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We are proud to present the inaugural issue of Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies. The papers gathered here introduce topics which we hope to see explored in subsequent issues.

The 21st century has truly coincided with revolutionary changes both cultural and political. Concepts and definitions connected with communication, multi-culturalism, re-examining traditional canons and critical approaches, the “new, new media” – are all in a period of dynamic change and a public debate rarely seen before outside of academia. People and institutions can interact with directness in ways barely imaginable two decades ago. Broadening definitions of culture include groups and categories equally unknown (though perhaps unseen) a short time back. While the print media seem threatened as even e-books challenge the traditional publishing industry, other venues of communication are taking on a new importance.

In many ways, and in many senses, we are at a crossroads; but unlike Robert Frost’s “Road Not Taken”, it seems possible at times to manage to travel both. The past remains and must remain relevant, while new approaches to literary and cultural studies are changing the way we view it. The new immediacy of dialogue facilitated by the Internet has allowed new voices to interact, bringing shared interests and “other” perspectives to the “marketplace of ideas” touted by Thomas Jefferson two centuries ago. Beyond the boilerplate rhetoric, the challenges of the future – the environment, peaceful coexistence with and tolerance of different cultures – certainly suggest another crossroads at which we have arrived. Whether the crossroads is a meeting place or a turning point, it cannot be ignored.

The aim of the journal is to provide a forum for interdisciplinary research within the area of English Studies. The journal welcomes contributions on all aspects of literary and cultural studies (including recent developments in cybertulture), linguistics (both theoretical and applied), and intercultural communication. In addition to academic articles, the journal will also publish debates and book reviews. There will also be some occasional features in Crossroads. This issue introduces “The Writers’ Corner” – a forum for authors who wish to present and discuss their works, and “Beyond the Canon”, whose aim is to solicit recommendations of and/or critical commentary on works which might otherwise escape notice – ones which illumine, challenge, and/or entertain. Future volumes will explore among other issues, mash-ups, fan fiction, literary archeology, and themes proposed by readers. We hope that the articles published in Crossroads will provide inspiration for our readers. We look forward to receiving your submissions.
**Abstract.** This discussion will draw on a series of written stories and commentaries on professional values in nursing for a cross-cultural pragmatics study of US nursing students in North Carolina and Chinese nursing students in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. We explore cultural differences in salience as a pragmatics construct for a professional construct important in nursing, that of caring. The nursing students were not in direct contact with each other except through written stories and commentaries: The Chinese nurses first wrote their thoughts in Mandarin and then translated them into English, after which the US students read and responded to them. The nursing students from both countries assumed that they shared constructs of what constituted professional values in nursing. However, our discussion will question the degree to which they shared common ground and assigned similar salience to the construct. We conclude that the Chinese and the US student nurses erroneously assumed that they shared each other’s understanding of ‘caring,’ underestimating the differences in work environment and cultural expectations. We also propose that they are readily capable, through communication, of recalibrating their reference frames once made aware that they differ.

**Keywords:** salience, socialization, intercultural, pragmatics, oral narrative, professional identity, personal identity, nursing.

**Background**

The process of acquiring the pragmatic skills of language use in varying situations has been described for novice lawyers and medical students (Hobbs 2003). Novice nurses begin to acquire pragmatic skills for professional socialization in their early training experiences, and again through interaction and observation when they enter the workplace (Messersmith 2008). However, there is frequently a mismatch between real-world experience and training demonstrations of valued ways of speaking / critical thinking. That mismatch reveals needs based on register: The new nurse has to identify functions for patterns of speaking to and about patients, peers, and supervisors, without necessarily sharing the same interactional styles (Li 2000).
At a time when Western universities propose collaboration with Asian nursing programs in China, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Japan, differences in caring theory and caring practices within either cultural milieu may cause misattribution of inner states (Rosen 1995), conflicts in intention, and varying interpretations of the meaning of crucial constructs.

This discussion will use a series of written stories and commentaries on professional values in nursing, elicited from US nursing students in North Carolina and from Chinese nursing students in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. We explore cultural differences in salience for an important professional construct in nursing, that of caring. Because the nursing students were not in situations of direct contact with each other except through written stories and commentaries, and because the Chinese nurses first wrote their thoughts in Mandarin and then translated them into English, the two groups of students were in what Kecskés calls “the first phase of the communicative process”. In that phase, they “articulate their own thoughts with the linguistic means that are easily available to them”, an egocentric behavior “rooted in speakers’ and listeners’ relying more on their own knowledge than on mutual knowledge” (Kecskés & Mey 2008: 3).

