 38). Wilde here mocks the superficiality of relations between acquaintances in the upper-class as they behave as if they know each other much better than they actually do. He furthermore criticises the quick judgement that the ladies are prone to, as they are fast with expressing their attachment and equally swift with expressing their hostility towards each other after having learned that they are both rivals for the same gentleman called Ernest.

Their superficiality is made evident in their behaviour after the revelation that they are both engaged to someone called Ernest, as they both take out their diaries – which contain more fiction than an account of their real life, which Gwendolen admits as important to “have something sensational to read in the train” (Wilde 40) – and fight over who was the first one who got engaged to Ernest instead of “being devastated by the duplicity of their lover” (Degroisse 53) which makes the situation highly ironic and absurd. During the tea-time scene, both ladies try to keep strictly to the protocol of politeness, even though the situation revealing such devastating news would allow for straying from the protocol. The hypocrisy lies in the contrast of their speech and behaviour as they accuse each other of the nastiest things while staying perfectly calm and collected. Only when Gwendolen accuses Cecily of having “entrapped Ernest into an engagement” (Wilde 41), Cecily tells Gwendolen quite frankly, that “this is no time for wearing the shallow masks of manners” (Degroisse 54). Ironically, this is what the ladies have been doing all afternoon long and Wilde once again points out the hypocrisy of the upper-class. Cecily further explains that “when I see a spade I call it a spade”,

what induces Gwendolen to the answer that she has “never seen a spade” (42). Degroisse interprets Cecily’s remark as elucidating her sincerity, whereas Gwendolen understands its literal meaning and thus satirizes Cecily’s identity as a country girl (Degroisse 54).

As established in chapter 2.1.3, a comic remark can hide or mitigate criticism, and in this case the subject of class conflict is clothed in Gwendolen’s satiric utterance. Mackie calls the ladies’ overly and superficial politeness at tea-time a “Willean slippage between style and sincerity” (160). When the ladies become aware that they have been misled and decide on confronting Algernon and Jack with their deceitful behaviour, they are still hesitant to accept the truth, yet the “wonderful beauty of his answer” (47) seems to weigh heavier in that situation than the actual facts. Algernon’s eloquence and charm induce Gwendolen to declare that “in matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing” (47). The ladies have realised the scope of the deceit, yet they decide to close their eyes when confronted with the truth, intentionally hiding from it. Gwendolen’s statement becomes even more ironic, when regarding the assumption for her, in “grave matters” style is allowed to take precedence over sincerity, when in such matters usually sincerity is appreciated more wildly than superficial style.

Another instance in which decorum and superficial politeness are upheld is the proposal scene between Jack and Gwendolen:

JACK: [Astounded.] Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN: I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet.

Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

JACK: Well . . . may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN: I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you. (Wilde 16)

Here, Gwendolen insists that Jack properly follows the protocol of a marriage proposal, even though she already exclaimed that she “passionately” (Wilde 15) loves him. This shows that even so intimate a scene as a proposal cannot overcome the barriers of politeness and decorum.

Similarly, Cecily constructs a detailed dating history in her diary both to be entertained by her sensational notes and also to make sure that her relationship with “Ernest” can live up to her expectations. She even admits that she had written letters to herself in his name:

You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

[...] The three you wrote me after I had broken of the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

(Wilde 36).

Not only these letters but also the break-up are forged to legitimise their relationship in the eyes of society. When Algernon asks for her reasons for breaking off their faked engagement, she answers that “[i]t would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once” (Wilde 36/37).

All scenes above feature the female protagonists in seemingly private situations. Nonetheless, they still observe proper decorum, but, ironically turn the ideas of decorum on its head. In the tea ceremony, only their words, not however their actions, could be described as polite. In the engagement scenes, both women insist on their partners’ adherence to decorum as before accepting their proposals. Thus, the text ridicules the concepts of modesty and decorum and constructs these social protocols as arbitrary and insincere. Decorum and etiquette are taken as the governing (really only) principles for all social life and are exaggerated to such an extent that their violation becomes hilarious (Mackie 160).

4.1.4. Wit and Intellectual Superiority

As stated in the Theory and Methodology chapter of this bachelor thesis, Wilde’s play and his characters are often regarded as witty. Mackie considers this form of dialogue a “stylized formulae of wit” (146). In the previous chapters, I have already presented examples of wit and verbal humour. Many of these examples, as I have already observed in my linguistic analysis, can be found in both Jack’s and Algernon’s speeches. One very prominent example, especially through its central position in the resolution of the play is Jack’s following statement: “Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?” (Wilde 58). This statement playfully

subverts the readers' expectations. Usually forgiveness is only necessary after someone has acted immorally or after he or she has hurt the other person. Here, however, Jack asks Gwendolen to forgive his truthfulness, a characteristic that is usually regarded to be a virtue and not a vice. This quotation proves Jack's quick-wittedness. Even though the revelations of the play's last scene would be difficult to overcome quickly, Jack does not lose his verbal humour even in supposedly chaotic situations.

It is not surprising that Jack, whose duplicity has already been established in the very first scene and whom Degroisse considers a "walking, breathing paradox" (42), should be one of the characters whose utterances can be considered as witty. However, also the female characters partake of the verbal duels in this play. Following, I shall engage with two female examples that can be considered as witty.

When Cecily discusses literature with her teacher, the following dialogue takes place:

MISS PRISM: Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

CECILY: Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

MISS PRISM: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means. (Wilde 25/26)

Here, Cecily's remark concerning the happy endings of novels can be considered as witty. By stating that happy endings depress her, she combines two supposedly contrary concepts in one sentence and challenges the conventions of poetic justice that reward 'good' characters (for example with a marriage) and punishes 'bad' characters with death or financial ruin (Nünning 193). If one regards the plot of the drama at hand, this text suggests that poetic justice is not applicable in all circumstances. In Wilde's play, nearly all characters conform to the conventions of comedy and are rewarded with a marriage, independent from the characters' morality during the earlier scenes.

Similar to Cecily, Gwendolen displays intelligence through verbal humour in the play. When "Ernest" (Jack) proposes to her she states that

Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. (Wilde 22/23)

She thus uses a common criticism, namely that young people do not respect their parents enough, and reverses it.

In all of these witty statements, the characters do not necessarily speak literal truths. Instead, they come up with intelligent answers or paradoxical statements that demonstrate that “saying the truth” as in Jack’s statement, might not be as important as society expects.

In this chapter, I have shown how the concepts of earnestness, morality, politeness and truthfulness are ridiculed throughout *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In the instances above, I have concentrated mainly on the upper-class protagonists. In the subsequent chapter, I will show that the lack of sincerity and clarity does not only occur in the protagonists’ utterances.

4.2. Morality, Class and Gender

The Victorian society, as constructed in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, does not feature a high range of characters. Whereas the protagonists live off their land and inherited wealth without the need to work, only few characters are part of the middle or lower classes. The play features two servant characters (Lane and Merriman), the unmarried Miss Prism, who is employed in the position of governess and the rector Dr. Chasuble.

In Victorian Britain, the social, political and economic developments of the early nineteenth-century and the forming of new identities led to the emergence of a class structure. From that point onward, class consciousness and class struggle were a key feature of the society. Yet, the hierarchic structures remained more present than ever, the people and politicians being equally aware of the construct and supporting it, regarding it as ‘viable’, living accordingly and thus based their superiority on that principle (Cannadine 104). These constructions of superiority and inferiority occur throughout the whole play. As already stated in the linguistic analysis, Lane is clearly aware of his inferior position and performs his obedience accordingly (Wilde 5). In the same scene, he voluntarily takes the blame for the eaten sandwiches to uphold his master’s pretence of hospitality (Wilde 13). Contrary to that, Cecily frequently uses her intellectual and societal superiority to manipulate her teacher Miss Prism, who, as a governess, would usually be of genteel origin but still financially inferior to her pupil.

Clearly, the middle- and lower-class characters behave according to their class. Thus, they are not allowed to verbally contradict their superiors too much. Nonetheless, all of Wilde’s

characters partake in the play's verbal humour and irony. As already mentioned in chapter 3.1., Lane's utterances flout the Gricean maxims making his statements not literally true. Later on, Lane again uses a humorous statement that also emphasises his inferiority. Talking about marriage, he claims

LANE: I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

ALGERNON: [*Languidly.*] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE: No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself. (Wilde 6)

This dialogue proves both Lane's verbal humour, by claiming that being married once should be considered inexperienced – while for others this is considered an ideal state - but also his inferiority, since Algernon does neither show interest in his family life nor in his humour.

With regard to Dr. Chasuble, verbal humour is characterised as being rather accidental than witty. Talking to Cecily, he states:

[...] Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [*Miss Prism glares.*] I spoke metaphorically.--My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet? (Wilde 26)

Here, his explanation for his metaphor appears completely nonsensical. Instead, bees are commonly for a metaphorical description of sexual intercourse. So, his attempt to make his earlier statement appear less sexual fails, showing that he is not as witty as the upper-class characters. He is still, however, constructed as insincere. While earlier proclaiming that he is a celibate (Wilde 54), later, he agrees to marry Miss Prism (Wilde 58).

Therefore, it has become clear that not only aristocratic characters, but all characters in this play frequently subvert the ideals of sincerity and morality. In the cases of the lower-class characters, irony works on two levels. On the one hand, other characters use irony against them in order to demonstrate their superiority (as with Miss Prism and Cecily). On the other hand, they themselves use irony, paradoxes and witticism and hence demonstrate that, even for them, "sincerity" is not the vital thing. Even Algernon, whose hypocrisy and insincerity I have noted earlier, regards Lane's morality as "somewhat lax", stating that "Really, if the lower orders

don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility" (Wilde 6).

5. Conclusion

Wilde's comedy is still nowadays often quoted because it contains numerous witticisms that still have relevance today, but the depth of his ironic remarks becomes only evident upon further analysis. The dualistic theme that is apparent on all levels of the play does not only manifest itself in the obvious paradoxical behaviour of the characters but is also illustrated in the language they speak – irony as a language of duplicity. This intensifies the revelation of the hypocrisy prevailing in the spheres of the Victorian upper-class. Wilde playfully portrays social criticism in humorous epigrams so that there is room left for interpretation on both sides, as the target of his criticism were his audience and readers.

In the introduction of this thesis I have contended that Wilde's play highlights the double standards and double moral of the upper-class Victorian society by employing stereotypical characters who contradict themselves constantly in speech and action. Oscar Wilde's most popular comedy is not simply humorous because of its overblown characters who manage to get themselves in irrational situations framed by an unlikely plot, but has much greater humorous relevance and validity. A main characteristic lies in the character's artificial and constructed speech that makes them constantly utter paradoxical remarks so that the audience or reader can hardly take them seriously and can never be sure on which side of the irony the actual truth lies. The characters make a statement but due to their use of irony they intend to say something else and in the course of the plot it turns out that their first – intendedly untruthful and immoral – statement was true the whole time.

Wilde manages to artfully connect all the dots and pull all plot strings and linguistic strings together, yet one of the points of criticism is that he does not succeed in finding an appropriate solution for Algernon who does not turn into an Ernest in the end. Another objection is that Wilde fails to offer an adequate alternative for the issues he criticises, such as personal identity, the duplicity and interchangeability of Victorian morals, the disparity between speech and action. This insincerity can be seen not only in the upper classes but also among the servants of the play. The characters are not faced with any misfortune resulting from their immoral behaviour, quite the opposite, as Jack's problematic origin is eventually resolved, he turns into

the Ernest society so strongly wished him to be and all the prospective couples are finally allowed to marry each other. Moreover, as I have shown in my analysis; the play's verbal humour fulfils other functions than the portrayal of insincerity. It is used to control emotions; to disguise aggressions and to construct inferiority and superiority relations.

This thesis's title is one of the most famous epigrams of the play at hand, since I have shown in my analysis that style in language is valued much more highly in the Victorian upper-class than sincerity in character. Sophisticated speech can hide indecorous behaviour as it produces a false impression, which is exactly the intended effect. The "shallow mask of manners" is brittle, yet indispensable as the ground for a society that wants to be deceived for the purpose of keeping up appearances.

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit von Frau Name (Matr.-Nr.) zum Thema „‘Style, not sincerity is the vital thing!’ – Irony and Wit in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)“

06.10.2019

Die Verfasserin hat zum Abschluss ihres Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema „‘Style, not sincerity is the vital thing!’ – Irony and Wit in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)“ vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen ausgesprochen gut erfüllt. Die Lektüre ist kurzweilig, was sowohl den passend zitierten Sequenzen aus Wildes Stück als auch der klaren Interpretation der Verf. zu danken ist.

Wie es der Titel ihrer schlüssig gegliederten Arbeit ankündigt, untersucht die Verf. die Sprachgebung dieses Klassikers der Weltliteratur. Sie beschreibt zunächst linguistisch, wie Wildes Drama Komik erzeugt und erklärt dann literaturwissenschaftlich die außersprachlichen Funktionen der ästhetischen Mittel. Diese Kombination aus den anglistischen Teildisziplinen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft wird von den Studierenden leider sehr selten ausprobiert und ist daher umso positiver hervorzuheben. Besonders angebracht ist hier der Vergleich zwischen beiden, bei dem die Verf. die Leistungen und Grenzen der Linguistik betrachtet, um die Rolle der Literaturwissenschaft für ihre Arbeit zu bestimmen (16).

Die zielführende **Introduction** stellt zwei Thesen vor, die die Verf. im Weiteren sehr gut nachvollziehbar belegt. Der ersten These zufolge dienen die Ironie sowie ihr verwandte Techniken der Erzeugung von logischen Inkongruenzen („wit“, Sarkasmus, Paradox) dazu, die bürgerliche Doppelmoral vor allem der viktorianischen Oberklasse zu entlarven (2). Die zweite These ergänzt dies um eine wichtige sozialhistorische Dimension: „I will show how irony in *The Importance of Being Earnest* can be read as a means of constructing and perpetuating class hierarchies.“ (2) Wenn man auf diesem hohen Niveau überhaupt von einer Schwäche der Arbeit sprechen mag, dann zeigt sie sich zu Beginn von Kapitel 4.2., wo die Verf. in nur zwei Sätzen historisch verkürzend und inkorrekt die Entstehung sozialer Klassen erwähnt und dann nach einem Verweis auf Cannadine sich wieder dem Stück zuwendet (28). Dies wird aufgewogen durch das gute Abstraktionsniveau der Arbeit, das vor allem bei der Übertragung der linguistischen Konzepte auf das Drama sichtbar wird.

Im **2. Kapitel** stellt die Verf. kurz und bündig ihre Zugänge vor und definiert ihre tragenden Konzepte aus der Linguistik, wo sie sich zum einen auf Paul Grice und

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zum anderen auf Dews/Kaplan/Winner konzentriert. Die literaturwissenschaftlichen Definitionen von Ironie sowie weitere Fachbegriffe entnimmt sie aus Lehrbüchern und Nachschlagewerken. Das Unterkapitel 2.3. zur Literaturtheorie befasst sich knapp mit dem Strukturalismus und dem *Cultural Materialism*, sollte aber statt des nicht verwendeten *Cultural Materialism* unbedingt den *New Historicism* enthalten, der zwei Mal explizit bemüht (2, 9) und sehr passend in seiner strukturellen Neuerung gewürdigt wird (9f).

Die beiden großen **Kapitel 3** (10-16) **und 4** (16-30) widmen sich der linguistischen bzw. der literaturwissenschaftlichen Analyse und Interpretation des Dramas. Die Verf. verwendet alle Fachbegriffe korrekt und gewinnbringend und wendet zunächst die *Gricean Maxims* auf sieben gut ausgewählte Textstellen an, an denen sie zeigt, wie Komik durch das *flouting of maxims* entsteht. Nach einer Zwischenzusammenfassung benennt sie die sozialen Funktionen von Ironie (3.2.), auf die sie auch im **4. Kapitel** immer wieder verweist (19, 22, 25) und die sie in einem Fall um einen neuen Aspekt ergänzt (28f). So bleiben die bis dahin gewonnenen Einsichten den Lesern gut in Erinnerung und der Text erscheint als einheitliches Ganzes. Die Verf. präsentiert sehr gute und überzeugende Beobachtungen, wie z.B. zur Interpretation des Titels und des Untertitels von Wildes Stück (17f) sowie zur Funktion der doppeldeutigen Sprache für die Darstellung der bürgerlichen Doppelmoral (20ff). Sie greift sehr ausführlich auf ihre gut ausgewählte Sekundärliteratur zurück (z.B. 24ff), ohne jedoch die Gelegenheit zur kritischen Auseinandersetzung damit zu nutzen.

Die **Conclusion** fasst die guten Ergebnisse der Arbeit treffend zusammen, verweist auf Leerstellen im Stück und kommt schließlich auch noch einmal auf das Titelzitat zu sprechen (25, 31), was die Arbeit schön abrundet.

Die Arbeit ist sauber gestaltet, hätte jedoch noch gründlicher Korrektur gelesen werden sollen, denn sie enthält orthografische Fehler (z.B. ausgelassene Worte, 12, 14, 18, 29 bzw. überzählige Worte, 11) sowie Grammatikfehler (Präpositionen, Zeitformen, Kongruenz, z.B. 22, 24, 30). Das Englische ist idiomatisch und liest sich sehr flüssig, denn die Verf. bewegt sich sicher im gehobenen akademischen Register.

Die Bibliographie enthält ausreichend einschlägige Literatur und entspricht den Vorgaben des MLA Stylesheet. Gillespie muss als eigenständiger Beitrag aufgeführt werden, weil er auf S. 8 zitiert wird.

Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,7 (gut)** bewertet.

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Bachelor Thesis
Constructions of Class in
Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*.

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1. Introduction

North and South (1855) is considered to be Elizabeth Gaskell's second industrial novel after the release of *Mary Barton* in 1848. In line with their subgenre's conventions, both novels focus on the immense economic and social transformations of the 19th century, which resulted from the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the previous century. These progressive impacts were mostly concentrated in the northern industrial centres of England, for example Manchester. Milton-Northern, the predominant setting of *North and South*, is constructed as a fictional version of Manchester and opposes the previously influential rural areas of southern England. The novel features a multitude of similar conflicts which unfold into both private and public matters of its plot of fictional social discourse.

In the most common view of literary criticism, *North and South* is part of a subgenre of the realist novel, which enjoyed huge success within Victorian England (Steinbach *Arts* 225). This subgenre, corresponding to the socio-economic transformations of its historical context, is referred to as either the social problem novel, the industrial novel, or the 'condition of England' novel in literary criticism. I will later point out some key conventions of the subgenre and reason why I will use the term of the industrial novel in this thesis. Although I will principally rely on the classification of *North and South* as an industrial novel, the prospect of reconciliation influenced by its romance subplot – portrayed in the courtship between Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton – remains crucial to Margaret's function as the protagonist and my following thesis statement.

I propose that Gaskell's *North and South* constructs the intense split between social classes of 19th-century England by relying on attitudes of regional pride and geographic disparities of settings, the representation of class-based living experiences by characters, and the intense use of Margaret Hale as a mediator between conflicts based on region and class. While the upper-class characters are positioned as effectively cut off by their desperate grip onto power, the working- and middle-class characters of Milton allow for a possible reconciliation to obtain mutual advantages. Additionally, Gaskell's novel strengthens its own function as an ideological state apparatus (ISA) to its Victorian middle-class readership by putting forward its female protagonist as the mediator between various conflicts.

On the theoretical level this thesis will be predominantly based on Marxist Criticism, which centralises the importance of class to any social progress. It foregrounds the struggle of one oppressed class, like the working-class characters in *North and South*, under the leadership of an economically dominant class, like the fictional entrepreneurial middle class of Milton. Following the notion of class, Althusser's definition of ideology and its emergence will also be

important to prove my thesis statement and support a possible conceptualisation of the novel as an ISA. I will further elaborate on these notions in the following theoretical chapter. In addition to this main approach some aspects concerning the construction of 19th-century gender ideals will be of relevance for this thesis.

Drawing upon the proposed thesis statement and the theoretical approaches briefly described, I will rely on the following structure and methodology to support my argumentation. Firstly, I will focus on the spatial and temporal constructions of setting in the novel, especially the opposition between rural Helstone and urban Milton, as well as the function of London as one of the novel's remote settings. This will include the close intersection of regional settings and their respective social classes as the focal point of Marxist Criticism. Secondly, I will analyse these constructions of class in more detail with each subchapter highlighting one class represented by the novel's characters, their actions, and possible causes of these actions. In this second chapter, the struggle for power between classes, both economically and culturally, is predominant in line with the theoretical approach of this thesis. Finally, my focus will shift onto Margaret's role as the mediator and her character construction. Apart from analysing her character with consideration of 19th-century gender ideals, this chapter will also include the conceptualisation of *North and South* as an ideological state apparatus (ISA) of middle-class ideology.

2. Theory and Method

2.1 Class, Marxist Criticism, and Ideology

Before beginning my argumentation, I will further elaborate on the theoretical framework of this thesis and the importance of class as a concept of literary theory when dealing with cultural phenomena of the 19th century, for example the industrial novel. "Victorian Britain was a deeply classed society" and relied on the acknowledgement of class as a fundamental category of social differentiation by a majority of the population in the 19th century (Steinbach *Class* 124). Since Gaskell published *North and South* at mid-century, the preoccupation of the novel with the concept of class appears inevitable.

In this thesis I will adhere to the three-class model brought forward by David Ricardo in the early 19th century. Divisions into upper, middle, and working classes according to this concept were associated with the source of income and "distinct relationships to the economy, and hence different interest" (Hewitt 306) of each class. This concept of class therefore suggests that the existence of different groupings within society relies on social and economic factors. Based on Ricardo's model, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels later proposed the existence of two

social classes marked by their relation to the economic means of production in a capitalist market economy. While the ruling bourgeoisie owns these means of production, the dependent proletariat produces goods by selling their workforce (“class (and literary studies)” 46-48). Marx and Engels further argued that the sole existence of different classes, from an economic viewpoint, accounts for the development of class-specific identities and cultures, including the achievement of different aims (Hewitt 306). However, class additionally entails other notions like the expectation of specific ideals and the intersection with various social concepts like race and gender (“class (and literary studies)” 46-48). Therefore, the differentiations between social classes in the 19th century were not as definite as this theoretical approach suggests.

Class serves as the centrepiece of Marxist Criticism, the theory I will predominantly base this analysis and interpretation of *North and South* on. Peter Barry’s description of what is essential to Marxist thinking can be used as a first point of guidance.

Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. This view of history as class struggle (rather than as, for instance, a succession of dynasties, or as a gradual progress towards (...) sovereignty) regards it as ‘motored’ by the competition for economic, social, and political advantage. The exploitation of one social class by another is seen (...) particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth-century form. (Barry 159-160)

In literature, Marxist Criticism often translates to the representation of this class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which Engels named the “revolutionary class of the future” stemming from the development of the factory system (Heller 177). Gaskell represents this theoretical assumption in the fictionalised struggle between working-class and middle-class characters of Milton, therefore making Marxist Criticism a suitable approach to her novel.

The concept of class aims at categorising society into groups and entails the existence of certain ideologies. An ideology can be defined as a “set of beliefs underlying the customs, habits, and practices common to a given social group” (“ideology” 164-165). These specific ideologies carry ideals and expectations given by the established ruling class of a society and additionally shape human subjects through a continuous reproduction of these predominant ideals and socio-economic conditions (Althusser 1337). Louis Althusser proposes the significance of ideological and repressive state apparatuses, respectively abbreviated as ISAs and RSAs, for the reproduction and dispersion of ideology in the interest of the dominant class. Literature itself must be considered as a cultural ISA by exposing readers to widespread ideologies represented in literary texts. This reliance on ideology also contributes to the difference to RSAs, which ultimately function based on violent forces (Althusser 1339-1342).

2.2 Genre Conventions of the Industrial Novel

As mentioned in the introduction, I will principally rely on the classification of *North and South* as an industrial novel. A short outline of the conventions of the subgenre can be helpful to gain a better understanding of Gaskell's novel. The Industrial Revolution brought about many negative side effects for England's working class, which had to endure poverty, over-crowding, and a lack of sanitation in many cities (Matus 27). Simultaneously, members of what Marx and Engels considered the bourgeoisie made immense profits in their commercial pursuits. "Anxiety and concern about this state of affairs were primarily stimulated by Thomas Carlyle", who drew attention to what he called the 'condition of England' ("condition of England novel" 149-150). In literature this attention to state affairs manifested itself in the emergence of a new subgenre of the realist novel, which sought to highlight these ills and endorse a change of politics to improve living standards (Dzelzainis 109). These subjects of writing were rather unprecedented and included strikes, poverty, and the awareness of class conflict (Clausson 4). Going back to Carlyle's concerns, this subgenre can be named the 'condition of England' novel, but also is referred to as either the social problem novel or the industrial novel. Aside from Gaskell, the mid-19th century saw many writers produce literary texts which can be classified to be part of this subgenre, for example Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë ("condition of England novel" 149-150). I will, however, use the term industrial novel in this thesis to highlight the impact of the Industrial Revolution on living experiences in the 19th century and therefore their representation in literary texts like *North and South*. The term suggests a link of literary representation to its specific historical context of the 19th century, while Carlyle's term might be used in other historical contexts as well to point out the 'condition of England'.

3. Constructions of Setting in *North and South*

3.1 Rural and Urban Settings in Opposition

Gaskell's novel features a multitude of conflicts, starting with the geographical opposition of the title itself. And while Gaskell was only persuaded into changing the title to *North and South* by her contemporary writer Charles Dickens (Athmanathan 37), the constructed fictional settings serve a distinct function within the narration. Divya Athmanathan proposes, that its fictional "spatial politics (...) are thematically and structurally important to the narrative development of *North and South*" (37). Helstone as a southern village, Milton as a northern city, and London as the nation's outstanding capital serve as the three dominant settings within the novel. All three settings are home to the protagonist Margaret Hale throughout the plot. The

geographical opposition of northern and southern England, furthermore, is deeply intertwined with cultural and social aspects concerning class relations as seen later in this analysis.

In southern England the country's shift towards an industrial economy was evident in the rising depopulation of its rural villages during the 19th century (Winstanley 212). Agriculture, however, remained important to feed the growing city populations and it was only by the 1850s that, based on population data, England could be described as predominantly urban for the first time (Gunn 240). Like in Gaskell's construction of Helstone, the countryside continued to be home to poor labourers, a clergy willing to provide some charity, and a population endorsing long-held structures concerning class and power. These social structures, especially upheld by the aristocracy gripping onto their exclusiveness and influence over the rising middle class, were "often attacked in the (...) nineteenth century as 'Old Corruption'" (Hewitt 308).

Contradicting the long-held superficiality and idealised steadiness of the rural and upper-class countryside, "[t]he city was the fulcrum for the major changes overtaking British society in the nineteenth century; it was on the (...) edge of capitalism and modernity" (Gunn 238). During the 19th century England was home to the growth of many industrial cities as a result of continuous technological advancements and steadily increasing urbanisation. Examples of these cities include Birmingham, Sheffield, and lastly Manchester; the very city Gaskell uses as the setting in her previous industrial novel *Mary Barton* (1848), and the city upon which she based her narration of Milton. Most northern cities gained reputations based on their own specialised industry (Gunn 240). Returning to the influential example of Manchester, the city largely relied on its cotton industry. During the 1820s cotton already had turned into Britain's most exported product, but it was only the use of steam power a few years later which allowed for a factory system producing textiles. By the mid-1830s over 1,100 cotton mills existed in England, mostly concentrated in its northern cities (Ashworth 225-226).

But as specialised industries gained immense success and city populations grew across the country, a number of conflicts and problems in these new centres of commerce arose. One of these issues concerned sanitation and the workers' suffering in poor neighbourhoods since "the populations of certain parishes doubled every decade (...), creating the teeming, insanitary 'slums' for which Victorian Britain was notorious" (Gunn 241). Moreover, the urban environment saw less order in social distinctions and gave way to the possibility of cultural conflicts between inhabitants of different social groups (Gunn 241). Helstone and Milton represent the contradicting geography of 19th-century England in their construction, making

the following analysis of these settings a useful lead-up to and part of the novel's constructions of classes and social progress.

Gaskell's narration of Helstone – a small village in the southern countryside of England – relies on its construction and semanticisation as an idealised, idyllic, and in some parts mystic relict of Margaret's early childhood and her anticipated return as a young woman. These distinctive traits of the novel's most important rural setting match the geographical metaphors first laid out by Donald Horne. His southern metaphor includes the following terms as central to establishing Englishness in the South: romance, illogicality, ruthless pride, as well as preservation of social structures and the belief of a given social order (Wiener 41). Although all of Horne's characteristics of a southern metaphor suit the construction of Helstone, a noticeable neglect of the concepts of untouched nature and health stands out. In *North and South* these two concepts are unavoidable as readers are confronted with various storylines concerning sicknesses and deaths of characters across settings and social classes.

Margaret's anticipating description of Helstone to Henry Lennox during her final days of living in London includes various passages of text alluding to Helstone's idealisation and romantic mystique. Upon request, Margaret raves about her beloved childhood home as being different from any other places she has ever visited: ““All the other places (...) seem so hard and prosaic-looking, (...) Helstone is like a village in a poem”” (Gaskell 12). This explicit reference presents Helstone as almost too beautiful to exist within the narration and therefore creates the image of a mystical space. In addition, this image can be considered part of Margaret's pride of her childhood home and includes the comfort and safety her character experiences while being in this setting. Another important aspect for the romantic conceptualisation of Helstone is the connection made to its brisk and untouched nature, producing the impression of purity and innocence.

The little drawing-room was looking its best in the streaming light of the morning sun. The middle window in the bow was opened, and clustering roses and the scarlet honeysuckle came peeping round the corner; the small lawn was gorgeous with verbenas and geraniums of all bright colours. But the very brightness outside made the colours within seem poor and faded. (Gaskell 23)

Although this passage alludes to the mystic idealness of the Hale family home in Helstone, especially by using the apparent intrusion of plants and colourful flowers into the drawing-room, the juxtaposition of dull colours establishes the difference between indoor and outdoor settings for the novel's characters. This differentiation troubles Margaret extensively with her mother's health already in decline and Mr. Hale's doubts as a member of the Church of England. A

disconnection between indoor and outdoor setting, already mentioned a few pages earlier, at the same time prepares the set-up of different social spheres within the plot. This will be again of relevance in the later chapter on the construction of Margaret as a female mediator facing the novel's various conflicts so exemplary for 19th-century England.

The neglect of health as part of Horne's proposed southern metaphor coincides with the influence of the Industrial Revolution. Southern settings in *North and South* are in many instances linked to the closeness of nature, untouched by humans and industry, and therefore represented as less harmful concerning characters' health. This image amounts for one of the key differences between rural areas and Milton as an industrial city and is first mentioned by the anxious Mrs. Hale before they leave Helstone. She "can't think the smoky air of a manufacturing town, all chimneys and dirt (...), would be better than this [Helstone] air, which is pure and sweet" (Gaskell 45) for her health. Her anticipation links adjectives associated with cleanliness and dirtiness to their influence of living standards and personal health. Following a similar trope, the construction of Milton as a less desirable place to live peaks in Bessy Higgins' desire to have had a childhood in the countryside like Margaret did. While Bessy, the daughter of a Milton labourer, suffers from a work-related lung disease, she exclaims: "'It's all well enough for yo' to say so, who have lived in pleasant green places all your life long, and never known want or care, or wickedness either, for that matter.'" (Gaskell 137). Her statement evidently also links regional differences of settings to class structures and prejudices, discrediting southern characters of having to deal with any anxieties in their life. Margaret quickly tries to negate this fixation of carelessness and absence of anxieties from herself by giving the example of dealing with her sick mother, providing a further lead-up to her position as the novel's mediator.

Bessy's hometown of Milton opposes Helstone binarily and matches the differentiation between Horne's metaphors. Pragmatism, rationality, the pursuit of economic self-interest and commerce, and the belief in struggle for self-advancement are all part of his proposed northern metaphor (Wiener 41). Milton fits this metaphor well, not only with Mrs. Hale's previously mentioned expectation, but also the first impression of the city by the Hale family.

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep *lead-coloured cloud* hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay. (...) Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; (...) As they drove through the larger and wider streets (...) great loaded luries bloked up the not over-wide thoroughfares. (...) [E]very van, every waggon and truck, bore cotton... (Gaskell 59; emphasis added)

The industrial city and its commercial centre are immediately and visibly constructed as cruel, rushed, and rather suffering from results of the Industrial Revolution. Instead of the romanticisation so vital to its rural settings, the novel places practicality and commercial sobriety over vanity in appearance in this urban settings. Again, Horne's geographical metaphor misses a concept relating to, or rather opposing, health. While Helstone's nature supposedly provides health, the characters in Milton face the city's toxicity and oppression. Firstly, the symbol of a "lead-coloured cloud" (Gaskell 59) assigns Milton its unhealthiness for characters living there. Secondly, this association can be viewed as a comment on suffering and economic pressure in industrial cities by using a heavy element like lead for the comparison. Margaret later comments on this issue as well. In her opinion "[i]t is the town life (...) which of itself is enough to induce depression and worry of spirits" (Gaskell 301).

Until now this analysis of Helstone and Milton was predominantly concerned with spatial aspects. However, settings of literary texts are also always reliant on their temporal construction. Time and speed are crucial for a comparison of Helstone and Milton and are part of characters' experiences in both settings. When Margaret first arrives from Helstone she quickly notices what great relevance punctuality and time have in an industrial city like Milton. She frequently encounters "streams of men and women two or three times a day" (Gaskell 71) in line with their time-specific walks to work at the cotton mills. Overall, northern England as the country's industrial centre is constructed as a space of incredibly quick pace, constant existence of action, as well as uninterrupted change concerning both economy and society. Helstone, on the other hand, once again relies on its own romanticisation and the inexistence of any temporal progress. During her return visit with Mr. Bell, Margaret can establish a comparison after having spent a significant time living in both settings.

It hurt her to see the Helstone road so flooded in the sun-light, and every turn and every familiar tree so precisely the same in its summer glory as it had been in former years. Nature felt no change, and was ever young. (Gaskell 385)

Ultimately, this perception of Helstone, as an example for the rural South, preserves the setting as everlasting and stagnant. This observation can further be projected onto the social context and the lack of social progress in comparison to industrial centres such as Milton, where "the chimneys smoked, the ceaseless roar and mighty beat, and dizzying whirl of machinery, struggled and strove perpetually" (Gaskell 418). Considering both spatial and temporal aspects of settings, the narration uses a variety of chronotopes, the specific configurations of time and

space in a literary text, to comment on the immense contradictions between geographical regions influenced by the progress of the Industrial Revolution (Mullen 110).

The differences between both regional settings are not only evident in its spatial and temporal conceptualisations, but are also vehemently linked to character traits and actions. Opposing the Hale family and their southern expectations, northern characters share a rather direct and honest course of action. This again relies on the concepts of economic self-interest to overcome the struggles of the city laid out by Horne's northern metaphor. The search for a new servant proves to be especially bothersome and difficult for the Hale family. Dixon, Mrs. Hale's lady's maid who strongly clings to her southern origin and rather snobby prejudices against the North, is shocked as she meets various "rough independent (...) Milton girls" (Gaskell 70) whose attitudes mismatch her social concepts and who "even went the length of questioning her back again; having doubts and fears of their own" (Gaskell 70). This example visualises how regionally different social expectations and practices promote the possibility of misunderstandings and the formation of tough prejudices or stereotypes linked to geography and class. These prejudices are also further entrenched by the pride many characters hold for their geographic origin and which setting each of them considers home. Margaret and Mr. Thornton for example engage in a rather heated discussion concerning geographic differences during one of their earlier encounters. Mr. Thornton proposes he "would rather be a man toiling, suffering (...) and successful" (Gaskell 81) in his familiar industrial North than having to endure southern carelessness all day long. The apparent regional claims he ascribes to character traits such as naiveness are however most likely equally brought forward by his stance on class structures of the 'Old Corruption' (Hewitt 308). Margaret unsurprisingly intervenes "roused by the aspersion on her beloved South (...) that brought the colour into her cheeks and the angry tears into her eyes" (Gaskell 81) and intensifies the construction of home pride being innate, emotional, and something that cannot be prevented. Just a few pages later, the proposition of regional pride, laid out by Margaret's defense of the South, is again highlighted by Mrs. Thornton. Although her daughter Fanny, born and raised in Milton, is less fond of the city as a place to live, she strongly and unapologetically asserts: "I do not feel that my very natural liking for the place where I was born and brought up (...) requires any accounting for" (Gaskell 97-98). All these emphases on the superiority of character's own region in their terms justify the prejudices they hold against anyone from a different region.

Concludingly, the opposition between Helstone and Milton, both exemplary settings of 19th-century England, aim to construct a prerequisite for the immense conflicts and social split within the country so vital to *North and South* as an industrial novel. The analysed differences

in fictional spaces and time, as well as the character's attitudes of local pride do not allow for the possibility of imagining a social reconciliation across regional borders as one united nation of the future. Instead, socio-cultural conceptions and ideals are very much divided by local habits (Mullen 107) and appear in need of someone to mediate. This role is attributed to Margaret as the novel's protagonist, who has lived in both rural and urban settings.

3.2 Remote Settings as Spaces of Flight

Although Margaret's most crucial actions as the protagonist take place in either Helstone or Milton, it should not be forgotten that she spent most of her adolescence living with her mother's relatives in London. This, however, is not part of the novel's story time. The family residing in Harley Street includes Margaret's aunt Mrs. Shaw and her cousin Edith, with whom she shares a close bond. This subchapter will focus on the construction of London and other remote settings as a space of flight and will have some intersections with the representation of upper-class living in *North and South*.

Throughout the 18th century, England's aristocracy preferred living in the countryside, but just as the rest of the country their lives also became more urban during the 19th century. This slow shift was mostly noticeable as the nobility and gentry spent more time in London (Wiener 47). They feared a loss of their exclusive power and political influence with the rise of the middle class relying on capitalism and industry. And although this view is widely accepted amongst critics, the upper class managed to maintain a lot of their power during the 19th century, especially because "a powerful alliance was forged between the landed gentry and the financial sector, based around the City of London" (Ashworth 224). Therefore, London opposed northern regions associated with industrial capitalism and ensured exclusiveness by proving to be an immense market for luxury goods reliant on wealthy buyers (Ashworth 225). The West End of the city ultimately became home to a leisure district filled with music halls and theatres aimed at entertaining the upper class living within the city (Gunn 245). Looking at London in its 19th-century context – and its literary representation in *North and South* – clearly highlights the immense intersectionality of class and regional differences.

The Shaw family home is situated well within this setting, suitable for upper-class characters, as the novel begins with a representation of their lifestyle in Harley Street. Although the first chapter only gives a rather small insight into the construction of their home, it visibly allows for the variety of exclusive upper-class activities such as hosting a farewell dinner before Edith's wedding. Concerning this analysis of setting, however, the surrounding of their home is of much more interest. London is conceptualised as being busy, but not as toiling and

suffering as Milton. This image of vitality is rather encouraged by excitement and the eagerness for activities of upper-class enjoyment. Especially Mrs. Hale's unexpected glow-up while briefly staying in London on their move to Milton alludes to the influence a shiny and luxurious setting has on an upper-class character or those who still think in long-established terms of class structure.

They went through the well-known streets, past houses (...), past shops (...), it was the very busiest time of a London afternoon in November when they arrived there. It was long since Mrs. Hale had been in London; and she roused up, almost like a child, to look about her at the different streets, and to gaze after and exclaim at the shops and carriages. (Gaskell 56-57)

Not only does Mrs. Hale's sudden liveliness support the argument of London being a setting less reliant on suffering, but it also cuts off the city from the rest of the country, which experiences the effects of capitalism and industry. Of course, this conceptualisation once again harshly opposes the industrial setting of Milton. The wealthy quarters of London therefore serve as an exclusive space of flight for upper-class characters to lose awareness, just like Mrs. Hale seemingly forgetting about her illness.

Mr. Thornton's comments on London, or more precisely on Parliament residing in London, prove this point of the city being detached from the rest of the country as well. In Mr. Thornton's case, this argument largely relies on the regional prejudices he holds, but also on class bias as England's parliament and politics were still mostly controlled by the upper class. Although middle-class mill owners gained suffrage with the 1832 Reform Act (Frawley 369), they were still not represented in Parliament themselves by mid-century. Speaking for his own social group, both concerning class and region, he and other mill owners "hate to have laws made (...) at a distance. (...) [They] stand up for self-government, and oppose centralisation" (Gaskell 334). He indirectly accuses Parliament, and therefore also London, of not knowing about things vital for characters living in the industrial North, including their anxieties and struggles.

London does not represent the only possible space of a getaway for the novel's upper-class characters. Gaskell marginally relies on seaside settings employed as a place of reflection and calmness in her writings (Burroughs 11). These settings oppose the industrialisation and economic progress taking place in the rest of the country. In *North and South* these settings include Cromer, which provides a place of reflection for Margaret, and the island of Corfu. Once the Shaw family temporarily relocates to Corfu after Edith's marriage, Margaret, now residing in Milton, receives various accounts of the island's beauty from Edith. Her letters

describe “her house with its trellised balcony, and its views over white cliffs and deep blue sea” (Gaskell 66-67) and connotes a naive, almost absolute careless lifestyle “utterly free from fleck or cloud” (Gaskell 67). Again, this spatial construction is linked to the Shaw family as representatives of the wealthy aristocracy, missing any signs of the struggle the rest of the country, including Margaret, faces that very same moment.

In its focus on the novel’s settings this chapter displays how diverse the geographic landscape of 19th-century England and its representation in literature was. Helstone and Milton as settings represent the cultural, social, and economic split driven by the industrialisation, dividing the country into two regionally distinctive poles. The outstanding and remote conceptualisation of London undermines the unavoidable connection between region and class. The next chapter, intended to analyse the constructions of class in *North and South* on a more precise level to support the thesis statement, ultimately relies on these setting constructions as a prerequisite.

4. Constructions of Class in *North and South*

4.1 Isolation of a Superficial Upper Class

Having laid out the regional settings in *North and South* and the implications they have on the novel, this chapter will now be occupied with its constructions of class as the focal point of this thesis. This analysis, to most extends, will be based on paying closer attention to the class-based living experiences of the novel’s primary characters, as well as their actions as part of the plot and any possible motivations for these actions.

To give a short summary before tying in the upper class constructed in *North and South*, the English aristocracy or upper class relied on income from land they owned and rented to others according to Ricardo’s three-tier model of class. Furthermore, a distinct feature of this class lied within the significance of privileged relations and kinship. With the growth of the middle class, this strict reliance on kinship became ever more important for upper-class families trying to ensure their social influence and power. However, this practice, quite obviously disregarding any social progress, soon gained scorn as a concept of ‘Old Corruption’ already encountered in the previous chapter (Hewitt 306-308). England’s upper class, comprising the nobility and gentry, had influenced the country’s politics for centuries although they only comprised five percent of the population (Steinbach *Class* 128) and in the 19th century faced the rising middle class powered by the Industrial Revolution.

Turning back to the fictional upper class of Gaskell’s novel, these aspects of contextualisation are clearly represented in characters like Mrs. Shaw and her daughter Edith.

Just like the conceptualisation of the spatial setting they are situated in, their actions and character traits lead to an exclusion from any social progress happening in their surroundings. One of the most obvious principles attributed to these upper-class characters is their own self-fashioning and efforts of maintaining their image of vanity and wealth. During a farewell dinner set shortly before Edith's wedding the importance of luxury exceeds any other conversational topic as "the shawls, which had already been exhibited four or five times that day" (Gaskell 8) once again serve as a display of wealth to the guest of the Harley Street house. Showing off wealth in front of other characters amounts to demonstrating power and respectable status, which was vital for any class in the 19th century (Steinbach *Class* 126). The guests attending this dinner also allude to the arbitrariness of some upper-class actions to ensure the concept of class exclusiveness, as it is mentioned that all guests "were the familiar acquaintances of the house; neighbours whom Mrs. Shaw called friends, because she happened to dine with them more frequently than with any other people" (Gaskell 6). Being regarded as socially superior by others even overthrows personal interests according to a comment made by Henry Lennox, Edith's future brother-in-law, in light of the continuous hassle surrounding the upcoming wedding.

'But are all these quite necessary troubles?' asked Margaret, looking up straight at [Henry Lennox] for an answer. A sense of indescribable weariness of all the arrangements for a pretty effect (...) oppressed her (...) 'Oh, of course,' he replied with a change to gravity in his tone. 'There are forms and ceremonies to be gone through, not so much to satisfy oneself, as to stop the world's mouth, without which stoppage there would be very little satisfaction in life.' (Gaskell 11)

This short dialogue not only sets up Margaret's inquisitive and slightly critical attitude towards upper-class life early on, but also serves as a summary of the first chapter interfering with the novel's classification as an industrial novel. *North and South's* first chapter rather adheres to the genre conventions of the so-called silver-fork novel. This subgenre bases itself on the exaggerated representation of aristocratic ideals and their apparent absurdity (Dzelzainis 106). Furthermore, the silver-fork novel allowed female writers to transition into writing social novels (Dzelzainis 107), as is the case in *North and South* once Margaret leaves London in the second chapter. With Henry Lennox proposing that there is nothing else of value other than the opinions of others, the characters of the upper class once again support their own separation from all other groups of a progressing society. This follows and reinforces the remote construction of the settings they are most prominently placed in.

Of course, being placed in a certain setting does not immediately eliminate any social ideologies attributed to characters. Although Mrs. Hale and Dixon, her lady's maid, make the move to Milton, they still adhere to their long-established arrogance against lower classes. While Mr. Hale invites Nicholas Higgins, a northern labourer, into their home, Dixon complains that Margaret and her father "must always be asking the lower classes up-stairs, since [they] came to Milton" (Gaskell 304) and establishes herself as a relic of upper-class social ideology opposing any approximation of lower classes. Dixon's disapproval of Nicholas as a working-class representative highlights the arbitrariness of her character's self-image. As a house servant she represents a working-class woman as well, but like many domestic servants featured in 19th-century novels assumes herself as socially superior by showing loyalty to her employer and their social ideology (Williams Elliott *Servants and Hands* 381). Mrs. Hale shares a similar mindset as Dixon and her sister, Mrs. Shaw, and complains about Margaret adapting "factory slang (...) [with a] very vulgar sound" (Gaskell 237) after moving to Milton.

The upper-class ideal of maintaining social exclusiveness and avoiding cultural contact with less respectable classes was enforced by multiple influential practices in many aristocratic families. One fictional example brought forward in *North and South* is the negotiation of a marriage beneficial to the included families; a practice already popular in previous centuries (Wilson 161). Margaret finds herself increasingly influenced by Mrs. Shaw and Edith after the death of both her parents. "[A]s if she were a lap-dog" (Gaskell 359) they control Margaret in her period of grief and later also wish to fix her up with Henry Lennox, all in order to not lose any exclusiveness to their family's name.

They kept her out of the way of other friends who might have eligible sons or brothers; and it was also agreed that she never seemed to take much pleasure in the society of any one but Henry, out of their own family. The other admirers, attracted by her appearance or the reputation of her fortune, were swept away... (Gaskell 417)

The proposed match between Margaret and Henry Lennox exposes the absurdity and single purpose of actions by upper-class characters, Mrs. Shaw in this instance. Her decision to sideline any other possible suitor opposes Margaret's indifference towards Henry Lennox as a possible husband. While readers and the authorial narrator know of Margaret's earlier refusal, Mrs. Shaw's lack of knowledge encourages her to hold onto the possibility of their marriage. This discrepant awareness again suggests the arbitrariness and intention of her wish for this beneficial negotiation between the Lennox and Shaw families. Margaret's inheritance from her father's Oxford friend Mr. Bell – valued at "about two thousand pounds, and the remainder about forty thousand, at the present value of property of Milton" (Gaskell 413) – establishes

social respectability to her name, which her aunt wishes to share by arranging a second marriage between her own and the Lennox family.

The first marriage of both families between Edith and Captain Lennox, in line with upper-class characters aiming at respectability, relies on this strategy of negotiating marriage. Yet, it is mentioned that “[t]he course of true love in Edith’s case had run remarkably smooth” (Gaskell 7) and her husband stands somewhat “below the expectations which many of Edith’s acquaintances had formed for her, a young and pretty heiress” (Gaskell 7). Edith’s character subjugates herself to the upper-class ideology her mother enforces. She is most often characterised by others as naive, helpless, and ignorant. Referring to a letter she sends Margaret from Corfu, the authorial narrator comments on the contents being “affectionate and inconsequent like the writer” (Gaskell 234) and therefore strips her of any contemplation concerning her cousin’s new life in Milton. Her beauty also stands out, especially her “long floating golden hair, all softness and glitter” (Gaskell 378). Altogether Edith fits into the prominent gender ideals of the 19th century, which glorified women staying within the private sphere and not partaking in any more public business. The public sphere was seen as a overwhelmingly male dominion (Stoneman 131). When comparing her to Margaret, the novel negates Edith any hints of agency and allows for a critique of 19th-century social ideology, which pushed women back into the private sphere to eventually develop traits such as “ignorance, timidity, and abrogation of responsibility” (Stoneman 140); three traits all visible in Edith. Therefore, she binarily opposes Margaret in her character construction. This opposition will be pointed out again later in this thesis, when taking a closer look at Margaret’s function within the novel.