Partly because the notion of caring is multiply layered, and partly because Chinese nursing has to some extent a Western framework, the nursing students from both countries assumed that they shared constructs of what constituted professional values in nursing. However, our discussion will question the degree to which they shared common ground and assigned similar salience to the construct.

We first review findings from studies of socialization of nurses in the U.S. and provide an overview of the development of nursing education and new emphases on professional socialization in Taiwan. Next, we look at short narratives by Chinese nurses in response to a longer narrative by an American nurse-educator, and subsequent reflections by Chinese and American student nurses on how their narratives evidenced professional values. Both sets of reflective reviews identified caring for patients as a primary value; each framed that value slightly differently, however, identifying culturally different ways both in speaking about the profession and about the development of clinical judgment, and in negotiating intercultural practices. We close with implications and suggestions keyed to our findings.

**Professional Socialization of Nurses in Western or Western-oriented Countries**

Research on socialization into the professions has grown over the last two decades; in linguistics, it “focuses primarily on the linguistic socialization of learners at work or preparing for work by means of education activities and apprenticeship” (Duff 2008: 257). Other disciplines offer additional perspectives. Boyle et al. (1996) draw on contingency theory of role socialization (Feldman 1976) to identify experiences supporting job satisfaction and high commitment for nurses. Etheridge (2007) interviews new nurses to discover how they learned to “think like nurses” and
to develop belief in ability and competence; see MacIntosh (2003) for further discussion of professional nursing identity.

As was done in a number of previous studies, Deppoliti (2008) emphasizes the notion that the nurse's professional identity is constructed gradually. For example, Fagerberg & Kihlgren (2001) claim that Swedish nurses settle into their professional identity in the third year after their degree, when they are able to take charge and show leadership. MacIntosh (2003) identifies phases in how beginning nurses adjust identity as they move from educational program to workplace, keyed both to their development of reflection and to the impact of mentoring. Messersmith (2008) studies the development of the role of nursing, commenting that nurses develop a sense of their role first in nursing school and then in the professional workplace, through interaction developing communicative competence. Vågan (2009) adds the importance of teacher-doctors as role models for developing a professional identity with medical students, which is similar to the impact of nursing preceptors on nurses in clinical practice (Carlson et al. 2010): Preceptors use occupational language or institutional jargon to offer explicit, experience-based explanations that help students develop competence.

However, looking at professional identity and developing a timeline for its construction is not the only way to examine professional socialization within nursing. Holmes & Meyerhoff claim that a community-of-practice construct is more useful than social-identity theory in developing “a shared repertoire of joint resources for negotiating meaning” (1990: 176). This emphasis on community is applied to nursing in the discussion by Andrew et al. (2008: 247; Andrew et al. 2009), who, like other authors working with this construct, comment that situated learning facilitates collaboration based on shared values. Similarly, Reybold (2008) explains that the community of practice “represents both the local milieu and larger ethos of the profession”. As we shall see, the very effort to balance both the local situation and the larger ethos can occasion cross-cultural confusion, miscomprehension, or stereotyping.

Professional socialization begins when a prospective nurse first enters a program, and it extends into joining the workforce (Melrose et al. 2013). This socialization may occur during clinicals that are designed to promote key concepts such as caring, or it may not occur until the novice nurse, newly graduated from a nursing program, can fully enter the workforce. In the US, nursing education began within hospital contexts. During the mid-nineteenth century, the impact of Clara Barton's work during the American Civil War and that of Florence Nightingale in the Crimea led to new approval of nursing and its need for training in the West. The first American nursing school opened at Bellevue Hospital in New York City in 1873, and two others opened that same year (Connecticut Training School at New Haven Hospital, and the Boston Training School at Massachusetts General Hospital) although a number of nurses had graduated from various hospital programs over the previous 15 years. Nightingale established the Nightingale Training School for nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital in 1860. All three of these U.S. nursing schools were based on Nightingale's prin-
principles, which include the individuation of the patient, the value of teamwork, and the combination of theory with practical application for the never-ending growth of the nurse as a specialist in care.1

Socialization Studies and Nursing Education in China and in Taiwan

Western-based nursing as an occupation for women outside the family was formally introduced into China not long after its institutionalization in the US, though it faced greater difficulties in becoming a respected vocation. A brief review of the history of nursing first in China (PRC) and then in Taiwan (ROC) highlights cultural issues that are still influential on what nurses think nursing to be.