4.2 The Thornton Family as Part of a Newly Dominant Middle Class

With its resolute social ideology and practices, the English aristocracy held onto economic, political, and socio-cultural power over many centuries. This advantage slowly shifted in favour of the arising middle class as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum and ensured financial success based on capitalist pursuits. Nevertheless, upper-class influence did not simply vanish at once; middle-class business owners renting property still supplied some income from rent (Hewitt 306). This practice is also exemplified in *North and South*, where Mr. Thornton rents property from Mr. Bell to house his cotton mill. Profits and achievements made by members of the middle class nonetheless overtook the long-established kinship and birthright system as a respected and highly regarded feature (Knapp 108) and therefore influenced social hierarchy altogether. The ascendance of the middle class not only manifested itself in historical context,

but also in the literary texts of the 19th century. While the industrial novels published overwhelmingly aimed at representing the working-class experience, the silver-fork novel – a term I already touched upon in chapter 4.1 – emerged as a subgenre focusing on the relation between the upper and middle classes (Dzelzainis 109). According to Ella Dzelzainis, the satirical construction of the aristocracy in this subgenre, for example as in Mrs. Shaw and her family, justified the rise of the middle class in a literary response (106-107).

Martin Hewitt claims this increasing influence, both in historical context and literary texts of the 19th century, marked the “eclipse of the aristocracy, [and] the triumph of the middle class” (305). Up to 15 percent of the population eventually made up this triumphant middle class and gained their income – the central aspect of class according to Ricardo’s model – by profits from their businesses. Their respectability and status in public, therefore, also relied on their profits and, ultimately, conditions of the market economy (Hewitt 308). Alongside their growing economic strength, the middle class secured political power with the Reform Act of 1832. This act provided male middle-class business owners with a right to vote and established parliamentary representation for industrial regions of England (Frawley 369). Similar to Mr. Thornton’s character, the successful middle class “[f]or a long time (...) was symbolized by the industrial manufacturer of the Midlands and the North” (Hewitt 308) in both historical context and literature. Thus, this subchapter will be based on the construction of Mr. Thornton and his mother, Mrs. Thornton, their actions, and character developments.

North and South as a literary text claims the superiority of the newly affluent middle class in its representation of these characters. For this reason, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton often face other characters completely different and express their confidence. Mrs. Thornton for example opposes Mrs. Hale in her constructed physical appearance. The narrator quite explicitly describes Mrs. Thornton as a “large-boned lady, (...) strong and massive (...) [with] no great variety in her countenance” (Gaskell 76). This description and her actions allow for a characterisation as determined, almost stubborn, and physically robust; an image later repeated and juxtaposed with Mrs. Hale fighting her worsening illness.

There lay Mrs. Hale – a mother like herself – a much younger woman than she was, – on the bed from which there was no sign of hope that she might ever rise again. (...) When Mrs. Thornton, strong and prosperous with life, came in, Mrs. Hale lay still, although from the look on her face she was evidently conscious of who it was. (Gaskell 241)

The difference in their physical condition – Mrs. Thornton towering vigorously over Mrs. Hale so close to her death – also represents the condition of the social classes their characters adhere

to. While Mrs. Hale still prides herself with being socially superior in terms of the aristocratic connections she has, Mrs. Thornton clearly interferes as a middle-class woman taking up space and attention within the room. Mrs. Hale's continuous decrease in physical well-being and ultimate death construct the failure of the old-established aristocratic ideology in a transforming English economy and society. Simultaneously, middle-class success is visible in Mrs. Thornton's construction as a character "strong and prosperous with life" (Gaskell 241) and manifests a claim of power. Nonetheless, as Maura Dunst notices, women of all classes in Gaskell's literary texts, especially mothers, share similar anxieties and face isolation across any possible class lines (52). Although Mrs. Thornton shows all signs of "personal strength and tenacity, she has little autonomy beyond what her son allows her" (Dunst 57). This observation terms back to the powerful Victorian gender ideal of different established social spheres, disabling women any public agency to focus on matters of the private sphere (Dunst 57). Margaret's proposed reconciliation between middle and working class also partially relies on this notion of similar anxieties and her challenges to gender ideals the novel's mothers comply with.

Along the characterisation by her physical appearance, Mrs. Thornton's self-characterisation as a proud and unapologetic woman also supports the claim of advancing middle-class power. This self-characterisation is most notable in her character's disrespect and mockery towards the southern, upper-class lifestyle and the Hale family, which in her view still are part of the "Old Corruption". The importance of region is again intertwined with class when Mrs. Thornton warns her son of Margaret as a possible love interest since she "comes out of the aristocratic counties, where, if all tales be true, rich husbands are reckoned prizes" (Gaskell 77) and praises the spirit for self-advancement of young women in Milton. As with most of the middle class, the reliance on a *laissez-faire* attitude is evident in Mrs. Thornton and establishes what her character considers as important traits: sober pragmatism and diligence to ensure economic success and personal achievement. Her observation of the Hale's drawing room during one of her visits stresses this again.

Margaret was busy embroidering a small piece of cambric for some little article of dress for Edith's expected baby – 'Flimsy, useless work,' as Mrs. Thornton observed to herself. (...) The room altogether was full of knick-knacks, which must take a long time to dust; and time (...) was money. (Gaskell 96)

The psycho-narration of her consciousness allows for an insight into her character's proud attitude concerning her son's economic success as a manufacturer, while scorning aristocratic idleness. Sternness in her character can only be shaken up by questioning this very substructure

of middle-class power. With Mr. Thornton's business in decline, she asks him "But how do you stand? Shall you – will it be a failure?" [with] her steady voice trembling in an unwonted manner" (Gaskell 423). Failure in commerce would undoubtedly undermine the power her character as a middle-class representative holds in the novel. This fear also explains why Mrs. Thornton harshly opposes her son taking lessons on classics with Mr. Hale. She vigorously opposes any possibility of cultural hybridity based on class (Athmanathan 47), favouring Mr. Thornton's "thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of to-day" (Gaskell 113) and simultaneously ruling out Margaret as a possible daughter-in-law repeatedly. Concludingly, her character construction represents the middle-class urge of overcoming past ideologies to focus on economic success as the prevailing factor of power and influence.

Mr. Thornton affirms this importance in the powerful position of his character within the setting of a rather socially progressive city like Milton. The construction of his physical appearance supports this claim on the most obvious level. Parallel to the constructed binary between his mother and Mrs. Hale, his physique strikes Margaret as impressive once she observes him next to her father. Mr. Hale has a "slight figure (...) contrasted (...) with the tall, massive frame" (Gaskell 80) of Mr. Thornton. On the other hand, the latter holds a "severe and resolved expression of a man ready to do and dare anything" (Gaskell 80). This comparison establishes a superiority of Mr. Thornton's firmness, power, and strong-minded dedication to his commercial actions. His attributes of strength are further underlined using the aforementioned gender ideals of the 19th century to weaken the importance of Mr. Hale's character, whose "beauty (...) was almost feminine" (Gaskell 80). Gaskell's narration therefore negates Mr. Hale, a past clergyman, any possibility of public power and marks Mr. Thornton's standing as part of the male middle-class dominance of the 19th century (Gunn 246).

The steady rise of middle-class power can be observed by the respectable status Mr. Thornton enjoys in the views of other minor characters he encounters. Following the planned move to Milton, the Hale family complains about the interior of their new home and the reluctance of the landlord to make any changes in their favour.

But when they removed to their new house in Milton, the obnoxious [wall]papers were gone. The landlord received their thanks very composedly; (...) There was no particular need to tell them, that what he did not care to do for a Reverend Mr. Hale, unknown in Milton, he was only too glad to do at one short sharp remonstrance of Mr. Thornton, the wealthy manufacturer. (Gaskell 65)

The persuasion of the landlord positions Mr. Thornton as a widely respected and influential character within his respective setting of the industrial city. Aspects of respectability, class, and

region heavily interconnect to stress the foundation on which Mr. Thornton's social position relies, his northern business. At a later dinner party, the authorial narrator comments that there is "no uncertainty as to his position (...) of power" (Gaskell 163) within a group of Milton manufacturers. His own comments additionally expose that Mr. Thornton clearly acknowledges his powerful position within Milton and allow for a self-characterisation which reinforces the mentioned traits. Following the strike-turned-riot in front of his mill, which ultimately bases itself on a worsening trade, he meets Dr. Donaldson, the physician who cares for Mrs. Hale, and exclaims: "'I'm made of iron. The news of the worst bad dept I ever had, never made my pulse vary. This strike (...) never comes near my appetite'" (Gaskell 213). By invalidating Dr. Donaldson's proposal that bad trade could impact his health he characterises himself as level-headed and a strong leader supported by his past achievements.

The background of the Thornton family, mentioned by Mr. Hale to Margaret before he takes on Mr. Thornton as a student, constructs the inevitable importance of self-achievement as the guiding principle to his character. After "[h]is father speculated wildly, failed, and then killed himself, because he could not bear the disgrace" (Gaskell 87), Mr. Thornton accordingly took the family matters into his hands and eventually paid of the debts through hard work as he "had to become a man (...) in a few days" (Gaskell 84). Therefore, especially in earlier parts of the novel, he prides himself as an advocate of the free market after having been able to benefit from it through hard work.

'It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks...' (Gaskell 84)

Opposing his views, Margaret objects that many involuntary actions by lower-class characters to survive and make financial ends meet most of the times do not end in upward social mobility. She deliberately points out misfits of the same system Mr. Thornton thinks of as a "great beaut[y]" (Gaskell 84). Mr. Thornton therefore only defends free market principles because in his case, rather out of the ordinary for the 19th century, they helped him gain social status. Fittingly, Martin Hewitt claims that the longing for upward social mobility relied on the "myth of self-improvement", while, in reality, social mobility between classes usually appeared downwards (310). The possibilities proposed by Mr. Thornton simultaneously discredit the novel's working-class characters of determination to achieve improvement and form a distinction between both classes. Margaret's criticism of his laissez-faire views represents "the old sense of responsibility toward[s] the poor" being lost with the slow advancement of middle-

class power and its accompanying value system (Henry 156). The disregarding attitude shared by Mr. Thornton and his family towards the working class of Milton, whether employed at his mill or other ones, links to this loss of responsibility and any private connection.

The relationship between the middle-class factory owners and their workers also lacks any private connection under the ideal of a free market economy. In the 19th century and its literary texts, labour simply constituted a resource which manufacturers could buy from members of the working class and which came with no responsibility other than “the nexus of contract” (Sussman 249). This notion dehumanises the workforce of the 19th century; an observation which can also be made in *North and South*. Mr. Thornton shares little interest for the well-being of his workers and pays their concerns little respect in the novel. Firstly, this ignorance is evident in the disrespectful language used by middle-class characters when addressing working-class characters. While Mr. Thornton calls his workers “hands” (Gaskell 173), “fools” (Gaskell 144), or only by their name without a title, like the “curt ‘Nicholas’ or ‘Higgins’” (Gaskell 225), his mother uses even stronger symbols when talking of her son’s workers. In light of the announced strike, she calls them “ungrateful hounds” (Gaskell 115) in a hateful manner. This example of her language dehumanises the working-class characters and ultimately attributes them animalistic traits; a notion I will return to in the next subchapter and its focus on the climactic strike scene of the novel. Overall, disrespect and objectification are represented as a widely accepted phenomenon by characters of all classes, as seen when Nicholas returns from asking for work and unaffectedly reports: “‘Th’ o’erlooker bid me go and be d—d [i.e., dead]” (Gaskell 307). Secondly, the horrible working conditions as a vital part of the narration support the claim of middle-class ignorance towards their workers. Protection of workers appears non-existent to ensure further cost cuts for businessowners like Mr. Thornton. As Bessy states, her lung disease could have been prevented by the installation of “a great wheel (...) to make a draught, and carry of th[e] dust” (Gaskell 102) in her workplace. But as this wheel “costs a deal o[f] money (...) and brings in no profit” (Gaskell 102), profit is represented as more desirable and valuable than worker’s health to middle-class mill-owners like Mr. Thornton.

Mr. Thornton’s character, however, develops throughout the plot as a result of the novel’s romance subplot and the influence his courtship for Margaret has. This development is manifested in his gradual acquaintance with and opening up to Milton’s working class, Nicholas being the most important one. The ultimate prospect of reconciliation heavily relies on Margaret’s function as the protagonist of *North and South* and her ability to mediate, which will be more closely analysed in the next chapter. Following the strike-turned-riot in front of

Mr. Thornton's cotton mill, Margaret's intervention, and her injury, he is not only overwhelmed by his feelings for her, but also starts to overthink his attitude towards the working class of Milton. He agrees with Margaret's proposition of peaceful mediation by allowing class contact and upon her apology for her intervention exclaims: "It was not your words; it was the truth they conveyed" (Gaskell 194). The acquaintance Mr. Thornton later makes with Nicholas builds up onto this starting point of accepting the necessity of mutual obligation and responsibility across classes. Nicholas' support for his next-door family after John Boucher's suicide conforms with what Mr. Thornton in a previous chapter coined to be the essence of being a (gentle)man and his belief in self-achievement. Lesa Scholl argues that Gaskell ensured that "[Mr.] Thornton and Nicholas are, therefore, equal" (103) in their constructed mindset of hard work. Mr. Thornton nonetheless is sceptical and only with time offers Nicholas work at his mill.

[Mr. Thornton] felt that he had been unjust, in giving so scornful a hearing to any one who had waited, with humble patience, for five hours, to speak to him. (...) [B]ut one hour – two hours (...) did he give up to going about collecting evidence as to the truth of Higgins's story, the nature of his character, the tenor of his life. He tried not to be, but was convinced that all that Higgins had said was true. (...) [T]he simple generosity of the motive (for he had learnt about the quarrel between Boucher and Higgins), made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overleap them by a diviner instinct. He came to tell Higgins he would give him work. (Gaskell 324-325)

The respect he slowly earns for Nicholas, based on the latter's sheer selflessness and solidarity, allows for the formation of a later even friendly acquaintance. Mr. Thornton therefore first gains personal respect and contact to Nicholas before also sharing this character development with other workers, representing a will to adapt to the ongoing social progress (Scholl 101). This acceptance is represented by his steadily growing interest and care for his workers, which at first even bewilders Nicholas, who gives account of Mr. Thornton visiting his workers regularly and calls him "two chaps" (Gaskell 339). One of these two being his long-standing position as their master, the other being someone who recently has shown care and interest in the well-being of the working class. With the announcement of a dining hall being built for his workers, Mr. Thornton entirely detaches himself from his earlier attitude of not wanting any personal connection to them. Rather he now assures that "much money might be saved, and much comfort gained" (Gaskell 361) with his project, allowing for mutual benefits through peaceful and respectful reconciliation. The construction of this fictional dining hall adheres to the concept of factory paternalism, first proposed by Arthur Helps, according to which an employer

should be obligated to care for the physical and mental health of the people he employs (Kanda 55). Mr. Thornton acknowledges that working-class poverty and resulting suffering, which he saw in the “miserable black frizzle of a dinner” (Gaskell 361), ultimately might harm his business more than any necessary investment. In the same scene he additionally calls Nicholas his “friend Higgins” (Gaskell 362) and therefore embraces the social hybridity his mother so strongly objects, but which he learned from both Margaret and Mr. Hale (Athmanathan 47). This proposition by Divya Athmanathan is again represented by Mr. Thornton’s own plead for reconciliation, saying that his “only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere “cash nexus”” (Gaskell 431). With Margaret close by, taking note of his development, the novel not only enables social reconciliation between the working and middle class of Milton, but also their personal reconciliation with ending in their confession of love for each other in the following and final chapter of the novel.

4.3 Milton’s Suffering Working Class and its Representatives

Mr. Thornton’s ultimate wish to establish a new connection to his workers partially relies on the miserable living conditions he notices and which *North and South* as an industrial novel represents so thoroughly. During the 19th century, the working class made up almost 80 percent of England’s population (Steinbach *Class* 128) and according to Ricardo’s model was defined by its dependence on wages as the mean of income. The difference of wages manifested for a rather diverse internal stratification of the working class. Although living standards of the working class improved throughout the 19th century, the stratification just mentioned ensured that these improvements were no universal observation for all members of the working class (Hewitt 308-310). Working standards were dire even for many young children. Different from the accustomed practices of previous centuries and rural areas, working-class families in English industrial centres also relied on wages their children earned from early ages on. These wages of children could make up some 40 percent of family income (Griffin 148), yet they were the result of life-threatening working conditions in manufacturing mills. At mid-century “children worked, on average, twelve to thirteen hours a day, six days a week, often in temperatures as high as 80°F (27°C) within environments that were damp and thick with cotton dust” (Ashworth 227).

In *North and South*, Gaskell effectively uses the genre conventions of the industrial novel to point out the misfits of this historical context in her construction of the Higgins family. Bessy, a young woman the same age as Margaret, explicitly represents the 19th-century custom of child labour in industrial centres. More precisely in Bessy’s case, she has worked hard

throughout her childhood in Milton and as a result faces a deadly lung disease during the novel's duration. Once again, the construction of physical appearance in both her and her father can be taken as a first reference point of working-class life. While Margaret wanders the city's streets, she repeatedly observes both of them as Nicholas is described to be a "poorly-dressed, middle-aged workman" and Bessy looks "still more unhealthy than he was himself" (Gaskell 72). The severeness of her illness – deadly and incomprehensible to Margaret – is constructed by the reaction of both Nicholas and Bessy to Margaret's hopeful advice that spring will raise Bessy's spirits and positively affect her health. While Bessy's character exudes "feebleness" and "utter hopelessness" (Gaskell 73), her father underlines the irreversibility of the lung disease: "I'm afeared hoo speaks truth. I'm afeared hoo's too far gone in a waste" (Gaskell 73). The use of "waste" objectifies Bessy in terms of her illness and represents how defenselessly he accepts his daughter's fate of approaching death. During a later meeting she even affirms Margaret's question "Bessy, do you wish to die?" (Gaskell 89), pointing out her miserable condition. Bessy's wish additionally is juxtaposed with Margaret's vitality as "she shrank from death herself, with all the clinging to life so natural to the young and healthy" (Gaskell 89). This comparison points out how different living experiences of the 19th century and their representation in literature were based on the social categorisation of class. Bessy's suffering, having its origin in her work during earlier years, constructs the immense industrial critique Gaskell aimed at with her industrial novels to raise awareness for the dire situation of the working class within the country. Bessy as the provided example "began to work in a carding-room (...), and the fluff got into [her] lungs, and poisoned [her]" (Gaskell 102). Aside from simple awareness, the literary representation of these working conditions "sought to convey the realities of working-class life to the more privileged classes to produce sympathy and sociopolitical change" (Dzelzainis 109).

The narration surrounding Bessy's inevitable death again highlights the immense impact her family's social standing and class struggle has on her suffering, as she almost dies without any company of her closest family at home. Nicholas does not witness her death after "leaving Bessy as well as on the day before" (Gaskell 217), while her sister Mary, according to the authorial narrator, was called for by a neighbour and "had only come in [from work] a few minutes before she died" (Gaskell 217). Nonetheless, the tragic scene of Nicholas getting the news of his daughter's death is accompanied by the construction of contentedness with her death as represented in the observation of her death body by Margaret.

The face, often so weary with pain, so restless with troublous thoughts, had now the faint soft smile of eternal rest upon it. (...) And that was death! *It looked more*

peaceful than life. All beautiful scriptures came into her [i.e., Margaret's] mind.
'They rest from their labours.' (Gaskell 218; emphasis added)

With this description of Bessy's peaceful physical appearance and the allusions to scriptures, the text constructs her death not only as inevitable but much more as liberating from the struggles her character had to endure. The severity of her illness as a result of the industrial factory work is therefore not only shown in her physical decay, but her worsening mental health. Death is represented as a viable option of escape for working-class characters, which will be relevant at a later point of this chapter with focus on John Boucher.

Aside from the construction of the Higgins family, Gaskell centres the novel's climax around the class struggle between the Milton working class and their employers. The fictional strike-turned-riot can be seen as a literary response to the industrial strike wave of the 1850s, which influenced middle-class writers like Gaskell to focus their fictional texts on class relations (Williams Elliot *The Female Visitor* 28). In *North and South* the poverty, suppression, and assumption of unfair financial tactics strengthen the challenge of social structures by working-class characters. Nicholas, for example, clearly positions himself in favour of the announced strike beforehand by using the metaphor of "the goose that laid 'em [i.e., the middle-class manufacturers] the golden eggs" (Gaskell 134). Referring to the working class as a "goose" and to the profit they earned their employers as "golden eggs", Nicholas criticises the wage cuts announced by the mill owners of Milton, who are still "flourishing (...) and getting richer upon" (Gaskell 134). Many other comments additionally allude to the announced strike prior to the chapter titled "A Blow and Its Consequences" (Gaskell 173-185), which is entirely dedicated to the narration of the the novel's climax.

The construction of the scene relies on a multitude of layers, overall highlighting how the working and living conditions of Milton's fictional working class induced the protest and later riot in its irrational brutality. The temporal setting of the announced strike suggests the inevitability of the upcoming struggle and represents the tense atmosphere between the two oppositional classes. As the "August sun beat straight down" (Gaskell 171), the city is manifested to be unpleasantly suppressed by its heat and stuffy air. Additionally, the "thunderous atmosphere [amongst workers], morally as well as physically" (Gaskell 172) supports the creation of the oppressive mood throughout the chapter. Gaskell uses a variety of images of nature for her narration of the beginning strike in front of Mr. Thornton's mill, which imply the uncontrolled temper of the movement (Clausson 11). While Margaret unknowingly runs an errand, she "heard the first long far-off roll of the tempest; – saw the first slow-surgng wave of the dark crowd (...) with its threatening crest" (Gaskell 172) near Mr. Thornton's mill.

The allusion to a storm allows for the representation of the movement slowly gaining momentum and creates suspense. With the strike rising up, the Thornton family and Margaret as their visitor fear the increasing willingness of the workers to violently fight for better standards of both living and working. The scene dehumanises the protesting working-class characters, who “made battering-rams of their bodies” (Gaskell 174) to intrude the gates of Mr. Thornton’s mill. Returning to Mrs. Thornton’s earlier description of her son’s workers as “ungrateful hounds” (Gaskell 115), the represented rage and suffering outweigh any reasonable attempt of a strike and lead to the uproar of a violent riot. The rioters “[a]s soon as they saw Mr. Thornton (...) set up a yell,— (...) the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening” (Gaskell 176). In this instance, Gaskell distinctively works with the middle-class fear widespread throughout the 19th century. This fear, as Jill Matus describes it, attributed working-class members incredible roughness, and furthermore neglected them the ability of any self-control (31). In line with the genre conventions of the industrial novel, the rioters’ anger is based on their employers and their ignorance to their worker’s needs: “Many in the crowd (...) were like Boucher,— with starving children at home — relying on ultimate success in their efforts to get higher wages, (...) desperate and livid with rage” (Gaskell 177-178). The scene ultimately constructs an animalistic drive within working-class characters with the sole reasoning of ensuring their own survival amidst dreadful living situations and supports Gaskell’s industrial critique.

The riot’s tipping point once again highlights the severeness of rage represented in the working-class characters and the loss of awareness concerning their actions in front of Mr. Thornton’s mill, ultimately induced by their suffering. Only with Margaret being injured as she stands between Mr. Thornton and the violent mob, the rioters stop almost immediately under the impression of shock.

Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop — at least had carried some of them too far; (...) reckless to what bloodshed it may lead. (...) A sharp pebble flew by her [i.e., Margaret], grazing forehead and cheek, and drawing a blinding sheet of light before her eyes. (...) They were watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up from their trance of passion. Those nearest the gate stole out ashamed; there was a (...) retreating movement. (Gaskell 179)

This shock relies on the unacceptability of Margaret as a female character being hurt within such a public scene. Her injury defies 19th-century chivalric protection granted towards women (Harman 65) and as a result rips the rioters out of their “trance of passion” (Gaskell 179). Margaret challenges the gender ideals of the 19th century by intruding the riot scene, which

undoubtedly is considered part of the public, and therefore male, sphere. She furthermore attracts sexual shame to her character by publicly showcasing her alleged desire for Mr. Thornton by protecting him. This representation of “uncontrolled female sexuality” shares similarities with the shame put upon the unrestrained working-class characters and their unrestrained and raging actions (Williams Elliot *The Female Visitor* 45).