According to Liu (1991: 319-20), medical knowledge was part of a largely Confucian outlook, though Buddhists introduced institutions of hospitals. Male doctors treated men; women were treated by ‘old wives’ or san gu liu po, who practiced different crafts associated with health and healing. Western medicine in China begins with smallpox vaccinations, first administered in 1808; the first hospital was established in 1835, and foreign missionaries began in the 1830s to establish hospitals and to train aides. Nightingale’s influence sent the American nurse Elizabeth McKechnie to Shanghai in 1884, where she introduced the Nightingale system of nursing (Chan & Wong 1999). Chen (1996) adds that missionaries were highly important in China during the last 20 years of the 19th century, with an emphasis throughout 1887-1914 on establishing nursing schools. However, Confucian-based attitudes about roles for women made it difficult to attract nursing students, a difficulty compounded by suspicion of foreign teachers. A similar situation existed in Taiwan: Western medicine was introduced to Taiwan by missionaries (Liu 1998). Liu adds that the first British Presbyterian doctor, James L. Maxwell, came to Taiwan in 1865 and that others followed. The earliest hospitals were established by missionaries, and missionary medical work continues to exist in Taiwan.

However, historians of medicine in China remind us that China had a medical tradition before the Western missionaries arrived. As Liu (1998) observes, Western medicine in Taiwan competes with an ancient healing system that is still a deeply rooted part of the culture, linked to profoundly valued religious and philosophical traditions, and in turn to the intense Chinese feeling of nationalism: “Having to adjust itself to Chinese culture, Western medicine has had to justify its existence by efficiency and a quick cure rate” (Liu 1998: 7).

The retention of traditional values combined with traditional practices is frequently mentioned in both anecdote and story. In Fall, 2010, anthropologist Joel Stocker asked his nursing students in

1 Both text and audio for Nightingale’s Notes on Nursing (1859) may be found at http://goddessnike.com/library/NightingaleNotesonNursing/.
Taiwan to talk about their nursing experience of death and dying, building from a guest lecture and assigned reading. He comments:

The stories were amazing, most of them about the student or someone she knows seeing a ghost in a hospital, having an out-of-body experience, going to a spirit medium (danggi) or going to a temple for guidance… nurses in Taiwan participate in many traditional and non-biomedical health practices, often medico-religious ones… (Stocker, 2010).

Traditional or Confucian values are maintained by many Chinese nurses. According to a survey by Pang et al. (2000: 27-28), nurses in Beijing, China “articulate two versions of caring practices within the clinical context as their ideal of service. One version is grounded in traditional caring values that require nurses to treat patients as their family members”. This compassionate, familial care is called cheng. “The other version is grounded in emerging professional values that require nurses to realize the therapeutic value of nursing work” – that is, proficiency in bodywork skills, which Pang calls jing (excellence in practice). In their survey, Pang et al. asked nurses to write definitions with examples of the concept of caring: 41 were grounded in traditional values, such as treating the patient as a family member, or cheng; 29 were grounded in ‘emerging professional values’ or jing.

The retention of traditional values can also be seen in the study by Lee-Hsieh et al. (2005) about the development of an instrument to measure patient perceptions of caring behaviors, the results of which could be used to train student nurses. Patient-reported behaviors fell into two factors, with items in the first factor measuring sincerity, empathy, and respect, such as “Make me feel like I have a sincerely caring nurse. For example, avoid making me feel I am part of a routine or a cog in a machine” (which had the highest factor loading, .974). The second factor measured professional behavior, such as “Explain to me what my medicine is supposed to do and what side effects I might expect”. When the same group of scholars, headed this time by Kuo, initiated the measurement of a student-training curriculum on caring, they identified key divergences from the Western measurement tool typically used to measure caring, “keyed to differing cultural practices in education, caring and behavior” (110). One example: the importance of ‘classmate’ in Chinese nursing training.

In Chinese nursing education, the entering student is assigned to a cohort; one is expected to listen to and offer help to classmates, for this is a long-term relationship within a relational network, not just a manifestation of curriculum. Kuo et al. conclude: “[W]hile caring may be universal among humans, its expression is entirely local” (2007: 112). Turale et al. (2010: 2602) come to a similar conclusion, quoting the English-language abstract of the Chinese article by Liu (2006): “Modern nursing was introduced to Taiwan over a century ago. It is now a complex mix of cultural borrowings from the West, anti-imperialist experiences, colonialist influences, ethical and gender issues and Chinese culture and traditions”. The problem for the researcher, then, is to identify salient cultural issues that surface in the language used to describe what a professional learns to do. The two-phase innovation we devised, a seminar and follow-up reflective writing, was intended to elicit language about professional socialization into nursing in both cultures.
The Innovation: Phase 1