Following the failure of the protest, Nicholas represents his pride and will of financial independence as a prominent value among the working class by not taking money from the Hale family for Mary’s assistance to Dixon. Although he “was rather disorderly (...), with a black unshaven beard (...), making his pale face yet look paler” (Gaskell 290) and in need for financial aid after losing his job, he clearly rejects the money Mr. Hale offers for Mary’s help: “‘If hoo takes it, I’ll turn her out o’ doors’” (Gaskell 290). This determined objection relies on his character’s assumption that Mary only provided little help to Dixon, which should not be paid, and the constructed working-class ideal of mutual responsibility and solidary support. The solidarity and kindness of his character also shows itself in his intention to strike and the reason he explains to Margaret.

‘My lass,’ said he, (...) ‘Dun yo’ think it’s for mysel’ I’m striking work at this time? (...) I take up John Boucher’s cause, as lives next door but one, wi’ a sickly wife, and eight childer, none on ’em factory age; (...) I take up th’ cause o’ justice. (Gaskell 134)

Although his own family struggles with their finances, his urge to fight for higher wages is not only justified by the will to improve his own living, but to secure the pure survival of other working-class members. His character constructs social responsibility as central to the fictional self-understanding of the Milton working class. Additionally, his answer to Margaret visualises another distinctive feature of *North and South* to differentiate social classes; the northern working-class sociolect. The intersection of class and geographic regions is again strongly visible with the differences in character-specific language. The most prominent examples of linguistic differences are omissions of word-final consonants and the use of slang words like “hoo” by northern characters. Nicholas even directly addresses these linguistic differences to the standardised English of the other classes in a discussion with Mr. Hale, saying: “‘I ax your pardon if I use wrong words’” (Gaskell 226). Overall, working-class characters in Gaskell’s industrial novels tend to favour “orality and speech rather than textuality and writing” (Matus 32-33). This again serves as a vehicle for Gaskell’s industrial critique, this time aiming at the immense differences in education of social classes during the 19th century. Differences in

character language simultaneously serve as another form of differentiation and categorisation in terms of class.

Returning to the case of John Boucher and his family, the novel's storyline surrounding them reveals and constructs central ideals of self-understanding of the 19th-century working class. Residing in the same neighbourhood as the Higgins family, they face even harsher poverty than Nicholas and his daughters. The Bouchers highlight the ill consequences of a capital market economy in northern industrial cities of England. John Boucher's character is suppressed by his working and living conditions, the failure of the strike, and the lack of any viable option of improvement for his family. His resulting desperation even overwhelms to take him as far as threatening Nicholas as a fellow working-class member and part of the Union, saying: "I'll hate thee, and th' whole pack o' th' Union. Ay, an' chase yo' through heaven with my hatred (...) if yo're leading my astray i' this matter'" (Gaskell 154). Ultimately, this overwhelming desperation constructed in his character leads John Boucher to drown himself. Similar to the construction of Bessy's death as a liberation from her illness, death is again established as a viable option of escape from worries and suffering for these characters.

Six men walked in the middle of the road, three of them being policemen. They carried a door (...) on which lay some dead human creature; (...) 'He was a determined chap. He lay with his face downwards. He was sick enough o' living, choose what cause he had for it.' (...) Owing to the position in which he had been found lying, his face was swollen and discoloured; besides, his skin was stained by the water in the brook, which had been used for dyeing purposes. (...) Through all these disfigurements, Margaret recognised John Boucher. (Gaskell 294-295)

This scene of Boucher being retrieved from the creek adheres intense brutality to his choice of committing suicide, especially by the description of physical disfigurements from death and his previous suffering. The mentioned determination of his character is later justified by the fact that they "all made up one great army of personal enemies" (Gaskell 301) to him, whether the middle-class masters, the Union, or his eight suffering children. His suicide furthermore induces a great amount of follow-up actions by minor working-class characters. These actions in many aspects represent working-class culture and ideals – e.g., kindness, solidarity, and the urge of care – in a praising and admirable way (Dzelzainis 110). The minor characters take action of caring for the widowed Mrs. Boucher and her children and establish solidarity as a principle beyond close friendship or kinship. They rather justify their actions with the simple desire to help someone of the same social standing. For example, one "helpful neighbour (...) was evidently a stranger to the house" (Gaskell 297), yet she takes control of the scene and persuades other bystanders to take care of the children as well as they can. In front of her father, Margaret

later admires these visible working-class ideals amidst their dire living standards and exclaims: “‘There’s granite in all these northern people, papa, is there not?’” (Gaskell 308).

This comment on the working class additionally points out the central aspect attributed to Margaret as the novel’s protagonist. The very fact that Margaret is present amongst all three social classes and almost all their respective settings throughout the plot predestines her as the novel’s mediator across socio-cultural differences. The next and final chapter of this thesis will analyse how the novel constructs Margaret’s role of the mediator, and which function this role serves in *North and South*.

5. Margaret Hale as the Mediator between *North and South*

5.1 Hybridity, Mobility, Agency: Margaret’s Character Construction

The previous two chapters of this thesis have shown the outstanding differences of social classes and regional settings constructed in *North and South*. Margaret as the protagonist appears in close contact with all three analysed social classes and moves along many of the novel’s settings throughout its duration. Therefore, the academic state of research widely accepts her character as a mediator and a representative of social progress (Burroughs 18; Scholl 100). Her character construction as this mediator builds upon her spatial mobility, her will of social mobility and adaption, and her agency in situations crucial to the plot development. This chapter will analyse Margaret’s character construction and the function of her role in context of the 19th century and the novel’s, mostly middle-class, readership. Additionally, the way *North and South* functions as an ISA will be examined by relying on her character construction and the romance subplot.

Margaret’s spatial mobility, both willingly and involuntarily, creates the first aspect which supports the transitional and mediatory role of her character. She faces multiple dislocations from her familiar surroundings throughout the narration, the first being her move to London as a young girl to live with her relatives. A short analepsis in the first chapter evidently clarifies that this move was unwilling, as Margaret “did (...) remember the tears [she] shed with such wild passion of grief (...) in that first night” (Gaskell 8) at the Harley Street house. Following the return to Helstone as a young woman, she once again is dislocated as a result of her father’s decision to leave the Church of England and move to Milton. The scenes surrounding her father’s decision also represent the first instance where Margaret needs to mediate between other characters; in this case her parents. Again, Gaskell acknowledges the reluctance of Margaret to move with “[t]he one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, (...) reeling and rocking” (Gaskell 34). In Milton, where the majority of the

novel is set, Margaret continues to represent spatial mobility in her exploration of the city. Examples include her walks through the Crampton neighbourhood, where “she was (...) constantly falling in with [factory workers]” (Gaskell 71), her visits to both the working-class family Higgins and the middle-class home of Mr. Thornton, and the accompaniment of her brother Frederick to the train station at dusk. On the level of her character constellation, many of these scenes represent Margaret as being alone and having a will of mobility, which defies 19th-century gender ideals of women remaining in the private sphere (Steinbach *Class* 133). Resultingly, “Mrs. Shaw became bewildered and hysterical (...) after various discussions on propriety and impropriety” (Gaskell 410), especially when Margaret promptly decides to leave for Oxford after Mr. Bell’s death.

As the constructions of settings and social classes intersect so heavily, Margaret’s spatial mobility includes and reinforces her mobility across the novel’s social classes situated in specific settings. The repeated dislocation and will of mobility support the establishment of cultural hybridity in her character as “she exists between cultures: she does not belong to the North, but at the same time (...) is increasingly disconnected from the South” (Scholl 100). Although Margaret grieves about leaving Helstone behind, her revisit to the countryside (Gaskell 384-401) and her subsequent wish to return to Milton while being dragged onto her relative’s vacation in Cromer (Gaskell 412-418) represent her character’s understanding and slow acceptance of Milton as her new home, both spatially and culturally. The development in her character towards this understanding is also previously visible when Margaret defends her use of what Mrs. Hale condescendingly calls “factory slang” (Gaskell 237). Although Margaret proposes simple pragmatism as the reason for her alleged change in language, this defense already establishes her growing connection to her new hometown. She even admits to her cultural adaption to Milton, proposing she is “standing up for the progress of commerce” (Gaskell 330), in a later discussion with her father and Mr. Bell. With this attitude Margaret differs from her aristocratic relatives and does not avoid contact with lower classes. When she befriends the Higgins family she reacts “shocked but not repelled; rather attracted and interested” (Gaskell 73) to their living conditions and Bessy’s severe illness. She allows contact across classes against any prevailing prejudices and acknowledges differences and their implications on character’s lives. The inquisitiveness constructed in Margaret’s character, especially in her visits to the Higgins family, decisively challenges 19th-century ideals of both social status and femininity (Williams Elliot *The Female Visitor* 25).

The reason for her deliberate interest in other social classes, in contrast to her aristocratic relatives like Edith, are relics of her past life in rural Helstone and the influence of her father’s

past as a clergyman. Both Margaret and Mr. Hale directly address the hostility between the Milton working class and middle class in the first volume of the novel as they get acquainted with Mr. Thornton.

‘[O]n the very face of it, I see two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own; I never lived in a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down.’ (Gaskell 118)

Margaret’s observation highlights her past as the daughter of a rural clergyman and proposes the ideal of mutual respect across class lines and providing charity to the poor (William Elliot *The Female Visitor* 32-33). Her longing for a reconciliation between the classes in Milton and her embracing of cultural hybridity also rely on the failed construction of the Hale family as members of a particular class. While the wealth Margaret inherits from Mr. Bell clearly constructs her as a character of the upper middle class (Dzelzainis 114) by the novel’s end, earlier descriptions within the narration are much more divisive. Even though Margaret has aristocratic connections on her mother’s side she must “bear (...) makeshift poverty” (Gaskell 128) in the Milton home and Mrs. Thornton struggles to make sense of the Hale family in terms of class. She acknowledges that Mr. Hale “appears a worthy kind of man enough; (...) a clergyman first, and now a teacher. (...) And yet (...) not rich” (Gaskell 142). Mr. Hale and Margaret therefore both are constructed as apparently classless to justify their wish for peaceful reconciliation and support between the classes in Milton. Therefore, this construction as classless is based both on materialistic terms and their cultural hybridity.

Finally, Margaret’s outstanding agency – at least for the female protagonist of a 19th-century novel – allows for the possibility of her character serving as the mediator between other characters; a position she already fits well with her own social and spatial mobility. Throughout *North and South* this agency characterises Margaret as determined, stern, and responsible, both in terms of self-characterisation and by comments of the authorial narrator or other characters. In private settings, Margaret’s agency is mostly represented by her taking on paternal duties to make up for the inability of others. With both her parents unable of taking care of the move to Milton she serves as a proxy head of the household. Margaret takes on the mediatory role and steps in to tell Mrs. Hale about the move. In opposition to Mr. Hale, who cannot get himself to bear any bad news to his wife, the narrator describes Margaret to be “of different stuff. She could not bear the impending weight on her mind all the day long” (Gaskell 44). And although she resolutely deals with the instances of their move, the narrator comments that “her heart was aching all the time, with a heavy pressure that no sighs could lift off” (Gaskell 53) to point out

that she still struggles with these actions despite her determination. The omniscient narrator additionally highlights the necessity of Margaret's agency for the continuation of the plot: "Moreover, if she gave way, who was to act?" (Gaskell 53). Joan Chard proposes that Margaret represents a "victor over [the] circumstances" surrounding her (82) in these private matters. Margaret's decision to take on the burden of telling Nicholas about Bessy's death again supports this claim. She directly faces the distraught Nicholas as she "stood in the doorway, silent yet commanding" (Gaskell 220) to ensure Bessy's last wish of keeping him from excessive drinking. Here again she defies feminine ideals of being compliant, but rather takes on responsibility and shows sternness.

This sternness in character is even more visible in Margaret's agency in public scenes. Her intervention in public spaces, especially surrounding the strike-turned-riot in front of Mr. Thornton's mill clash with the 19th-century ideals of the separate spheres, as women, or female characters in literary texts, were expected to not intervene in such public scenes (Steinbach *Class* 133). "Yet intervene is exactly what Margaret does in *North and South*" (Williams Elliot *The Female Visitor* 31) once she "had lifted the great iron bar of the door with an imperious force (...) in face of that angry sea of men" (Gaskell 178). With this impulsive action, which she later calls her "natural instinct" and the "sanctity of [her] sex" (Gaskell 194), her character is presented as fearless and again interested in more than what is expected of her as a 19th-century woman. Margaret characterises herself similarly after the riot, when she accompanies Frederick to the train station and proclaims: "'I am getting very brave and very hard. It is a well-lighted road all the way home, if it should be dark. But I was out last week much later'" (Gaskell 262). Even in scenes where Margaret chooses not to intervene, her character still challenges 19th-century gender ideals by establishing an urge to participate in issues which draw her attention, like the discussion of the gentlemen at Mr. Thornton's dinner party. Instead of engaging in gossip like the other ladies at the dinner, she "caught the clue to the general conversation, grew interested and listened attentively" (Gaskell 162). It is later mentioned that she "even knew enough (...) to understand (...) some of the technical words employed by the eager mill-owners" (Gaskell 163). Margaret's intellectual agency therefore aligns with her active agency to construct her character as the perfect mediator between the cultural and class-based ideals of 19th-century England.

5.2 Reconciliation, Romance, Gender: The Novel as an ISA

The construction of both regional settings and social classes, their intersections and varying conflicts justify Gaskell's need for a character to mediate. However, considering the gendered

conventions of public and private spheres during the 19th century, the question arises why the novel puts forward its female protagonist, who repeatedly challenges these very ideals, to resolve the fictional, yet representative conflicts. *North and South*, just like Gaskell's previous industrial novel *Mary Barton*, addresses middle-class readers to evoke sympathy for the suffering working class and aims at achieving sociopolitical change (Dzelzainis 109). As Susie Steinbach additionally points out, any 19th-century literary text served the function of an institutional state apparatus, abbreviated as ISA, by its preoccupation with public and domestic topics, as they "not only reflected contemporary (...) debates but were an aspect of them: novels could challenge and even shape Victorian life" (*Arts* 223). Gaskell acknowledged this potential use of literature and its possible contribution to peaceful social progress (Henry 153), which is visible in Margaret's construction accordingly to the dominant ideology of the novel's readers, while also promoting progressive stances with Margaret defying this ideology to a certain extent. These middle-class readers endorsed the gendered spheres harsher than other classes (Steinbach *Class* 133). Therefore, although Margaret's mobility and agency clash with the contemporary gender ideals, as analysed in the previous subchapter, her character also adheres to some central aspects of them. Margaret's character still represents idealised femininity in some scenes, for example "[s]he looked as if she was not attending to the conversation, but solely busy with the tea-cups (...) with pretty, noiseless, daintiness" (Gaskell 79) at one time, but also decides to interact in social debates and shows earnest compassion with the working class of Milton. When Mr. Thornton argues his case for lowering wages the psycho-narration mentions that "Margaret's whole soul rouse up against him (...) – as if commerce were everything and humanity was nothing" (Gaskell 152-153), constructing Margaret as interested in these public matters she later even intervenes in. The juxtaposition of challenging yet representing ideals of 19th-century femininity continues with Margaret allowing emotional outbursts in moments alone, while maintaining her agency in situation she needs to act to ensure the plot continuation and the well-being of other characters. For example, following the hassle between herself, her exiled brother Frederick, and one of his old enemies at the train station on the evening Frederick leaves England, Margaret finds herself interrogated by an inspector.

'I was not there,' said Margaret (...) show[ing] no emotion, no fluttering fear, no anxiety, no desire to end the interview. (...) Margaret bowed her head as he [the inspector] went towards the door. Her lips were stiff and dry. (...) Then she went into the study, paused – tottered forward – paused again – swayed for an instant where she stood, and fell prone on the floor in a dead swoon. (Gaskell 273-275)

Margaret's steadiness and capability to not only withstand the interview but also lie to protect her brother oppose the assumed tenderness of young women in the novel's historical context. Only once the inspector leaves and Margaret is alone her character succumbs to the pressure and follows the trope of the fainting Victorian heroine (Matus 42), partially reinforcing prominent middle-class ideology. Indirectly, *North and South* also strengthens this ideology by inviting readers to reflect on the shame, both real and fictional, which falls upon women entering the public sphere (Harman 46). In Margaret's case, her bold actions, such as lying to the inspector or the intervention in the strike-turned-riot, construct this shame her character endures.

Besides Margaret's role as the mediator the novel's function as an ISA also is strengthened by its conflicting romance subplot, which shares many similarities with Jane Austen's romance in *Pride and Prejudice* (Clausson 3). With their courtship, their ultimate confession of love, and their participation in the novel's social plot, both Margaret and Mr. Thornton as middle-class representatives reproduce prominent ideology concerning gender and marriage. Nils Clausson stresses, that "strong as he is, Thornton (...) is weak in the one area in which Margaret (...) is strong: emotion and feeling" (9). Standing between Mr. Thornton and Nicholas she uses the stereotypically female traits of her character – i.e., emotionality, compassion, and a will to listen – to be successful in her mediation. And while Gaskell represented the 19th-century working class to induce social awareness, she anticipated criticism by many of her middle-class contemporaries (Kanda 48). Mr. Thornton's proposal and Margaret's acceptance therefore do not only represent their character's private reconciliation, but also create the image of the newly affluent middle-class, represented by their marriage, as successful and dominant in 19th-century England. In this function as an ISA of the uprising middle class, *North and South* intertwines all aspects I covered in this thesis with Mr. Thornton asking "Do you know these roses?" (...) drawing out his pocket-book, in which he treasured up some dead flowers" (Gaskell 436), more specifically roses from Helstone.

6. Conclusion

Taking on Susie Steinbach's rightful claim that 19th-century England was deeply divided by the concept of class and respective ideologies (*Class* 124), this thesis aimed at showcasing the representative constructions of social classes and their conflicts in Gaskell's second industrial novel. *North and South* constructs this intense split of society in its fictional settings and the class-specific actions and ideals of characters. Furthermore, the novel establishes its protagonist Margaret Hale as a mediator between the narrated conflicts.

The analysed settings of the novel serve as a prerequisite for the cultural conflict between classes, as Helstone and Milton are constructed as opposites, both in terms of space and time. While the rural village of Helstone alludes to romantic ideals of the past centuries, Milton represents the fast-paced progress of the Industrial Revolution and capitalism spreading throughout 19th-century England. Other remote settings within Gaskell's novel, for example London or Corfu, create the possibilities for some characters to flee from this regional conflict.

Settings and attitudes of regional pride are overall closely intertwined with the constructions of social classes in *North and South*. The fictional upper class, encompassing the Shaw and Lennox families, is mostly situated within the mentioned remote settings and holds a desperate grip onto their long-established power and social exclusiveness. With their actions, upper-class characters increasingly position themselves as cut-off from the rest of the country. In contrast, the industrial working and middle classes of Milton, despite their conflict, ultimately achieve a reconciliation represented in the slowly advancing friendship between Mr. Thornton and Nicholas. This acquaintance relies on the character's class-specific ideals and Margaret's intervention as a mediator. Nonetheless, the novel constructs both classes as enemies in their claim of power, especially within the first half of the plot. While working-class characters face increasing exploitation and misery, as seen in the cases of Bessy Higgins and John Boucher, the middle-class characters pride themselves in their economic success and immense social power.

The constructed hostility between these two classes within the setting of Milton attracts the attention of Margaret who proposes peaceful and reasonable reconciliation. She ultimately succeeds, resulting from her character construction as socially and spatially mobile and willingness to act. With her mobility, cultural hybridity, and agency she effectively challenges prominent ideals of 19th-century femininity. Although the construction of Margaret challenges these gender ideals to achieve the aim of the industrial novel, the romance subplot at the same time reinforces prominent middle-class ideology. Margaret represents some ideal traits of femininity, for example compassion and emotionality, which justify her successful intervention as a mediator between classes. Together with the subplot following Mr. Thornton's courtship for her, her role as the mediator strengthens the novel's function as an ISA in favour of 19th-century middle-class ideology.

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Der Verfasser hat zum Abschluss seines Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema "Constructions of Class in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*" vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen gut erfüllt. Die sehr übersichtlich gegliederte Arbeit besteht aus einer Einleitung, einem Theorie- und Methodenkapitel, drei Interpretationskapiteln und einer Zusammenfassung.

Die **Einleitung** führt gut in den Gegenstand und das Erkenntnisinteresse der Arbeit ein. Der Verfasser formuliert seine zentrale These und gibt seiner Arbeit damit eine klare Argumentationslinie. In vorbildlicher Weise wird hier die formale Textanalyse mit der Frage nach deren ideologischen Implikationen verknüpft: "I propose that Gaskell's *North and South* constructs the intense split between social classes of 19th-century England by relying on attitudes of regional pride and geographic disparities of settings, the representation of class-based living experiences by characters, and the intense use of Margaret Hale as a mediator between conflicts based on region and class" (1). Die vielen Kurzzusammenfassungen und Vorausweisungen sichern der Arbeit einen sehr guten Zusammenhalt.

Im mit zwei Seiten sehr kurz geratenen **zweiten Kapitel** untermauert der Verfasser sein Vorhaben unter Bezugnahme auf marxistische und strukturalistische Theorien, wobei er vor allem das Lehrbuch von Peter Barry und Nachschlagewerke (Cuddon, Murfin/Ray), aber auch Steinbachs historischen Überblick zum 19. Jahrhundert heranzieht, um zentrale Begriffe und Konzepte zu bestimmen. Im ersten Unterkapitel setzt er sich mit marxistischen/kulturmaterialistischen Definitionen von *class* und *ideology* auseinander, um den Roman als ISA (*ideological state apparatus*) im Sinne Louis Althusser's zu charakterisieren, der insbesondere die eingeschriebenen bürgerlichen Leser in die neuen Klassenstrukturen des 19. Jahrhunderts einübt (z.B. S. 1, 28, 32). Im zweiten Unterkapitel, das sich laut Überschrift den Genrekonventionen des Industrieromans zuwendet, beschreibt der Verfasser die thematischen Merkmale dieser Gattung, auch in Abgrenzung zum *condition of England novel* oder *social problem novel*, geht aber nicht auf die formalen Besonderheiten ein, die die Darstellung der gewählten Methode bereits an dieser Stelle ermöglicht hätten. Die Definitionen einiger Fachtermini, die im weiteren Verlauf der Analyse dienen, fehlen hier ganz (*romance*, *silver fork novel*). Dabei hätte insbesondere die Anwendung des Konzepts der *hybridity* (S. 29), das der Verfasser den *Postcolonial Studies* entlehnt, im Kontext des Romans näher erläutert werden müssen.

Die große Stärke der Arbeit liegt in ihrer sehr ausführlichen Analyse und Interpretation des Romans in den Kapiteln drei bis fünf. Der Titelmetapher des Romans folgend,

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gliedert der Verfasser seine Untersuchung in drei eng miteinander verbundene Unterkapitel. Im **dritten Kapitel** diskutiert er die Raum- und Zeitkonstruktionen des Romans, die das fiktionale Milton im industriellen Norden mit dem ländlichen Helstone im Süden kontrastieren. Wie der Verfasser im **vierten Kapitel** zeigt, finden sich diese Kontraste ebenso auf der Figurenebene und insbesondere in der Figur der Margaret Hale, deren Rolle als Vermittlerin Geschlechterstereotypen unterwandert und zugleich bestätigt (**fünftes Kapitel**). Der korrekte und präzise Gebrauch der narratologischen und marxistischen Terminologie erlaubt es dem Verfasser, die vielschichtige Romanästhetik in ihren Funktionen für die Darstellung von sozialen Klassen im Industriekapitalismus des 19. Jahrhunderts zu untersuchen. Die einzige Schwäche liegt in der z.T. fehlerhaften Verortung der Analysekatoren im Text (z.B. S. 2, 3, 6, 13). Der **Schluss** fasst noch einmal gut die Ergebnisse der Arbeit zusammen.

Die **Bibliographie** ist mit zweieinhalb Seiten sehr umfangreich und entspricht, wie die sauber gestaltete Arbeit selbst, den Vorgaben des *MLA Stylesheet*. Das Englisch des Verfassers ist überwiegend flüssig und bedient sich eines akademischen Registers. Zuweilen unterlaufen dem Verfasser Grammatikfehler, die den Gebrauch von bestimmten Artikeln und Präpositionen betreffen, das Verständnis und die Lesbarkeit der Arbeit aber nicht beeinträchtigen. Auch die wenigen Unebenheiten auf der Stilebene (falsche Begriffe wie *neglection* oder *reluctancy*, häufige Wiederholungen von *conceptualisation* oder *function*) beeinträchtigen den guten Gesamteindruck der Arbeit nicht. Einzig die unkritische Übernahme des Begriffs *progress* aus dem Roman und der Sekundärliteratur (z.B. S. 1, 9, 13, 21, 28, 34) fällt störend auf.

Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,7 (gut)** bewertet.

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Bachelor Thesis
Transformation in David Malouf's Australian Novel
***Remembering Babylon* (1993)**

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1 Introduction

In 1788, the First Fleet with British settlers arrived at Botany Bay in Australia, following James Cook's claim of the continent on behalf of the British Crown in 1770 (Brittan 1159). Declaring the continent *terra nullius*¹, meaning a land without owners (Banner 95), over 40,000 years of Aboriginal history were invalidated (Dutta 157). The absence of a negotiated treaty on land rights for First Nations peoples² aggravated their exploitation in Australia compared to the United States or Canada (154). Only in 1992, as a consequence of the High Courts' decision in the *Mabo* case, the doctrine of *terra nullius* was refuted, acknowledging First Nations peoples as rightful landowners for the first time (Hughes-d'Aeth 292). In 1993, a year after the *Mabo* trial, David Malouf's novel *Remembering Babylon* was published. This work is aptly preoccupied with the impact of colonisation on diverse groups, such as British settlers and First Australians, and will serve as the foundation for this bachelor thesis.

I selected the novel due to its complexity, rich employment of tropes and elaborate character constellations. Simultaneously drawing loose inspiration from Australian history, the novel can be situated in the genre of the revisionist historical novel. According to Ansgar Nünning, who suggests five rubrics for the historical novel, this type is characterised by a reinterpretation of historical events, providing multiple alternative perspectives and challenging “hegemonic historiographic discourses and the generic conventions of the realist historical novel” (362). These postmodern elements in particular shall be explored in my work to show how the novel questions the objectivity of history.

Set in a mid-19th-century Australian settlement, *Remembering Babylon* centres on Gemmy Fairley, a Scottish boy who lived among First Australians as a castaway. His return to a Queensland village sixteen years later disrupts the established order, challenging both interpersonal dynamics among settlers and their individual self-perceptions. In general, the novel has acquired considerable attention from literary critics since its publication three decades ago and continues to be of concern today, as evidenced by my bibliography spanning works from the 1990s to recent years. Many of these texts focus on themes such as nature,

¹ Both *terra nullius* and *Mabo* are received historical concepts and will therefore be written in italics.

² In the following, I will adhere to the Australian government style manual on inclusive language, employing the terms “Aboriginal” as an adjective and “First Nations peoples” or “First Australians” to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Firstly, the latter two terms are favoured because they were “generated by [I]ndigenous peoples themselves” (Ashcroft et al. 3). Secondly, the word “First” emphasises their historical occupation of Australia preceding anyone else, while “Nations” implies the diversity within this collective (“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”). I acknowledge that these terms are still broad yet given that Malouf's novel does not specify the local community or language group, a more specific term cannot be used. It is essential to recognise that First Nations peoples are not a homogenous group and that speaking about one Aboriginal language, tribe, or nation is discriminatory, as it neglects their diversity.

settler or Aboriginal identity, the significance of naming, the binary of the colonisers and the colonised, as well as myths like the Wild Man or the Wild Child.³

David Malouf, one of Australia's most celebrated writers, has received numerous awards, including the *Los Angeles Times* Award for Fiction (Bliss 726) and the Australia Council Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature (Hawkes and Piccini 278). The enduring presence of his works in high schools and universities confirms Malouf's position within the Australian literary canon (278).

Departing from existing research, my bachelor thesis will explore those aesthetic elements of the literary text that highlight character development, struggles with belonging, boundaries or limitations, and postmodern concerns. As the title suggests, the analysis shall deal with transformation on various levels, namely narratological, individual and social transformation. Contrary to the focus on a universal 'settler identity' or 'Aboriginal identity', which both simply do not exist, my analysis centres on individual experiences of characters using narratological categories such as the narrative situation, character constellation and metaphors, which have yet to undergo in-depth analysis with regard to the novel.

This thesis employs a postcolonial and gender studies approach. The former enables the analysis of metaphors and establishes the meaning of the Other and the hybrid, while the latter serves the analysis of the settlement's social structure. For that, the term of patriarchy will be used. Additionally, I will provide a definition of transformation and establish the categories I will employ, a dimension lacking in existent research. There is no consensus on character transformations, and I disagree with literary critics like Bill Ashcroft (59) and Sheila Whittick (97) who claim that almost everyone's development was a failure. Instead, I offer a deviating approach: Rather than exploring the dichotomy of successful and failed transformations, my focus will be directed towards examining facets of the transformation processes.

I argue that David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* employs complex character constructions and developments, recurring metaphors, and an elaborate narrative situation to represent the complexities of belonging and transformation in the context of a mid-19th-century settlement in Australia. Gemmy Fairley thereby acts as a catalyst, enhancing the settlers' comprehension of the symbiotic relation between the land and its Aboriginal inhabitants. The settlement, in turn, becomes an example of British colonial ideology, its

³ The concept of the Wild Man refers to the idea of a "degenerate being," who is isolated from society and lacks human capabilities such as speech and rationality, characterised by a solitary existence in the wilderness (Daly 9). Conversely, the trope of the Wild Child, also known as the Lost Child, encompasses narratives about a white child departing from their home and getting lost in the alien landscape. Upon eventual discovery, the child has irreversibly adapted to the wilderness, being unable to reintegrate into Western society (Scheckter 62). Both figures embody the fears of Western societies regarding the unknown Other and are prevalent tropes in white Australian literature (62).

power dynamics and the patriarchal structures. This results in a constant struggle for power, which is emphasised by metaphors like the fence, the stone, and the pages documenting Gemmy's life story, which simultaneously indicate the limitations of the settlers' development. Finally, the narrative situation presents the intricate power dynamics within the settlement.

The thesis will commence with a presentation of the postcolonial and gender studies approach in chapter two, accompanied by the definition of key concepts already mentioned above. In chapter three, I will analyse the narrative situation first, and the character development and power dynamics of selected characters later. This shall help to demonstrate Gemmy's function as catalyst for the transformations experienced by individual characters. Subsequently, the investigation of metaphors in chapter four will highlight Gemmy's construction as Other, but more importantly it will show the failure of the settlers to acknowledge him as an equal human being and to see his potential in guiding them to connect with the land they inhabit. This eventually leads to Gemmy abandoning the settlement and to the novel concluding open-ended, in which the colonial order remains intact and Gemmy's whereabouts unclear.

2 Methodological and Theoretical Framework

I will employ concepts and methods from postcolonial studies, which emerged as a critical mode of inquiry in the 1990s (Barry 185). According to Peter Barry, postcolonial criticism is characterised by its examination of the Western portrayal of the non-European as exotic Other (187). This establishes the binary separation of the coloniser and the colonised, presenting the latter as the Other as opposed to the Western self, primarily through discourses of primitivism and cannibalism (Ashcroft et al. 186). Ascribing the coloniser supremacy, this process creates a power imbalance that oppresses the colonised (186). In *Remembering Babylon*, both First Australians and Gemmy are subject to Othering, a process referring to "the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group" (188). Gemmy's British origin complicates his clear categorisation as Other, as the notion of hybridity will later demonstrate. Additionally, the Othering of First Australians is only subtly conveyed through the settlers' behaviour and thoughts, because direct interactions between both groups are absent. Hence, Gemmy paradoxically becomes a representative figure for the Aboriginal perspective within the narrative.

Moreover, postcolonial critics are concerned with cross-cultural interactions, identity as "doubled, or hybrid, or unstable," and the role of language, which exposes colonial structures

in literature (Barry 188-9). In relation to the novel, the concepts of Otherness and hybridity are relevant in analysing the character construction of Gemmy, while language and cultural encounters highlight the settlers' displacement in 19th-century Australia.

The term hybridity, initially a biological concept referring to the offspring "of cross-breeding [...] from mixed parentage" (Döring 34), is recontextualised in postcolonial discourse. In this context, it "refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization," and has become associated with Homi K. Bhabha, who calls this contact space a 'Third Space' (Ashcroft et al. 135-6). As both Other and hybrid, Gemmy challenges the binary colonial system, provoking varied reactions from the settlers. The liminal space also questions the possibility of fixed cultural boundaries (Middeke et al. 309), an aspect that will be further explored in chapter four, examining how Gemmy's entrance into the settlement destabilises the boundary between civilisation and wilderness, as perceived by the British settlers.

Emerging as a response to the second wave of the Women's movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, gender studies examines "hierarchical gender structures that oppress[...] women" (209). Initially, this field focused solely on women, as reflected in the term Women's Studies or Feminist Criticism. However, it subsequently broadened to explore gender relations and the role of gender in society (209). Gender, in contrast to biological sex, is a social construct that establishes a set of social expectations for individuals and significantly influences power dynamics (209). When analysing *Remembering Babylon*, it should be noted that the settlers of 19th-century Australia did not differentiate between gender and sex, thus perceiving both as natural and interchangeable concepts.

A central concept to analyse the power structures governing the gender relations in the novel is that of patriarchy. I will use the definition of Sylvia Walby who claims that patriarchy is "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (214). Such a social framework, characteristic of 19th-century Britain and its colonies, is prevalent in the settlement of the novel. The power imbalance of patriarchy results in women lacking autonomy and being marginalised in decision-making processes. For that reason, the character developments of Ellen and Janet McIvor require a distinct evaluation compared to their male counterparts Jock McIvor and Lachlan Beattie. In this context, the concept of the Other extends to women, who, under the dominion of men, are relegated to a subordinate status based on gender. This aspect reveals the interconnectedness of cultural studies, as both postcolonial and gender studies focus on issues related to power, language, and the representation of individuals or groups as inferior.

Lastly, I will briefly define the concept of literary transformation and explain the different levels I will employ in my thesis. Kai Mikkonen argues that literary metamorphosis is a motif that usually affects a subject, often a linguistic or human being, that is, “in the metamorphic process, juxtaposed or interlinked with something that is not only [Other] but often non[-]linguistic as well” (309). This dynamic can be applied to the novel, where the settlers are confronted with Gemmy who catalyses their transformation processes. These transformations, in turn, challenge “the boundaries between the subject and its [O]ther or between language and non[-]language” (309). As a result, Gemmy, as the Other and at times non-linguistic entity due to his limited English proficiency, questions the boundaries of the characters.

In the following analysis, I will distinguish between three types of transformation that allow for a deeper understanding of character developments, the narrative situation, and the use of metaphors. These include narratological, individual, and social transformations. Narratological transformation refers to changes on the meta-level of the narrative, such as shifts in the narrative situation or character constructions. Individual transformation examines altered perceptions and internal, often moral conflicts of characters. Finally, the effects of these individual developments on the settler community, particularly on its power dynamics, will be analysed in the category of social transformation.

Guided by an analytical framework of terminologies established by Vera and Ansgar Nünning, derived from structuralist literary scholars, this thesis will be centred on a three-step approach, examining the language, content and conceptual level of the novel. This methodology facilitates a structured exploration of thematic and formal elements of the novel that helps revealing the function of these aesthetic components within the narrative. Consequently, my thesis is based on the idea of a “semanticisation of literary forms,” postulating that form constructs meaning (Nünning and Nünning 26).

3 Character Construction of Gemmy Fairley as a Catalyst for Transformation

The novel’s protagonist Gemmy Fairley has been analysed through various analytical concepts of postcolonial criticism. Whether perceived as the lost child by Clare Archer-Lean (2), the “[c]hild of the wilderness breaking into [...] civilisation” as posited by Ashcroft (51) or as a scapegoat related to devilish spirits in Veronica Brady’s interpretation (97), each concept situates Gemmy within the framework of Australian myths. However, they lack some important dimensions: the complexity of Gemmy’s individuality, his impact on the settlers,

and the function of recurring postmodern elements within the novel. Gemmy's character transcends the limitations of conventional archetypes, resisting confinement to a singular symbolic role.

To enhance the comprehension of Gemmy's influence on the other characters and to underscore his complex character construction, I will briefly contextualise him within postcolonial criticism.⁴ Gemmy is situated within the dual framework of the Other and the hybrid, conjoined here as the hybrid Other. Initially perceived by Lachlan as a First Australian, Gemmy is cast as "a black" emerging "out of a world over there, beyond the no-man's-land of the swamp, that was the abode of everything savage and fearsome" (Malouf 2). This first encounter immediately positions Gemmy as the Other, a threat to the newly formed settlement and community. Yet, the binary colonial system established by the settlers is disturbed as Gemmy articulates English words, revealing that he is British. Later described as a "white black man" (63), Gemmy embodies characteristics of both the white settlers and the tribe he had been living with for the past 16 years. In the settlers' perception, Gemmy "had started out white" (36) but had "gone native," which is a common motif in postcolonial literature (Huggan 103). His hybrid nature challenges Eurocentric conceptions of white supremacy and reminds the settler community of its fragility in a foreign land (Alber 160). As a consequence, the legitimisation for colonialism is destabilised, prompting a need among the settlers to restore the colonial order by attempting to civilise Gemmy: "It was a duty they owed to what they were, or claimed to be, to bring him back, if it was feasible, to being a white man" (Malouf 35). In the end, the settlers' attempts fail due to their fear and desire to dominate both Gemmy and First Nations peoples. In addition, Gemmy experiences a retrogressive individual transformation which culminates in his disappearance from the settlement. Gemmy's sense of discontent and illness intensify, as Gemmy attempts to reclaim his former Western identity. The gradual return of his knowledge about the English language adds to this feeling. As a result, Gemmy believes that his return to Western society is accompanied by a displacement from the Aboriginal one. This represents a paradox, as his assimilation and reintegration into British society had essentially been the settlers' aim. Despite outwardly trying to conform to the settlers' norms in conduct and appearance, Gemmy renounces the knowledge acquired from First Australians. Consequently, his connection to the land dissolves and he disregards the habits he had adopted from First Australians, experiencing disorientation and unbelonging similar to that of the settlers.

⁴ Fig. 1-6 in the appendix offer a graphic representation of the character constellations and transformations. The illustration of the settlement is simplified and only depicts those characters and developments relevant to this work.

Regardless of this application of the postcolonial concepts of hybridity and Otherness to analyse Gemmy's character, this section primarily focuses on demonstrating that Gemmy's presence in the settlement serves as a catalyst for the transformation and growth of other characters, following Kathleen Doty's and Risto Hiltunen's proposition (104). Subsequently, I shall commence with the narratological transformation within the category of the narrative situation, which will highlight the narrative's complexity caused by its multi-perspective storytelling mixed with postmodern elements.

3.1 Functions of the Narrative Situation

To identify the narrative situation of the novel, I will follow the three main narrative situations defined by Franz K. Stanzel, which are the authorial, figural and first-person narrative situation (Nünning and Nünning 111). Based on this categorisation, Malouf's novel employs a figural narrative situation wherein the narrator recedes into the background and adopts the perspective of a character, called the reflector figure. This internal perspective offers a "viewing frame," through which events are narrated as experienced and viewed by the reflector figure (Fludernik qtd. in Nünning and Nünning 114). The novel's narrative complexity arises from its open perspective structure, resulting in a decentralised narrative and the absence of a fixed reflector figure. Instead, multiple figures seamlessly interplay and shift dynamically, complicating the identification of the current reflector figure guiding the narrating process. While Gemmy, Lachlan, and Janet serve as primary focal points, the novel incorporates perspectives from other characters such as Mr Frazer, George Abbott, Jock and Ellen McIvor.

This narrative approach corresponds to the characteristics of the revisionist historical novel. Drawing on postmodern techniques listed by Linda Hutcheon (21, 30) and Nünning (362), the literary text uses fragmentation, ambiguity, and multiple internal focalisations. The constant alternation of the reflector figure results in a plot told in fragments, never adhering to a singular version of storytelling but rather presenting the content in disjointed segments that articulate diverse settlers' perspectives. Therefore, the narration becomes unreliable and creates a sense of disorientation, preventing a linear and clear understanding of events. Simultaneously, resisting to present a single, authoritative perspective illustrates a high level of subjectivity, another concern of the revisionist historical novel (362). In accordance with Hutcheon's insight, "[t]he perceiving subject is no longer assumed to [be] a coherent, meaning-generating entity" but instead narrators become "disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate" (11). Thereby, objectivity and the assumption

that only one perspective on colonial history exists, namely, the perspective of the white, male British coloniser, are questioned.

The non-linear representation of time further contributes to the novel's ambiguity. Although predominantly told chronologically, the narrative is repeatedly interrupted by flashbacks, repetitive narration, ellipses, and foreshadowing. For instance, the novel's climax (chapter 9, see *Fig. 4*) featuring the First Australians' visit to Gemmy is initially described from Andy McKillop's perspective, a settler with an antipathy against Gemmy. Andy lies about the Aboriginal visitors giving Gemmy a stone, convincing the other settlers of the threat Gemmy allegedly poses to the settlement. Three chapters later, Gemmy's perspective offers a contrasting account, in which he explains his visitors' intention to reconnect him with the land and "to reclaim him" (Malouf 108). The order of narrating represents how the settlers' perceptions are predominantly influenced by Andy McKillop and disregard Gemmy's version, which results in their attempt to drown Gemmy. Additionally, foreshadowing creates the illusion of an omniscient narrator with knowledge surpassing that of the reflector figure. However, this technique is used to generate suspense and misdirect the reader, setting them up to expect events that would contradict Australian colonial history.

On a meta-level, the novel's narratological elements transform from the beginning to the end. I will first concentrate on the beginning of the novel, which establishes a pattern of adopting specific reflector figure perspectives. Then, I will focus on shifts in quantity, type, and variety of reflector figures. The narrative commences twofold, describing Gemmy's entrance into two distinct communities. The first chapter describes his arrival at the settler community, where he is first sighted by Lachlan and his cousins Janet and Meg. Here, the reflector figure assumes Lachlan's perspective, symbolic of his assertion of white male superiority as he exercises power over Gemmy with a stick, used as a weapon. The focus shifts to Gemmy as a reflector figure only after an array of characters is introduced and focalised. Thereby, the Other is excluded and described only through the viewpoints of others, providing explicit figural commentaries. This sets the tone for the novel and shapes the reader's first impression of Gemmy. In the second chapter, this is juxtaposed with Gemmy's arrival at the Aboriginal community sixteen years earlier. Here, it is Gemmy's perspective that dominates, in turn silencing First Australians and focusing on his feeling of disorientation and alienation due to communication barriers and unfamiliar surroundings. Gemmy tells of his life among the Aboriginal tribe, where he also remains an outsider, and expresses his thoughts as he crosses the boundary fence towards the settler community.

The arrival scenes in both communities are identical: Gemmy is perceived as an animal, a “wounded waterbird, a brolga” by Lachlan, and a “sea-creature” by First Australians (Malouf 2, 20). In both instances, he is dehumanised, faces prejudices and challenges of assimilation. Moreover, Gemmy’s situation remains the same: estranged from his home, constrained by limited speech, and treated as an outsider by the community. This narrative parallel emphasises the similar response from both communities to Gemmy, marked by scepticism and fear of the Other. In each arrival scene, a white male authority figure, embodying white supremacy, becomes the reflector figure. In the first chapter, Lachlan, the only boy among the three children, assumes this role, whereas in the second chapter, it shifts to Gemmy. This pattern alludes to the colonial power structure, while offering alternative perspectives of colonial history, provided ironically through the eyes of a 12-year-old child and a British castaway.

The extension and subsequent reduction in the number of reflector figures marks another important transformation within the novel’s narrative situation. As the story progresses, a growing number of reflector figures is introduced, adding complexity and character entanglement. Each reflector figure is presented with a unique backstory, explaining their reasons for migrating to Australia and their social position in the settlement. The multi-strand plot causes confusion and disunity, diverting attention from Gemmy’s arrival, the colonial mission of the settlement and the exploitation of Australia. Instead, the narrative focuses on the mundane experiences of ordinary and marginalised individuals, a common feature of revisionist historical novels (Nünning 362), and invites the reader to overlook the atrocities committed by British colonisers. Furthermore, the detailed introduction of each reflector figure exposes their flaws. Lachlan is self-centred and desires dominance; Andy lies to enhance his reputation within the settlement; George Abbot, the schoolmaster, is selfish and acts for his personal interests only; Jock is depressed and bitter; Ellen denies the existence of First Australians. The pattern is consistent across all characters, preventing the reader from fully identifying with any of them, thereby intensifying the dissatisfaction inherent in the reading experience and creating hope for change in one or multiple characters. The individual developments that fuel this hope will be discussed later in this chapter.

Most reflector figures eventually accept Gemmy’s presence, with some, like the McIvor family and Mr Frazer, developing genuine affection for him. This shift suggests that these characters might transcend Western values of supremacy, power, and greed, accordingly hinting at a possible reconciliation between First Nations peoples and British settlers. However, settlers like Andy McKillop, who constitute a minority among the reflector figures

but a majority in the settlement, react aggressively towards Gemmy, driven by anger, fear, distrust, and a strong sense of superiority. Such a reaction is also evident in the collective narrative voice that the narrator occasionally adopts: “It was the mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness that made Gemmy Fairley so disturbing to them, since at any moment he could show either one face or the other” (Malouf 39). This collective voice implies that those sympathetic towards Gemmy are exceptions and highlights the predominantly aggressive stance towards Gemmy and First Australians. Employing a dual narrative approach, the narrative becomes both ambiguous and contradictory. Although the novel focuses on settlers accepting Gemmy, the narrator constantly reminds the reader about settlers who demand his departure, a theme that persists until Gemmy eventually leaves the settlement.

Towards the novel’s end, the number of reflector figures shrinks, narrowing down to just Janet and Lachlan in the final chapter. The circumstances of other settlers and Gemmy remain unclear and ambiguous (see *Fig. 6*). Despite some settlers experiencing individual transformations, the novel does not culminate in Gemmy’s integration into the settlement, nor does it depict a reconciliation between settlers and First Australians. Instead, colonial history remains unaltered: First Australians continue to suffer exploitation, and their presence in Australia is still denied, thereby maintaining the myth of *terra nullius*.

In conclusion, the novel presents alternative historical perspectives by employing multiple internal focalisations. It draws upon historical records, like those of Gemmy Morril, blending them with fictional elements to challenge conventional history. For that reason, the novel illustrates “the point of view of those all too long ignored by traditional historiography” (Nünning 362). Yet, the perspectives in the novel still emanate from the standpoint of white settlers, continuing the practice of overlooking and marginalising First Nations peoples in both historical and fictional narratives (Molloy 128).

3.2 Character Development and Power Dynamics

This section shall focus on social and individual transformations within the novel, examining character dynamics and shifting power relations in the settlement. The novel gradually reveals character relations and settlement structures, with each chapter contributing insights into the characters’ consciousnesses. This progressive revelation requires multiple readings for full comprehension of the novel, underscoring its sophisticated nature. Character relations and conceptions significantly begin to shift with Gemmy’s entrance into the settlement, labelling him as a catalyst for transformation (see *Fig. 2-5*). To gain an overview of the settlement

structures, a systematic categorisation of the settlers proves insightful. The first categorisation is based on narratological principles, differentiating the settlers according to their character conception as either a type or an individual (Nünning and Nünning 95). Subsequently, the settlers will be classified by their stance towards First Nations peoples and their reactions to Gemmy. These classifications ultimately help to identify key characters central to this section's analysis and establish a framework for understanding character constellations.

In the first analytical category, the characters are grouped according to their complexity and personal traits. The first group consists of static, one-dimensional characters, exemplified by settlers like Ned Corcoran and Andy McKillop (see blue characters in *Fig. 2*). These characters, resistant to change and unwilling to cooperate with First Australians, strongly adhere to the preservation of the colonial order and embody the character type. This type serves as a representative for the resilient settler, determined to maintain power and supremacy as a coloniser. The second group features developing, multi-dimensional characters, including Jock, Ellen and Janet McIvor, Lachlan Beattie and Mr Frazer (see yellow characters in *Fig. 2*). They exhibit a variety of characteristics, illustrating their uniqueness and, in some cases, an openness to reflection and change under the influence of Gemmy. Notwithstanding these differences, the characters still operate within the colonial structures of the settlement, and the male figures among them continue to seek power and dominance. In addition, the extent of complexity and individual development of these characters of the second group varies, as I will demonstrate when exploring them in depth.

The second analytical category divides into three groups, based on the settlers' mindsets. The first and second group are introduced in the novel (Malouf 56), while the third is an addition by Jan Alber (167). The groups are:

- 1) Settlers demanding the extinction of First Australians
- 2) Settlers advocating for the enslavement of First Australians
- 3) Settlers refraining from enforcing their beliefs on Australia and its Aboriginal population

Each group indicates different levels of aggression and oppression towards First Australians, further partitioning the settlement community. The third group, mainly composed of the multi-dimensional characters listed above, represents the minority within the settlement that shows acceptance towards a coexistence of First Australians. Their perspectives dominate the novel, as these characters are the main reflector figures. Hence, Alber suggests that the novel aims at "transcend[ing] colonialist thinking" (167). I only partially agree with Alber's claim because most multi-dimensional characters, particularly Ellen and Lachlan, still express

internalised colonialist attitudes despite appearing progressive. Thus, the potential of these characters and the validity of this third group's formation require scrutiny. This task will be part of the following section, which focuses on character transformations.

3.2.1 Character Development of First-Generation Settlers

The analysis of character transformations commences with Jock and Ellen McIvor, the married couple belonging to the first generation of settlers who agree to shelter Gemmy. Jock, more out of his family's insistence than personal conviction, reluctantly admits Gemmy into his hut. Even after five months, he struggles to accept Gemmy's presence, and maintains a deliberate distance (Malouf 64). When faced with scepticism and discomfort from neighbours regarding Gemmy's presence, Jock reassures them of his harmlessness, in spite of having his own doubts. For Jock, Gemmy poses no physical threat to the settlement, yet he continues to feel uneasy in his presence (64). This behaviour and internal conflict demonstrate Jock's equal engagement in Othering Gemmy and highlight a tension between social expectations and a developing empathy towards Gemmy. Initially partly agreeing with his neighbours' consensus, Jock becomes a mediator, trying to reconcile Gemmy and the settlers to pacify his own inner conflict. His position within the settlement, coupled with prejudices rooted in colonial ideology that views First Australians as primitive, prevents him from approaching Gemmy. Moreover, Gemmy's behaviour and appearance, but especially his diminished proficiency in the English language, obscure the fact that, biologically, he is not a First Australian. Jock's difficulty in welcoming even a former compatriot highlights the broader challenges settlers face in accepting First Nations peoples, questioning the possibility of reconciliation.

The concept of community plays an important role in the settlement, which is emphasised by the settlers' regular gatherings and the value of mateship. Struggling with an alienation from the land, the settlers form strong relationships with each other to ease their sense of unbelonging. They replace their lack of connection to the land with interpersonal bonds. Mateship is often claimed "to be a defining characteristic of what it means to be Australian," and is particularly emblematic of the "Australian bushman" (Page 193). Moreover, it is a male-oriented concept, suggesting brotherhood and solidarity among male settlers but excluding women (194-5), alluding to the patriarchal structure of the settlement. The essence of Jock's individual transformation lies in his realisation of the limitations of mateship, leading him to abandon his mediating position to openly support Gemmy. This shift in awareness begins when Gemmy is accused of conspiring against the settlers. Departing from

his previous behaviour, Jock vehemently defends Gemmy, marking a significant internal shift and increasingly distancing himself from his neighbours. His previous hesitation, justified by a “fear of standing alone” (Malouf 97), had prevented him from supporting Gemmy. But, confronted with his neighbours’ unreasonable accusations, Jock reevaluates his own perspective and recognises the absurdity of their claims. This transformation is reinforced when other settlers abduct Gemmy. Overcoming his former reservations, Jock not only intervenes to rescue Gemmy but also allows Gemmy’s physical contact, finding comfort in their closeness (115). Consequently, this moment leads Jock to realise his “essential likeness” with Gemmy (Laigle 87), marking a transition from depending on communal validation to seeking personal integrity and loyalty. Jock’s defiance of peer pressure in the isolated settlement is exceptional and courageous, as concluded by Sriparna Dutta (157). His own transformation disrupts established community dynamics, particularly considering his former status as a respected authority figure and confidant among the settlers (Malouf 66). A clear indication of this change in status is Gemmy’s relocation to Mrs Hutchence’s house without consulting Jock, undermining his authority. Signifying a change both for Jock individually and within the social structures of the settlement, this event emphasises the instability of social roles and community cohesion.

As a result of his self-discovery and the changing dynamics with his neighbours, Jock’s relationship with Ellen transitions as well. Their shared sense of injustice “restored an intimacy between them that [Ellen] had missed in the harshness of their life up [t]here” (99). Jock’s newfound empathy for Gemmy leads him to embrace vulnerability, transforming his bitterness and detachment into affection and trust towards Ellen. This emotionality challenges constructed masculine norms in patriarchal societies, which frame men as strong, rational, and intellectually superior to women (Döring 172). Nevertheless, Jock primarily discloses his vulnerability within the domestic sphere, sharing this aspect of himself exclusively with his wife. In patriarchal societies, the private sphere of the home is separated from the public sphere of social life, here illustrated by the confines of the settlement, assigning gender-based tasks (Walby 228). In this context, men govern public affairs, while women manage domestic responsibilities and support their families. The settlement exemplifies a private patriarchy, prevalent in 18th- and 19th-century Britain and characterised by “the relative exclusion of women from arenas of social life apart from the household” (228). Women lack property rights, occupy subordinate positions to their husbands, and are excluded from the public sphere. Hence, Jock restricts his vulnerability to the household to avoid judgement from the community, struggling to publicly acknowledge his transformation. He rationalises his shift in

mindset to his neighbours by framing the perception of Gemmy as a threat as nonsensical (Malouf 95).

The individual and social transformation of Jock hints at a potential for greater change within society, suggesting that he might influence other settlers to become more accepting of Gemmy, thus increasing the number of open-minded, evolving settlers. Nonetheless, this prospective is eradicated as Gemmy leaves the McIvor household, interrupting their connection with him. The remaining reflector figures are then limited to Lachlan, Janet, and Mr Frazer. With Gemmy's departure, both Ellen and Jock cease to function as reflector figures in the novel. Instead, Lachlan reports on their lives post-Gemmy. Ellen, whom he characterises as a realist, hesitantly welcomes her neighbours back into her home, aware that she must return to the community dynamics before Gemmy's arrival. Jock, in contrast, struggles to revert to his former life, as "[s]omething had been destroyed in him that could not be put right" (Malouf 147). Even though he reconciles with his neighbours, the trust in them and his need for acceptance have dissipated. In conclusion, Jock's individual transformation endures even after Gemmy's removal (see *Fig. 5*). Nevertheless, socially, he returns to his prior position in the community, maintaining "the pretence that life, in something like the old form, had resumed and would go on" (147).

The insight about Ellen already anticipates her limited individual and social transformation. Initially, she demonstrates hospitality towards Gemmy and is characterised as an exceptionally independent and autonomous woman. Unlike Jock, she is indifferent to her neighbours' approval (70) and becomes the family's anchor as Jock's mental health deteriorates in Australia (68). Ellen's matriarchal qualities establish her as a strong female character in the novel, a role later complemented by her daughter Janet. Although concerned about Gemmy's potential impact on her children, Ellen treats him with motherly affection (33) and continues to support him even after the attack on Gemmy and their property (114). However, she is aware of the fragile position this places Jock in, explaining her decision not to intervene when Gemmy is eventually sent away.

Like Jock, Ellen has a flaw that hinders full identification with her character and demolishes the reader's previously developed sympathy: her denial of the historical existence of First Nations peoples, claiming that "[t]ill they arrived no other lives had been lived here" (100). This stance silences First Australians, invalidates Gemmy's life among the Aboriginal tribe, and perpetuates *terra nullius*. Despite her openness towards Gemmy, Ellen fundamentally agrees with the colonial ideology, rooted in racial stereotyping to justify exploitation. The reader's initial empathy for Ellen grows by insight into her consciousness as

a reflector figure, highlighting favourable traits such as hospitality, parental concern, self-confidence, and an optimistic view of the land. As Geneviève Laigle argues, Ellen perceives Australia as an opportunity to reveal personal strengths and weaknesses, contrasting with most settlers who feel disturbed by the unfamiliar landscape that provides excessive space and exposes aspects of themselves they prefer to avoid (78).

Ultimately, Ellen indicates neither individual nor social transformation through Gemmy's presence. She had already adapted to her new surroundings and assumed an unofficial head-of-household role before Gemmy's arrival, a position atypical for women in patriarchal structures. Her influence on the community is minimal, as she mainly manages the household and, as a woman, lacks access to the public sphere. Yet, she plays a decisive role at the beginning of the novel, convincing Jock to shelter Gemmy and integrating him into their daily life. Ellen primarily benefits from her husband's transformation, which improves his mental state and enables them to function as a team. Initially, Malouf misleads the reader by withholding Ellen's unfavourable character traits, fostering hope for change and identification with her character. Both hope and identification diminish due to Ellen's denial of Aboriginal presence and her focus on her personal well-being and that of her family. The novel's genre conventions explain this approach: while the historical novel includes previously ignored perspectives, it does not aim to revise history utopically. Hence, illustrating a Scottish settler woman advocating for First Nations peoples' rights would be unrealistic and exaggerated.

Expanding the analysis beyond the McIvor family, I will now proceed to investigate the character development of Mr Frazer, another first-generation settler, who adds a new perspective on Gemmy and the Australian land. Although he holds the position of the settlement's minister, Mr Frazer primarily operates in his role as a botanist, finding comfort among plants rather than fellow settlers, believing that "the world of plants offered an order he would never find among men" (Malouf 120). This perspective highlights his critique of the settlers' power and reputation-based hierarchical structures, contrasting with the interdependence he observes in nature. Faced with the impossibility of comprehension and equality among his neighbours, Mr Frazer withdraws from the settler society and avoids participating in their consultations.

Mr Frazer's botanical interest leads him to bond with Gemmy, who is willing to share his knowledge about native plants that he learned from First Australians with him. Mr Frazer's remarks about nature and the colonial mission in his notebook indicate that he personifies the enlightened settler, willing to learn from First Australians. He develops an alternative approach to colonialism, influenced by his interactions with Gemmy. Mr Frazer advocates for

settlers to adapt to the Australian environment by cultivating local seeds, rather than growing crops native to England or Scotland. By doing so, settlers would “follow the example of [First Australians] who have lived there for thousands of years” (Laigle 86), choosing assimilation over imposing foreign practices on the land. This positions him as a prime example of Alber’s third settler group (167).

Furthermore, Mr Frazer views Gemmy, who embraces Aboriginal ways of living, as “a forerunner” and “a true child of the place as it will one day be” (Malouf 121). Consequently, he envisions the settlers’ mission: “to make this place too part of the world’s garden, but by changing ourselves rather than it and adding thus to the richness and variety of things” (121). Realising his peers lack the capacity to implement his vision, Mr Frazer presents his idea to the Queensland government in Brisbane. The politicians he encounters are indifferent, preoccupied with power and their desire to create a second England in Australia. The concept of the cultural cringe illustrates this mindset, viewing Australian cultural products as “second-hand and second-rate and in need of English imports” (Döring 135). This attitude extends to agriculture, favouring British crops and cultivation practices over Australian ones. Mr Frazer’s comparison of Australia’s development stage to Britain’s past exemplifies this:

[D]id not our distant ancestors, [...] out of mere wilderness, the old coarse grasses that lapped the bellies of their horses, and, separating the grains and nursing them to plumpness, learning how to mill and grind and make daily bread, and how to tend the wild vine till its fruit yielded wine, create settled places [...]? All this can be done again. (Malouf 120-1).

As a minister commissioned to create a civilisation in Australia, he imposes a Western worldview and colonial ideology on First Nations peoples without considering their aspirations. Nevertheless, Mr Frazer’s perspective stands out among the first-generation settlers. Despite his modern and progressive proposals, his ideas are doomed to fail due to a minority in belief, and his character is removed from the novel after his trip to Brisbane, symbolising the end of his interaction with Gemmy. Mr Frazer’s transformation from a solitary figure to a confident individual advocating communal solidarity, and his cross-cultural friendship with Gemmy highlight his potential for understanding and acceptance. The limits of such a connection emerge when Gemmy withholds certain information from Mr Frazer, fearing that he does not fully comprehend or responsibly handle the power associated with it (60).

On a social level, Mr Frazer’s vision of a colonial approach that includes First Nation peoples’ cultures, traditions and habits challenges the power dynamics of the settlement and

the colonial system in general. Yet, his failure is predictable, as the implementation of his approach would destabilise the colonial system that deeply relies on denying First Australians their rights. British property claims, which in turn rely on *terra nullius*, further complicate reversing the narrative of colonialism (Banner 131). The widespread belief among British settlers that colonisation is an “unalloyed good, the humanitarian thing to do, a way of bringing to others the benefits of European civilisation” (126) adds to the resistance against change, particularly change that jeopardises power and property rights. In the end, it is not primarily Mr Frazer who fails but the collective transformation of the settlement, the government, and the British Empire – entities that either command or execute the colonial mission.

In summary, the first-generation settlers in Australia exhibit instances of individual and social change, evident in their modifying relationships and perspectives on the land. Nonetheless, their strong ties and loyalty to their homeland, as seen in Jock and Ellen’s case, limit their impact on Australian society. Therefore, the prospect of reconciling with the new environment and its Aboriginal populations is passed to the next generation, represented by Janet and Lachlan.

3.2.2 Character Development of Second-Generation Settlers

Janet McIvor’s transformation significantly contrasts with her mother Ellen’s limited and static development. Janet is introduced in the first chapter upon her encounter with Gemmy. Her version of the encounter is overshadowed by Lachlan’s perspective and largely ignored by other settlers. Janet’s growing awareness of gender-based restrictions imposed on her prompts her towards seeking social equality and a purpose in life beyond the domestic role of women expected in patriarchal societies (Whittick 97; Malouf 53).

Before the arrival of her cousin Lachlan following his father’s death, Janet was oblivious to the privileges granted to males. However, Lachlan’s presence and his expectation “that she must naturally yield to him” (51) bring these privileges into her focus. Initially, Janet is captivated by Lachlan, fascinated by his accounts of Scotland (49). Unlike Ellen, Janet, though born in Australia, yearns for Scotland and desires the affluence and material possessions associated with it (49). This emphasises Janet’s colonial displacement (Ashcroft 59) and her cross-generational loyalty to the British Empire, an integral part of colonial ideology.

The power dynamics in the settlement differ for men and women of both first and second generation. While men’s influence and authority rely on peer recognition, women derive

power from internal strength and independence. This contrast in defining and manifesting power is evident in the relationship between Jock and Ellen, and later between Lachlan and Janet, as highlighted in the novel: “His power lay in your recognising that he possessed it. [...] The girl’s power was entirely her own. She needed no witness to it” (Malouf 33). Although men occupy authoritative positions, women demonstrate leadership in decisive situations, as confirmed by Ellen, who persuades Jock to take in Gemmy, and by a collective of women that decides to move Gemmy to Mrs Hutchence’s house. Janet, refusing to be intimidated by Lachlan’s power play and unwilling to conform to gender roles, seeks an environment free from power struggles. Ultimately, she finds this safe space in the matriarchal community led by Mrs Hutchence, becoming emancipated from oppression and distancing herself from Lachlan. Noteworthy, Janet engages with Mrs Hutchence before Gemmy is relocated to her house, highlighting her independence (see *Fig. 3* and *Fig. 5*). This significant step in her individual transformation becomes evident to Lachlan when he observes her thriving independently: “He had taken for granted [...] that her chief concern must be him. She [...] was absorbed, he saw, in a world of her own that he had no part in” (149).

Janet’s transformation reaches a new phase during an experience with a bee swarm on Mrs Hutchence’s property. This event, often referred to as epiphany, is one of the novel’s most extensively discussed incidences by literary scholars (Archer-Lean 8). Narrative insertions foreshadow and mystify it, raising the reader’s expectations about its impact on Janet’s life and the novel’s outcome: “Her view was that when real life caught up with you, it would not be in a form you had already imagined and got the better of” (Malouf 55). Surrounded by the bee swarm, Janet feels as if she “had been lifted from the face of the earth” (129) and from then on, she distinguishes between her old and new mind (130), loading the event with religious or even supernatural meaning. She is fascinated by this communion with nature, bringing her closer to life’s purpose (130). Regardless of its utopian potential, this experience ultimately fails to effect any broader social change, such as guiding the settlers towards a reconciliation with First Nations peoples or integrating Gemmy into the settler community.

Isolated from the oppressive patriarchal structures of her childhood, Janet decides to devote her life to bees in a female convent, resembling Mrs Hutchence’s community. The incident’s influence on her life is disappointing, as Janet could have extended her insights about gender injustices to reassess colonial structures, thereby striving for reconciliation. At the novel’s conclusion, this potential is implied when Janet reflects on her life and

relationship with Gemmy, and then turns her attention to the Australian landscape. In her internal stream-of-consciousness monologue, she realises that her connection with Gemmy was fundamentally rooted in love, rendering material possessions trivial without it (Malouf 181). As Brady suggests, Janet, as a woman, prioritises community and continuity over power and confrontation, confirmed by her benevolent approach to Gemmy (98). Despite her initial fascination with material wealth, she ultimately chooses a simple life in the convent, characterised by minimal possessions and the absence of personal property – a modest, yet significant, individual transformation.

In the final paragraph, Janet acknowledges the beauty of the Australian landscape, finally accepting and embracing her new environment, instead of longing for Scotland. She advocates for confronting the unknown: “As we approach prayer. As we approach knowledge. As we approach one another” (Malouf 182). Instead of using this insight to foster harmony around her, Janet remains caught in patterns of self-centredness and narrow-mindedness, traits she sought to avoid adopting from her mother.

Ending the novel from Janet’s perspective further highlights her potential to recognise colonial injustices towards First Australians and to act as a mediator between both groups. This potential stems from shared experiences of oppression faced by women and First Australians, as patriarchal societies often ascribe similar characteristics of weakness, emotionality, deficiency, and inferiority to both women and ‘the native’, in this context, the First Australians (Döring 173). The intersectionality validates that both society groups are situated in a state of inferiority: women as the weaker gender, and First Australians as the weaker race, which are both socially constructed categories. In a more subtle way than Gemmy, Janet is treated as the Other as well, explaining her bond with Gemmy. Overall, Janet progresses on a personal level but struggles to extend these insights to the structures of colonial society, white supremacy, and exploitation. Ultimately, the omission of First Australians in her prayer highlights her difficulty in translating individual growth into broader social change.

The last character I will examine in this section is Lachlan Beattie, who initially embodies the archetype of masculine colonial authority. In the opening scene, he instinctively perceives Gemmy as a threat, protecting his female companions in a manner learned from older male settlers, characterised by a “masculine air” and a “code that [...] belonged to men” (Malouf 52). His control over Gemmy exposes his desire for domination and egocentrism, representing impediments to peace between the settlers and First Australians (Brady 98).

Lachlan's future ambitions correspond to colonial objectives – he dreams of exploring Australia, naming geographic features after himself and his family (Malouf 52). This practice, originating from James Cook, represents the transference of land ownership from First Australians to settlers through the act of naming, a common colonial strategy in Australia (Brittan 1160). Therefore, Lachlan's aspiration and fear towards Aboriginal languages highlight the role of language and naming in denying First Nations peoples a place in the settlement and in Australia, perpetuating the myth of *terra nullius* (Molloy 117).

Like his uncle Jock's, Lachlan's power depends on external recognition, leaving him vulnerable when others challenge it. His humiliation upon being the last in the McIvor family to learn about Gemmy's abduction illustrates this vulnerability. His inability to understand Ellen and Jock's trust in Janet over him, especially as she is a girl, further reveals his insecurities. Lachlan enjoys the superiority through his dominance over Gemmy, but his individual transformation offers hope for change of this character trait, developing from a character type to a character individual. He experiences moments of compassion, particularly when defending Gemmy against other boys. As he transitions from leading the younger boys' group to having to prove himself among older peers, Lachlan initially sees Gemmy as a source of significance, but later feels ashamed of this (Malouf 144). When Gemmy's presence is disputed, Lachlan defends him, describing it "a matter of honour [...] to stand up for Gemmy whatever the cost" (143). This act of moral conviction and loyalty signals a departure from Lachlan's self-centredness, as he risks his reputation and respect among the group. Thereby, Gemmy momentarily develops into a companion for Lachlan. However, joining the older group, Lachlan reverts to his former behaviour, yielding to peer pressure and dismissing Gemmy from their meetings. Lachlan renounces his friendship with Gemmy, labelling his guilt as a "girlish" weakness that briefly permitted emotions to govern his actions (144). This underscores his ongoing moral dilemma and susceptibility to social pressure. Despite his awareness that Gemmy is treated unfairly, Lachlan, like Jock, fails to permanently distance himself from it.

Years later, now a minister, Lachlan is still troubled by the way he treated Gemmy, trying to absolve himself from his guilt by declaring Gemmy dead without evidence (179), resembling the denial inherent in the myth of *terra nullius*. His later life is ambiguous and paradoxical: while having achieved political power as a minister, his attempts to reconnect with Janet and defend a naturalised German cook during the First World War expose his emotional side and resistance to social pressure. He has realised that power does not bring him fulfilment or happiness in the end. Yet, these actions are driven more by vanity and a lack

of purpose in his life than by loyalty or friendship, as Lachlan states that the German is “an unattractive fellow [...], I don’t quite trust him” (Malouf 174). Overall, Lachlan’s life as an older man reveals Gemmy’s lasting impact, continuing to haunt him just like Janet: “Something Gemmy had touched off in them was what they were still living, both, in their different ways” (180). Nonetheless, his transformation ultimately fails due to his unceasing pursuit of power. While occasionally attempting to break free from colonial exploitation patterns, he remains retained by them, choosing the comfort of familiarity over change and evolution.

In conclusion, the analysis of individual and social transformations within the novel exposes a complex interplay of character developments and power dynamics. A twofold classification of the main characters demonstrated their multidimensionality and capacity for self-reflection, particularly in response to their interactions with Gemmy. Nevertheless, the extent of their transformations varies significantly. Jock McIvor develops from a mediator between settlers and Gemmy to a defender of Gemmy, which disrupts community structures and complicates Jock’s reintegration into the settlement after Gemmy’s disappearance. Ellen McIvor’s prior openness to Gemmy is ultimately overshadowed by her consent with colonial ideology, which perpetuates racist stereotypes. The couple’s dynamics subvert patriarchal gender roles, with Ellen taking the lead in the domestic sphere, especially when Jock faces mental challenges. This positions Ellen as a strong female character, distinguishing her despite her limited personal transformation. In contrast, Mr Frazer proposes a new approach to colonialism, which is met with resistance from politicians and other settlers committed to maintaining the colonial order, thereby highlighting limitations faced by those challenging the status quo. Nonetheless, Mr Frazer himself is not immune to colonial prejudices and ideology, envisioning an Australian society modelled after Great Britain, leaving little room for alternative propositions. Janet McIvor follows into her mother’s footsteps, as her transformation is marked by a rejection of patriarchal norms and a pursuit of autonomy. However, she struggles to translate her personal growth into social change, constrained by gender roles. Her retreat to a convent signals her withdrawal from patriarchal society and from the fight for gender and racial equality. Lastly, Lachlan Beattie, personifying colonial authority, is hindered by his ego, power ambitions, and guilt. Although he occasionally exhibits moments of compassion and moral conviction, he is ultimately stuck in his role as the white, male coloniser.

These character transformations effectively challenge power structures, including aspects of gender, race, and social hierarchies. This questioning applies not only to the character

developments within the novel but also functions as a critique of colonial power dynamics in 19th-century Australia. Malouf, as “a writer of possibilities,” explores potential ways to redefine and resist “an outdated version of dominant, Australian heteromascularity” (Hawkes and Piccini 280). These opportunities are tested by the characters, but their actions mostly remain confined to their individual realms. The narrative’s ambiguity and multiple perspectives encourage a critical reassessment of historical subjectivity, situating the novel aptly in the genre of a revisionist historical novel. The characters’ decisions and the novel’s storytelling approach foster scepticism towards their ambitions and the implications of their actions.

4 Metaphors of Struggle and Unbelonging

The complex narrative structure of the novel is underscored by three central metaphors: the fence, the stone, and the pages. In contrast to literary scholars who view these elements as symbols (e.g., Ashcroft 56), I will explore their metaphorical quality. Metaphors, unlike symbols, convey meanings that are figurative and context-dependent, therefore lacking universality. To analyse these metaphors, I will apply narratological terms as outlined by Nünning and Nünning (68-9). These include the concepts of the ‘vehicle’, ‘tenor’, ‘source domain’ and ‘target domain’. The vehicle refers to the metaphorical term itself, a linguistic image that is transformed to the tenor, which is the metaphor’s referent. This distinction leads to the notions of the source domain, which represents the vehicle’s original semantic field, and the target domain, corresponding to the tenor’s semantic field. The metaphor’s decisive feature is the interaction and exchange of characteristics between these two domains (68-9). By systematically categorising these elements, two objectives are achieved. First, it reveals the narratological transformation processes of each metaphor. Second, it clarifies their functions within the novel and their relevance beyond the fictional narrative. The following sections will examine each metaphor individually.

4.1 The Fence

The fence metaphor in the novel develops from representing a literal boundary to embodying psychological barriers. As Gemmy arrives at the settlement, he encounters a fence, precariously balancing on it while the three McIvor children approach (Malouf 29). This act of balancing illustrates Gemmy’s struggle to maintain his Aboriginal lifestyle while reconnecting with his British heritage. Thus, him falling from the fence marks his unwilling

removal from his Aboriginal life, forcing him to adjust to the settlement's unfamiliar environment. This shift is reinforced by the English words that Gemmy stutters on the fence: "Do not shoot, [...] I am a B-b-british object!" (Malouf 3). Language creates a sense of belonging, attaching the settlers to Gemmy and emphasising his reintegration into the British imperial order (Tayeb 338).

In this metaphor, the fence serves as the vehicle, representing the division between the Western and non-Western world, specifically between the settlers and First Australians. Primarily associated with the semantic fields of farming and agriculture, where fences mark property boundaries, the fence also stems from construction and security, deterring intruders. The source domain includes, accordingly, the realm of physical barriers, while the target domain encompasses abstract barriers of cultural and ideological separation. Thus, political implications of division, power, social hierarchy, and dominance become the metaphor's focal point. Historically, border fences and property have been crucial indicators of power and status in the Western world, naturally interconnecting these semantic fields. British land policy in Australia, unique in its application of *terra nullius*, denied First Australians their land rights, falsely claiming the land under the British Crown (Banner 98). As a result, fences enclosed settlement areas which were deemed developed, civilised, and safe, demarcating the boundaries of British territory. According to Stuart Banner, the absence of Aboriginal farms significantly contributed to disseminating the myth of *terra nullius*. The myth was based on the British belief that a society's accomplishment of a specific stage of civilisation, including hunting, pasturage, farming, and commerce, dictates property rights (101-2). This relegated First Australians to the first stage, whereas British settlers had reached the farming stage, thereby justifying their superior property rights. This classification is implied by Mr Frazer's comparison of Australia's development to Britain's (Malouf 120), highlighting that colonialism is built on exploitation, racism and Western-centric perceptions. Initially, Gemmy's appearance affirms the settlers' view of First Australians as primitive, backing their property claims. Yet, as Gemmy assimilates, the settlers notice more similarities with him than previously assumed (46, 163), threatening their power and land rights, and leading to a growing rejection of Gemmy.

The act of naming, a tool for establishing ownership, strengthens the settlers' sense of security within their property. The reference to Bowen, the closest named town near the unnamed settlement (5), illustrates the settler community's unstable and evolving nature in Australia, affecting both first- and second-generation settlers. Because of that, the fence represents a frontier of dichotomies: wilderness versus civilisation, black versus white,

indigenous beliefs versus Christianity, and uncultivated versus cultivated land. Gemmy, as the “authentic hybrid” (Ashcroft 56), has the potential to reconcile these worlds of settlers and First Australians. As Lamia Tayeb posits, “the novel suggests that the (white) self must transcend colonial boundaries” in pursuit of a balanced coexistence (340). However, only few settlers, like Mr Frazer, recognise this.

The border fence, meant to protect the settlers from harmful and dangerous influences, is fragile, as Gemmy’s act of crossing exposes, consequently destabilising their sense of security. Hence, the deconstruction of the fence is associated with the settlers’ fears of losing power, dominance, and hierarchy, merging connotations of source and target domains. Jock’s reflection on his relationship with his friend Barney Mason further transforms the fence metaphor. In addition to its literal meaning, the fence now signifies the growing division between Jock and Barney, provoked through Gemmy as catalyst. He is responsible for Jock’s changing mindset regarding social cohesion and power dynamics (see *Fig. 3*). Before Gemmy’s arrival, “[t]hey had never worried about fences or boundaries” (Malouf 65), marking a shift from the physical fence from the opening scene to a metaphorical division among settlers. In the novel’s penultimate chapter, the fence reappears as a physical object and barrier during Mr Frazer’s trip to Brisbane. He observes the “busy little capital coming to life [...], all its picket fences gleaming, the relentless sunlight bouncing off its domes” (159). Mr Frazer’s vision of learning from First Australians clashes with the Premier’s proposal to give Gemmy the position of the customs officer at Bowen’s port, merely relocating Gemmy to another segregated, fenced area, instead of dissolving the division between settlers and First Australians (159). As a result, the narrative highlights the persistence of physical and metaphorical divisions.

The isolation experienced by Gemmy affects the McIvor’s and Mr Frazer, whose involvement in his life results in their own marginalisation. Gemmy’s presence redefines the boundary of exclusion, shifting it from the settlement’s edge to the McIvor property. As a consequence, the McIvor’s are isolated from the settler community as well. Alerted by Gemmy’s proximity, the settlers suspect further boundary breaches by Gemmy, possibly affecting their own properties. For instance, Barney, whose land adjoins Jock’s, exhibits hostility towards Gemmy. Concerned about the consequences of Gemmy trespassing onto Barney’s territory, Jock warns Gemmy: “An’ ye’d better no’ gang wand’rin’ on the Masons’ side [...]” (34). At first, the border is a definitive spatial marker, but Gemmy’s integration into the McIvor’s household blurs this boundary. This diffusion of barriers – physically, socially, and culturally – intensifies the settlers’ unease and reveals their fear of physical

intrusion and social order disruption. Moreover, Gemmy's hybridity challenges the dichotomies of colonial ideology, affecting every settler living within the confines of the settlement.

The McIvor's attempt to balance between Gemmy and the settler community becomes a challenge. Gemmy's presence in the McIvor family questions colonial values and perceptions of First Australians, while belonging to the settler community requires rejecting Gemmy and enduring injustice and exploitation. Navigating this division demands for assertiveness and effort, leading the characters to gradually recede into the familiar, yet problematic, settler community. This regression highlights the difficulty of overcoming prejudices and the need for social approval. Janet's decision to join a convent exemplifies a form of withdrawal from colonial realities, preferring isolation over a fight for equality. Gemmy's description of Janet's gaze while balancing on the fence suggests her unfulfilled potential for understanding and acceptance of both Gemmy and First Australians: "If he had given himself over to that rather than to the heaviness of his own body, he might have stayed up there for ever" (Malouf 33).

In conclusion, the examination of the fence metaphor has evidenced transformation on different levels: Firstly, the fence is introduced as a literal boundary, delineating space. It then transforms into a psychological barrier, which compromises prejudices, fears, and cultural divisions within the settler community. This transformation affects the settlers' dynamics, as seen in characters like Janet and Jock, whose interactions with Gemmy prompt a reassessment of the power dynamics in the settlement. Secondly, the fence shifts from signalling separation to representing a fluid boundary permitting integration, as the McIvor's and Mr Frazer connect with Gemmy by accepting and learning about his habits, character traits, and modes of communication. Finally, the metaphor illuminates the potential for reconciliation, as opposed to exclusion. These transformations reveal the main attributes of the metaphorical vehicle, projected onto the tenor: separation, limitation, exclusion, protection, and the fence's function as a construct of civilisation.

4.2 The Stone

The stone is introduced towards the end of the novel, and – as opposed to the fence – never exists in a physical form. The metaphor originates from an incident where Gemmy is visited by members of the Aboriginal tribe he lived with. Andy McKillop, who witnesses their encounter, fabricates a story about Gemmy receiving a stone from the tribesmen: "I saw them give him something [...] A stone" (92). The lie spreads within the settlement, growing in

impact: “[T]he stone, once launched, had a life of its own. It flew in all directions, developed a capacity to multiply, accelerate, leave wounds” (Malouf 93). This passage describes the metaphorical nature of the stone. As a metaphorical vehicle, the stone represents the threat of First Australians, which the settlers believe has infiltrated the settlement through Gemmy. Hence, the metaphor’s tenor is the danger Gemmy ostensibly poses to the community.

The stone metaphor amplifies suspicions among settlers about a possible conspiracy, wherein Gemmy is accused of collaborating with First Australians to displace the settlers from the land. While nature serves as the source domain for the metaphor, human emotions constitute the target domain, symbolising the settlers’ mistrust and fear of Gemmy. As supposed evidence of the conspiracy, the stone reinforces the settlers’ perception of Gemmy’s Otherness, affirming his status as an outsider and emphasising his alienation. Most settlers accept Andy’s lie as truth, leading to heightened alertness and the invention of fantasy stories about the stone, some attributing magical qualities to it. These exaggerated narratives reveal the settlers’ irrational fear of Gemmy and First Australians, climaxing in the attempted murder of Gemmy. Including fantastic elements into their stories also stresses the settlers’ misunderstanding of Aboriginal spirituality, projecting their anxieties onto the stone and associating it with evil spirits. Consequently, Alice Brittan interprets the stone as emblematic of everything Andy “imagines might have been said to Gemmy by his Aboriginal visitors,” serving as a link to incomprehension and fear (1168).

The metaphor gains depth through several “salient features,” central semantic characteristics, which are projected onto the tenor of the metaphor (Nünning and Nünning 69), proposing further approaches to interpreting the metaphor. Firstly, the stone’s historical function as a weapon (Wilson et al. 1) associates First Australians with primitiveness in the settlers’ perspective, and simultaneously highlights the stone’s potential harm. This connection reinforces the British settlers’ prejudiced view of First Australians as “the most primitive people on the face of the earth, scarcely more civilized than animals” (Banner 113). Paradoxically, the settlers recognise that the First Australians’ most dangerous weapon is the stone, an object that appears innocuous. Yet, their fear persists, concerned that the stone represents a greater, serious threat, perhaps indicating a conspiracy. Secondly, the stone’s inexpressiveness implies the silencing of First Australians and the settlers’ miscommunication and misconceptions, fostering their fear and sense of threat. Moreover, the omnipresence of stones in the surroundings of the settlement suggests that the potential harm from First Australians, along with the settlers’ fear, is omnipresent within the community as well. Lastly, the stone’s heaviness metaphorically illustrates the emotional burden of the

settlers' prejudices, representing how these feelings heavily impact the community, causing mistrust, disharmony, and disunity. Ultimately, the stone metaphor reiterates a theme of the novel: everything that is perceived as different, unknown, and thus unpredictable is deemed dangerous and must be eliminated.

However, not all settlers accept and propagate Andy's lie. Jock, for example, who doubts the credibility of the lie, argues with Barney, pointing out the absurdity of the claims and defending Gemmy's innocence. Repeatedly opposing his neighbours corresponds to Jock's transformation of occasionally resisting peer pressure. The settlers' access to deadlier weapons increases the irrationality surrounding the stone, marking a climax of fears. Therefore, the stone becomes emblematic of the settlers' willingness to protect their property, even when concrete threat is lacking. This behaviour is common during Australian colonisation, proved by historical events where British settlers dispossessed First Australians of their land, leading to violence, including shootings, poisonings, and forced displacement of First Australians (Molloy 68). Despite Andy's immediate regret over his lie, he refrains from correcting it, in fear of exacerbating his already precarious status within the community. As in Lachlan's case, Andy prioritises his reputation over honesty and loyalty: "[I]f it came to the test he would stick to his story and let them choose. Between him and this blackfeller. When push came to shove, they'd choose *him*, they'd have to. Only he wasn't sure of it" (92-3, author's emphasis).

On a meta-level, the metaphor of the stone transcends its significance within the novel, exemplifying how stories, once invented, can spread uncontrollably, shaping perceptions and collective understandings of events. Like the stone, the myth of *terra nullius* was based on falsehoods about First Australians, but had far-reaching consequences, extending beyond a single settlement or community. The myth spread throughout British territories, becoming a tool for land appropriation and control. Once established, it proved irreversible, demonstrating the impact of deceptive narratives. Hence, the stone metaphor shows that even mundane objects can be weaponised for goals centred around wealth, prosperity, and power.

In terms of transformation, the metaphor undergoes several changes. Primarily, the metaphor expands in scope and influence. Starting as a single lie from Andy, and propagated to a few settlers only, it rapidly circulates and gives rise to more lies, causing the community to divide into two factions: those who believe Andy and a minority questioning the lie's validity. This division provokes individual transformation as observed in Jock, who reassesses his moral stance and ultimately distances himself from friends like Barney. The lie thus impacts relationships and community dynamics. Andy's fabrication about the stone turns

abstract fear and anxiety into drastic actions, such as the attempted murder of Gemmy. This incident, in turn, shifts Gemmy's circumstances, leading to his relocation to Mrs Hutchence, which distances him from the familiarity and sense of belonging he had experienced with the McIvor's and brings him closer to abandoning the settlement.

To conclude, the stone metaphor triggers transformations at both individual and social levels, serving as a narrative device that summarises the settlers' response to Otherness. Their quest for power and belonging drives their brutal actions. The analysis of the metaphor also demonstrates parallels between the fictional narrative and reality, downsizing elements like the myth of *terra nullius* through the metaphor of the stone.

4.3 The Pages

The final metaphor of the pages interlinks both narrative transformations and postmodern elements in *Remembering Babylon*. On Gemmy's second day in the settlement, Mr Frazer and George Abbot engage in reconstructing Gemmy's life story (Malouf 14). In the end, they assemble seven written pages, blending Gemmy's reality with their own speculations and preconceived narratives: "[T]hey could never be certain, later, how much of it was real and how much they had themselves supplied from tales they already knew, since he was by no means the first white man to have turned up like this" (14). Gemmy's difficulty in articulating himself in English and understanding Mr Frazer's questions make a truthful record of his experiences impossible. George Abbot, responsible for the writing, notices the absurdity of Mr Frazer's undertaking, so he deliberately alters Gemmy's story (17). These inventions mix facts and fiction within the fictional narrative, a characteristic feature of postmodern narratives that illustrates the process of storytelling. In their attempt to understand Gemmy, Mr Frazer and George Abbot craft a narrative shaped by their cultural contexts and biases, stigmatising instead of recording Gemmy's experiences. On a meta-level, the pages demonstrate the subjective nature of history, influenced by the writer's perspective and the listener's interpretations.

The vehicle of the pages refers to historical recording, its tenor. This links the source domain, which is the Western tradition of the act of writing, storytelling, and communicating, to the target domain of colonial history recording and the appropriation of Gemmy through documenting his life story. Thereby, Gemmy becomes a British object, ironically confirmed by himself as he confuses the terms object and subject when entering the settlement (3). The appropriation of his story implies control, power, and ownership over his life, highlighting

that the exclusion of perspectives distorts historical records, which challenges the notion of objective historical documentation.

The settlers' insistence on their methods of communication and recording, illustrated by their interactions with Gemmy, reveals their closed-mindedness towards non-Western forms of exchange. By imposing their ways of communicating on Gemmy, they overlook the fact that Gemmy only partially belongs to their culture, and within their narrative, "Gemmy is constructed as a white man" (Tayeb 335). Gemmy occasionally desires to assimilate but, as he spent most of his life with First Australians, is unfamiliar with Western habits. Desperate to belong to the settler community and wanting to prove his similarity with them, Gemmy agrees to have his story recorded. Gemmy's comment that he "knew what writing was but had never himself learned the trick of it" (Malouf 18), suggests that the Aboriginal tribe with whom he lived relied on oral communication, further emphasising cultural divides. Consequently, the documents embody Gemmy's connection to the white settler community, including him into their culture, and thus serve as a meta-referential tool, drawing attention to the constructed nature of the novel, memory, and imperial history. The storytelling process is rendered as ambiguous and biased, arising from the multi-perspective narrative. Lachlan desires to contribute to the writing process, due to him being Gemmy's first person of contact in the settlement, and asserts that Mr Frazer and George Abbot "had lost their one chance of getting at the truth" (15) upon his exclusion. This comment underlines his belief in the Westernised perspective on history as the only truth. The novel further employs postmodern elements such as fragmentation, non-linearity, and the rejection of a singular truth, as the content on the pages consists of merely fragments of Gemmy's story. His story is non-chronological and open-ended, remaining a puzzle even after the novel's closure. Thereby, Malouf exemplifies the history of First Australians, which at the time of the novel's publication is incomplete, concealed and silenced.

Gemmy's discomfort with the writing process reveals his alienation within the community and Western culture. He feels drained of his Aboriginal character traits (18), demonstrating his sense of loss and misunderstanding. These feelings cause his desire to reclaim the pages, attempting to regain control over his life and escape the confines of the narrative constructed about him. Gemmy's deteriorating mental health after moving to Mrs Hutchence's house represents his weakening connection with the Aboriginal tribe, a decline exacerbated by the resurgence of distressing memories from his past life in England. Traumatized by a childhood marked by the abuse of Willett, a rat-catcher who serves as Gemmy's father figure, Gemmy spends his life seeking belonging and affection. His search for a place where he feels accepted

takes him from Willett to the Aboriginal tribe and ultimately to the settler community: “[S]ince he has nothing else to love, he loves [Willett] with a fierce intensity, a fear too, which is the greatest he knows, that he may get lost” (Malouf 134). A year after Gemmy’s arrival at the settlement, realising he will not find this place within the settler community, he demands the return of the papers from George Abbot. Mistakenly, Gemmy receives student assignments instead of the original papers, which are in Brisbane with Mr Frazer (161). Nevertheless, this act of reclaiming the papers liberates Gemmy from the settler community and his Western self, leading to his departure from the settlement. In the last scene featuring Gemmy, rain erases the ink from the pages, metaphorically detaching him from white society, encompassing both the settlement and his past in England. Substituting the original papers carries significant implications. Firstly, it exemplifies the miscommunication between Gemmy and the settlers, emphasising the theme of cultural misunderstanding and the challenges of cross-cultural exchange, particularly when one party is resistant to alternative perspectives. Moreover, the interchangeability of the pages ironically comments on the historical recording, where narratives of marginalised individuals, like Gemmy’s, are often overshadowed or reinterpreted by dominant cultural perspectives, in this case those of white British colonisers. Once altered or appropriated, these narratives can never be completely restored, signifying a permanent impact on affected individuals and communities. While Gemmy bears the consequences in this case, all First Nations peoples suffered under Australian colonialism and the colonisers’ determination of how the narrative about colonisation proceeds. Overall, this serves as a broader postcolonial critique on historical documentation and the effects of colonialism.

In summary, the metaphor of the pages explores themes of history, communication, and cultural misunderstanding. The biased recording of Gemmy’s life demonstrates the subjectivity of history and the complexities of recording it, particularly from a colonial perspective. Gemmy’s discomfort and alienation within the settler community, his struggle to reclaim his narrative, and the ultimate erasure of his story by the rain trace his detachment from white society. Moreover, the substitution of the original pages further underscores miscommunication and colonial dominance in Australia, emphasising the lasting effects on marginalised individuals and communities.

5 Conclusion

The exploration of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* in the context of narratological, individual, and social transformation revealed the novel's complex interplay of narrative techniques, character development and metaphors. Gemmy Fairley thereby emerges as a catalyst for transformation on narratological, individual and social levels. As a figure who has lived among First Australians before joining the settler community, Gemmy is constructed as a hybrid Other by the settlers, challenging their ingrained binary system of colonial ideology. This leads to a disruption of the social order and power dynamics within the settlement. Malouf's decision to include Gemmy as a hybrid figure, rather than as a First Australian character, is significant. Gemmy's British roots facilitate a certain level of acceptance in the settlement, a privilege denied to an Aboriginal character. Thus, Malouf engages with themes of binary classification and colonial ideology through Gemmy's hybridity.

This thesis has examined the novel's narrative situation, characterised by a figural mode with multiple reflector figures, resisting a single authoritative perspective and instead offering fragmented viewpoints. This decentralisation illustrates the settlers' individual struggles for belonging in the colonial setting, while also creating ambiguity and subjectivity in the narrative. Malouf revisits historical accounts by employing postmodern elements like fragmentation, multiple focalisations, and ambiguity, which serve to disrupt conventional historiography. Instead, he integrates marginalised perspectives and challenges the notion of objectivity of historical records. However, the novel's focus on white settlers' perspectives continues the marginalisation of First Australians, a practise prevalent in both historical and fictional narratives, thereby repeating the Western-centric construction of colonial history.

Further, this thesis has investigated character developments of first- and second-generation settlers, exposing how they are shaped and confined by the dynamics of colonialism and patriarchy. Male settlers, like Jock and Lachlan, struggle with issues of dominance, social status, and self-centredness, exhibiting the colonial endeavour's focus on power, prestige, and wealth. In contrast, female settlers such as Ellen and Janet face restrictive gender expectations, limiting their public agency and influence within the settler community. Nevertheless, the thesis demonstrated that women play key roles in community decisions concerning Gemmy, subtly challenging male supremacy within the patriarchal hierarchy. Although Mr Frazer mostly retreats from community dynamics, his alternative version of colonialism and his mission to civilise First Australians reveals Western-centric biases and colonial ideology, despite seeming progressive. Regardless of individual and social advancements, the settlers ultimately fail to effect substantial change within the colonial

system, as their existence in Australia relies on white supremacy and the concept of *terra nullius*.

Additionally, the role of property and naming in perpetuating *terra nullius* and in contributing to the settlers' sense of displacement has been another focus of this work. The act of naming, as a tool of colonial assertion, highlights the colony's fragility, requiring the erasure of threats like Gemmy and First Nations peoples.

The metaphors of the fence, the stone, and the pages further exposed themes of power, belonging, communication, and the limitations of settler transformation. While the fence serves as both literal and metaphorical barrier between settlers and First Australians, the stone embodies the settlers' unjustified fears and prejudices regarding the unknown. Lastly, the pages highlight problems of miscommunication and postmodern concerns about the subjectivity and exclusion inherent in historical documentation.

To sum up, Malouf manipulates reader expectations by fostering sympathy through insights into the consciousness of the reflector figures, only to have these characters revert to patterns of ignorance and self-interest. The novel's open ending, marked by Gemmy's disappearance, exemplifies the semanticisation of form. In a manner similar to Gemmy, First Australians were exiled from their land with their perspectives, practices and narratives obliterated. Thus, the novel ends unresolved and ambiguous, without offering a character with whom the reader can identify, resulting in an unsatisfying reading experience. The ending serves to demonstrate the suffering of First Nations peoples and the lack of a remedy for the atrocities inflicted upon them. The novel's preoccupation with various, intertwined issues makes it so complex and intricate to dismantle, having generated the enormous scholarly engagement with Malouf's work.

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Appendix: Character Constellation Charts

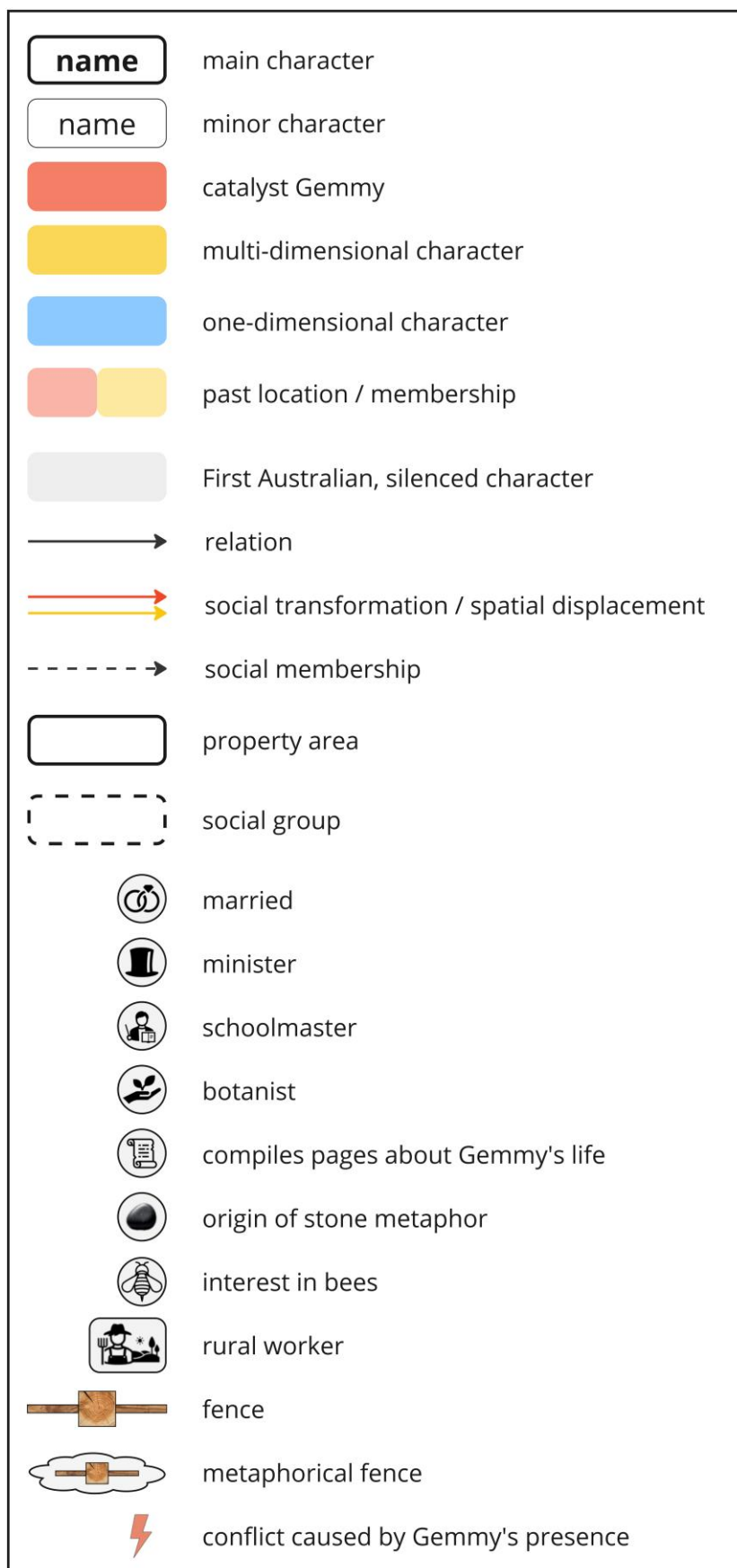


Fig. 1: Legend for Fig. 2-5

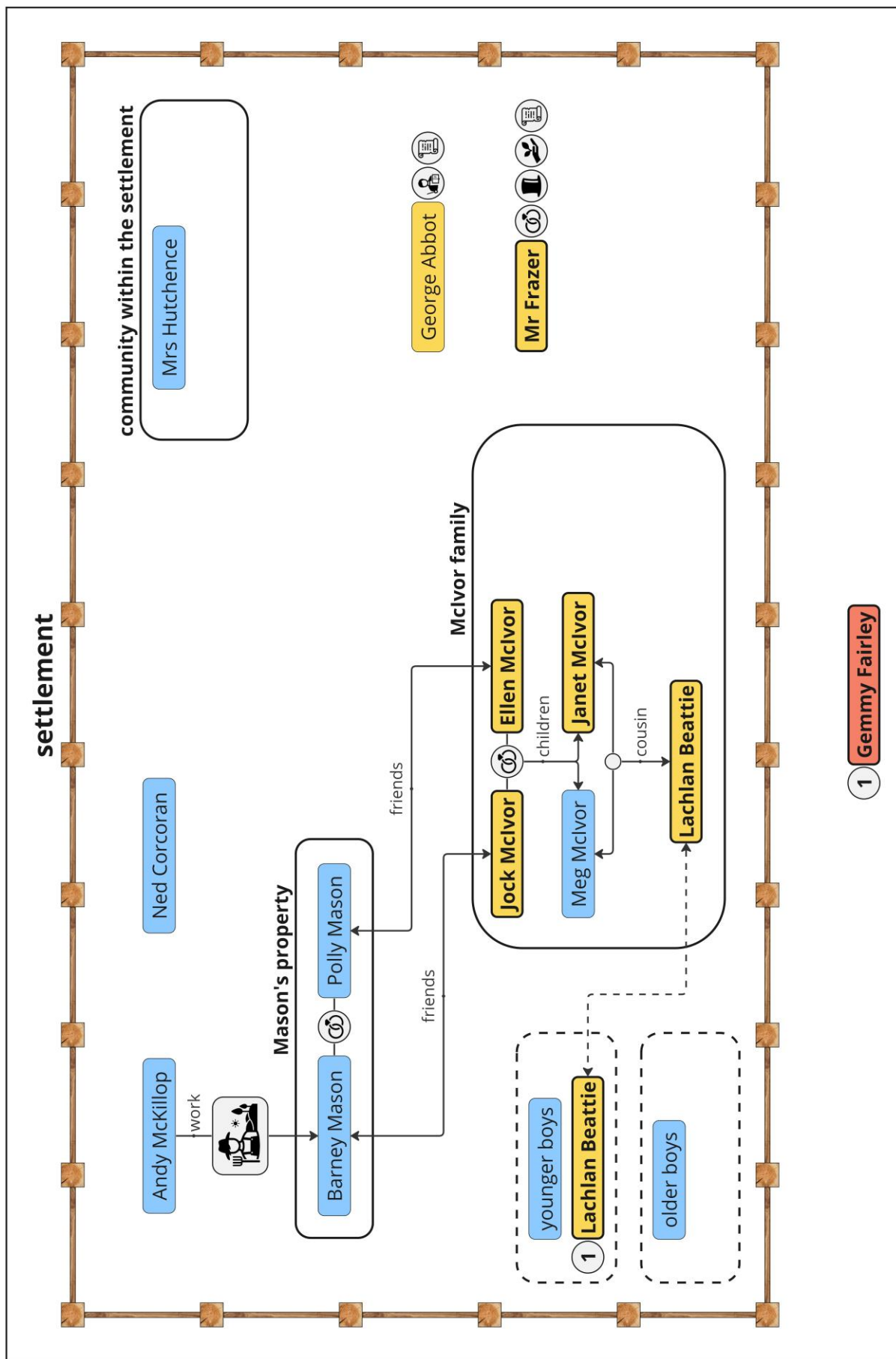


Fig. 2: Character constellation at the beginning of the novel: starting point for transformations

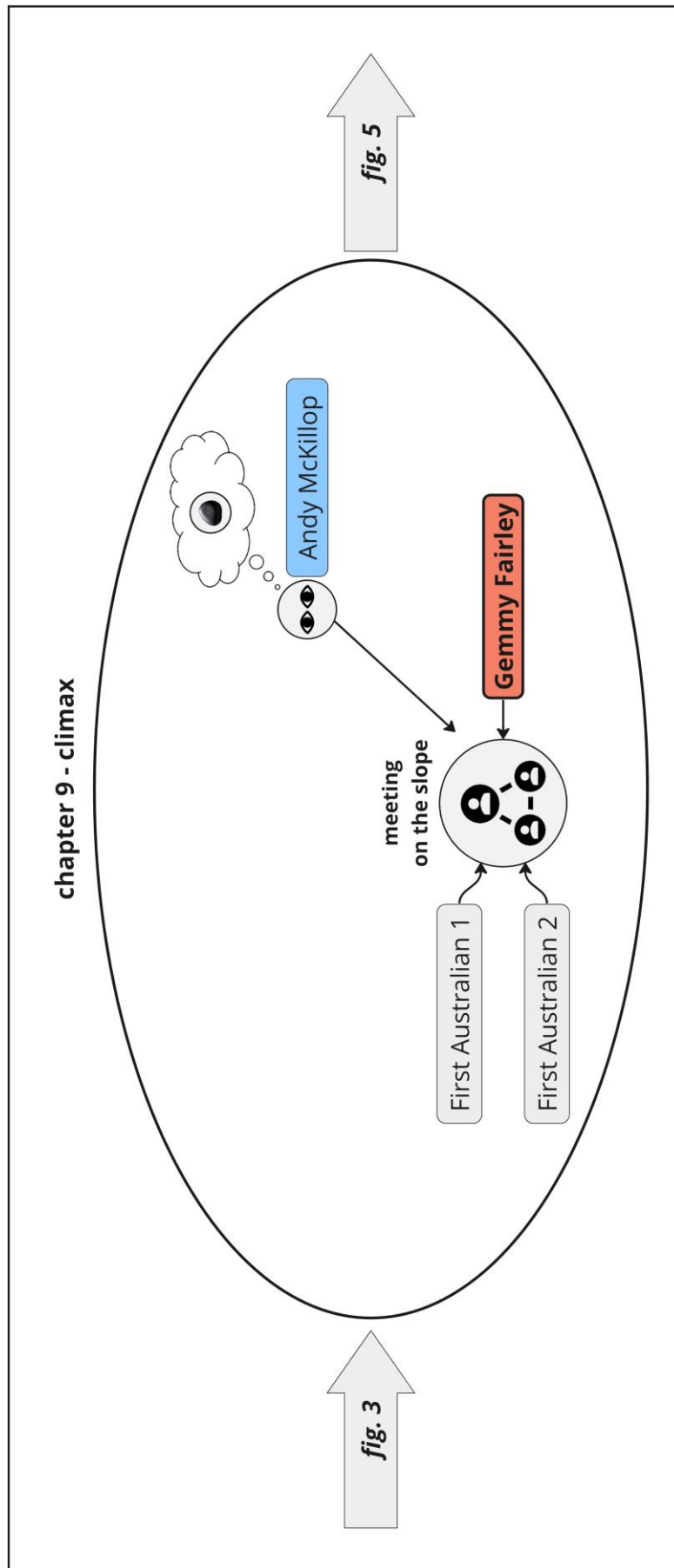


Fig. 4: The novel's climax with the First Australians visiting Gemmy

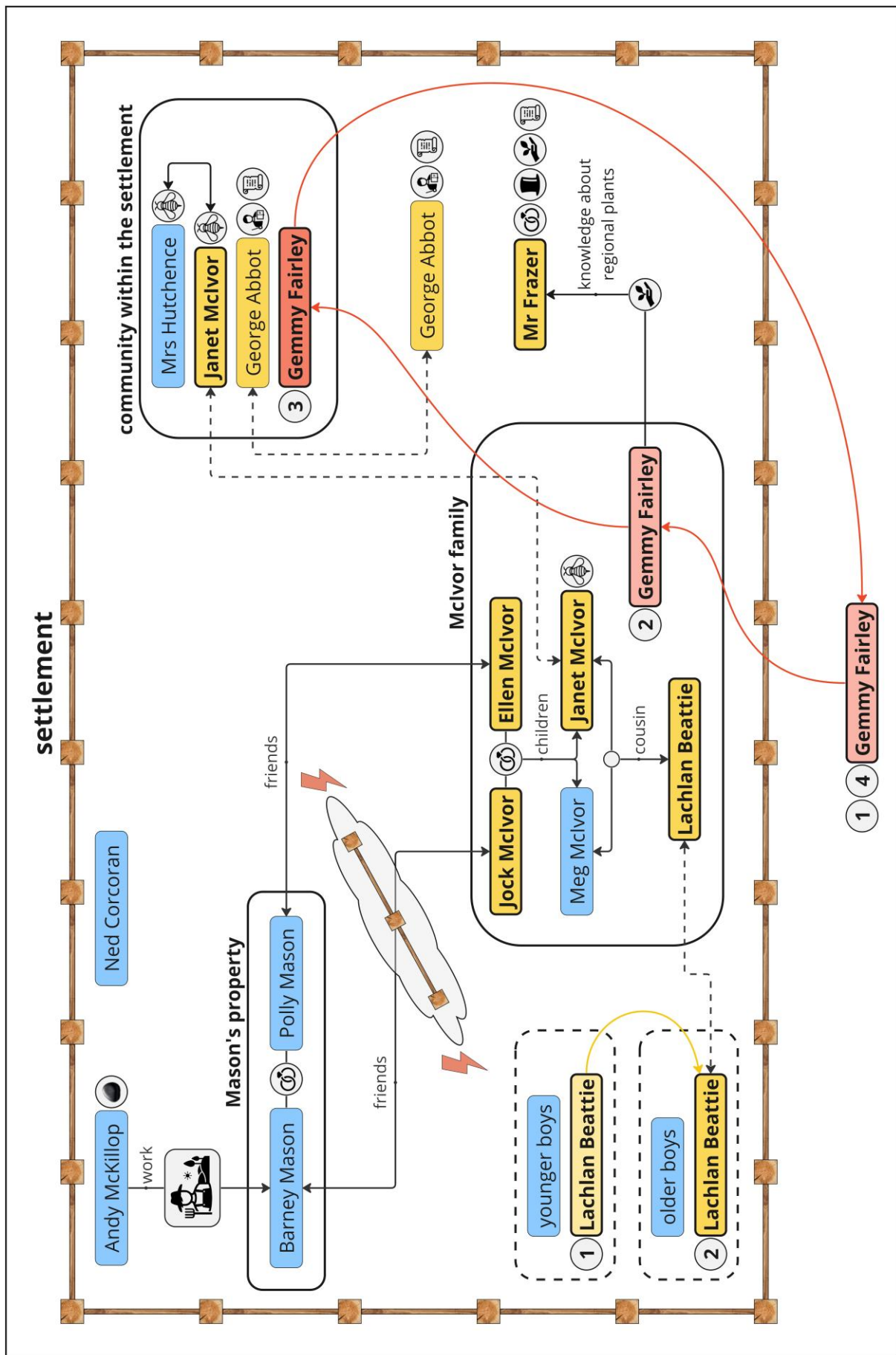


Fig. 5: Character constellation after Gemmy's relocation to Mrs Hutchence and his departure

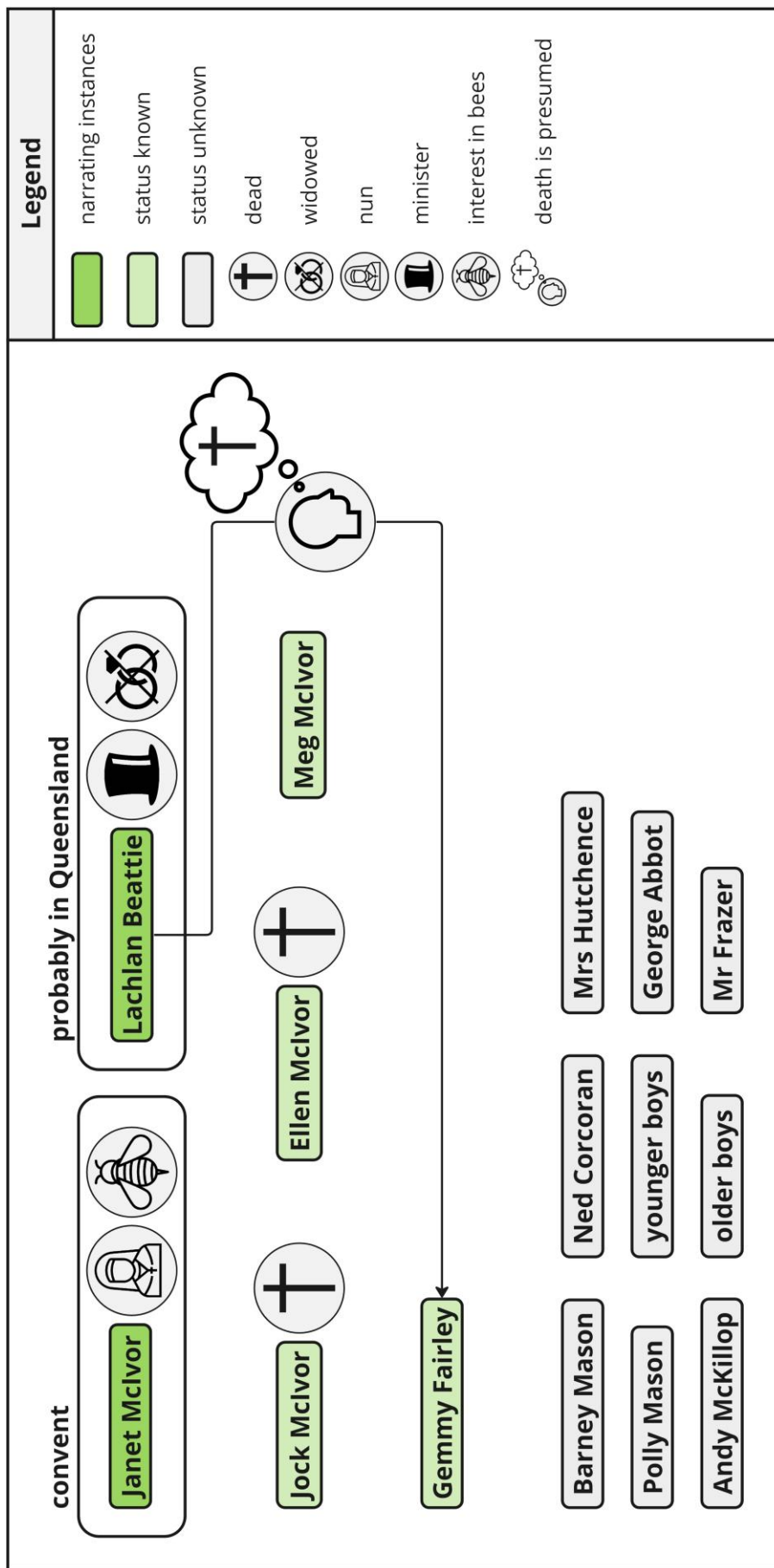


Fig. 6: Character constellation at the end of the novel (chapter 20)

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Erstgutachten zur Bachelorarbeit [Name, Matr.nr.]

XXXX hat zum Abschluss des Studiums eine englischsprachige Bachelorarbeit zum Thema "Transformation in David Malouf's Australian Novel *Remembering Babylon* (1993)" vorgelegt, die die Anforderungen gut erfüllt. Die Arbeit besteht aus einer Einleitung, einem Theoriekapitel, zwei Interpretationskapiteln und einer Zusammenfassung sowie einem mehrseitigen Appendix mit sehr übersichtlichen Visualisierungen der Figurenkonstellation.

19.03.2024

Die Verf. beginnt die **Introduction** mit einer historischen Einordnung des gewählten Romans, den sie mit Nünning zutreffend als revisionistischen historischen Roman charakterisiert. Hier wäre es wünschenswert gewesen, die australische Literaturgeschichte als weiteren Kontext anzuführen, denn das Genre des historischen Romans ist hier sehr produktiv. Sie fasst den Forschungsstand zum Roman kurz zusammen und setzt sich von zwei Autor/innen der Sekundärliteratur ab, die alle Romanfiguren als Scheiternde begreifen (2, auch 11, 22). Daraus entwickelt die Verf. ihren eigenen Zugriff unter dem Paradigma der Transformation, das sie auf der narratologischen, der individuellen und der sozialen Ebene lokalisiert und mit Konzepten aus den Postcolonial Studies und den Gender Studies analysiert. Sie formuliert eine klare These, die die künstlerische Form dieses postmodernen Romans als Auseinandersetzung mit Kolonisierung und kolonialer Ideologie in Australien versteht (2).

Im **2. Kapitel** erläutert die Verf. ihre theoretischen und methodischen Grundlagen und definiert die zentralen Konzepte sehr kurz, aber ausreichend und bezieht sie sehr gelungen auf den Roman (3f). Bei der Definition des Patriarchats (4), bleibt jedoch unberücksichtigt, dass Frauen selbst zum Erhalt der sie benachteiligenden Strukturen beitragen, wenn sie (wie im Roman thematisiert) z.B. ihren Kindern diese geschlechterspezifischen Rollen vermitteln. Das **3. Kapitel** widmet sich in zwei Unterkapiteln der Figur des Gemmy Fairley als Katalysator der individuellen und sozialen Transformationsprozesse in der fiktiven Siedlung schottischer Einwanderer im nordaustralischen Queensland des 19. Jahrhunderts. In **3.1** diskutiert die Verf. die komplexe Erzählsituation sowie die Fokalisierungstechnik und wendet dafür die literaturwissenschaftlichen Analysebegriffe präzise und gewinnbringend an. Sie benennt die Elemente postmodernen Erzählens und erkundet die vom Wechsel der Reflektorfiguren ausgelösten narratologischen Transformationen (7ff). Im Unterkapitel **3.2** stehen verschiedene Figurengruppen im Zentrum, deren individuelles Transformationspotenzial die Verf. auslotet. Besonders gut gelingt ihr das für die Figur des Jock McIvor (12f), während die Analyse von dessen Frau Ellen eher schematisch ausfällt (15). Die Verf. misst deren Verhalten

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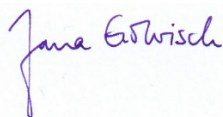
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am bürgerlichen Weiblichkeitsideal, obwohl die aus dem schottischen Bergarbeitermilieu stammende Figur als Bäuerin im Kolonisierungsprozess andere Lebensaufgaben wahrnimmt als eine Hausfrau aus der englischen Mittelklasse es idealerweise tun sollte. Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint Ellen McIvors aktive Rolle nicht mehr als ungewöhnlich, sondern als zweckdienlich (15, 17, 21). Die Tochter-Figur der Janet McIvor bewertet die Verf. als „disappointing“ (18), weil diese nicht auf die „reconciliation“ (mehrfach 18), d.h. auf die Versöhnung zwischen den weißen Kolonisatoren und den australischen Ureinwohnern hinwirkt bzw. für „harmony“ (19) und „social change“ (21, ähnlich 25) sorgt. Nach welchem Maßstab wird hier geurteilt? Welche Frauenrolle verbirgt sich hinter dieser Bewertung? Ist Versöhnung in der Phase der Kolonialisierung überhaupt ein sinnvoller Anspruch? Die Analogie zwischen Frau und Ureinwohner, die die Verf. bemüht (19), findet hier ihre Grenze, denn die weiße Frau ist Teil der Kolonistorengesellschaft – so wie es die Verf. auch für deren männliches Pendant Lachlan Beattie konstatiert: „he is ultimately stuck in his role as the white, male coloniser“ (21).

Im **4. Kapitel** beschäftigt sich die Verf. in drei Unterkapiteln sehr überzeugend mit drei zentralen Metaphern des Romans, dem Zaun, dem Stein und den Seiten mit der fabulierten Lebensgeschichte der hybriden Figur des Gemmy Fairley. Dessen überraschende Ankunft nach 16 Jahren unter den Ureinwohnern versetzt die Kolonistorengruppe in einen Zustand der Unruhe, Angst und Bedrohung, wie die Verf. mit vielen Wortwiederholungen vor allem von „fear“ und „threat“ konstatiert (bes. 24, 26). Während der Zaun als poröse Grenze fungiert, ist der Stein deutlich mehrdeutiger. Anhand dieser Metapher zeigt die Verf. gut auf, wie die Kolonisatoren Mythen um den Stein spinnen und ihn benutzen, um ihre unterschiedlichen sozialen und ökonomischen Interessen durchzusetzen und den Eindringling schließlich vertreiben (27). Das **5. Kapitel** bietet dann eine kompakte Zusammenfassung der Untersuchungsergebnisse. Offen bleibt u.a. die Bedeutung des Romantitels, der mit dem Bezug auf Babylon ebenfalls eine Metapher für die Situation der Kolonisatoren anbietet.

Die **Bibliographie** entspricht dem *MLA Stylesheet*. Sie enthält eine Vielzahl passend ausgewählter Sekundärxen zu einer großen Bandbreite relevanter Themen, einschließlich des gewählten Romans. Die Arbeit wurde sauber Korrektur gelesen und erfüllt auf formaler Ebene sehr gut die Vorgaben. **Das Englische** liest sich flüssig. Es ist variantenreich und bewegt sich durchgehend auf dem gehobenen akademischen Niveau. Es enthält nur einige wenige Grammatikfehler bei den Präpositionen (15, 20, 25, 27, 30) und anderen Elementen wie transitiven Verben (8). Stilistisch stören nur einige Wiederholungen von Worten und Aussagen (18, 24f und bes. 26), die aber den guten Gesamteindruck nicht schmälern.

Die Arbeit wird mit der Gesamtnote **1,7 (gut)** bewertet.



Prof. Dr. Jana Gohrisch