Fifty practicing nurses in Taiwan joined a day-long English-language seminar on *Developing Professionalism through Narrative Techniques* as part of their own advanced training. The objective of the seminar was to explore ways in which reflective narratives could develop empathy and professionalism and promote intercultural competency. Supported by partial oral translation into Mandarin by the Chinese host, they analyzed components in “Nurse Mary’s story,” a practicing American nurse educator’s English narrative of her earliest experiences. Following that, they interviewed each other in Mandarin for brief recounts of important early experiences on the job and translated their interviews into English, as part of the seminar’s requirements. Sharing their work was consented and voluntary. Their translations have not been changed: They are preliminary drafts not yet polished into a standard written format, but are easily understandable. Indeed, their rough-draft translations furnish a more direct glimpse into their nursing culture. The Chinese nurses’ brief stories and a recap of Nurse Mary’s story formed the content of Phase 2: responses by Chinese / U.S. nursing students, as displayed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Phases in the study**

### Phase 1

In Taiwan
- Research context
- Nurse Mary’s story
- 15 pairs: Bilingual interviews

### Phase 2

- 40 Chinese nursing students respond: Nurse Mary’s story and Bilingual interviews
- 40 US nursing students respond: Nurse Mary’s story and Bilingual interviews

The seminar had three sections, each comprised of a didactic presentation followed by group discussion and activities:

1. Goal, Objectives, and Definitions: Cultural Competence, Community of Practice, Narrative Analysis
2. Socialization into a Healthcare Community of Practice
3. The Nurse’s Story: A Personal Story about Professional Socialization.

Section 1 presented the seminar’s goal: Demonstrate how writing/reading reflective narratives can promote cultural competency by increasing the empathy and professionalism essential for caring.
Brief definitions of narrative were based on Hymes (1972) and Labov (1972); the definition for community of practice referenced Eckert’s website.\(^2\) The group as a whole discussed frameworks for cultural competence, including whether Western training can be effective in non-Western countries. Section 2, on socialization, presented a brief literature review of Chinese and American discussions and added examples of contemporary use of narratives in medicine and nursing, such as DasGupta et al. (2006) and Swift and Dieppe (2005), who link narrative to training in cultural competence and improved understanding of patient concerns.

The Nurse’s Story

Nurse Mary’s story, recounted by the third author, introduced Section 3. Her narrative responded to a prompt that asked her to talk informally “about things you were told on the job by other nurses, that you think helped make you be a better nurse, or indeed put you in touch with what you were supposed to be doing.” To her own surprise, Mary’s earliest lessons were in way finding and in the importance of tacit knowledge in the culture of a big New York City hospital:

I really just didn’t even know to get to – the name of the place was Babies 11, which you would think was on the 11th floor, but it wasn’t. And so that, that was my first shock on my very first day, was to find out that Babies 11 was not on the 11th floor, it was uh, a re-redone hospital, and trying to find my way around was very confusing. So my socialization to nursing began just from a direction point-of-view and learning not to trust the signs that were written, you had to ask somebody, because what was written was never checked. Because the people that lived there, they knew where Babies 11 was…

An older unlicensed nurse assistant, a twenty-year veteran of work in the hospital, mentored all the new nurses on the floor on how to organize tasks and where to find things. For Nurse Mary, learning to deal with patients came from three sources:

first, interaction with my classmates… there were maybe 8 of us that lived together in one apartment and we would come back after a day and share our problems with different patients and learning how to deal with that.

A second source was a host of experiences in the city and the hospital with ethnicities different from her own, necessitating learning in order to identify their unspoken rules and expectations:

The people in the neighborhood as well as the people in the hospital would teach me different

\(^2\) www.stanford.edu/~eckert/csofp.html; cf. Eckert & Wenger 2005
things but not until I stepped over the boundary... what I learned from that first two years of working as a new nurse was um to ask.

A third source was her willingness to ask, to be laughed at for asking, and to seek collaborative participation from co-workers and supervisors:

mostly I followed other people and saw how they did it and became a partner and said “If you will show me how to do this, I will help you with yours, if you’ll help me with mine”

Nurse Mary returned at the end of her narrative to the importance of interaction with her classmates:

We shared at the end of the day, all kinds of things, whether it be from patients or just generally how the organization worked, liked who said what to who, how the doctors perf... uh... expected uh... a certain thing to be done, even though we didn't deal with the same group of people, we did find very much uh... similarities and started to make our own... ideas about um different groups of people.

**The Bilingual Stories**

Like Pang et al. (2000), we sought written responses to Nurse Mary's story and found the construct of *caring* to be a crucial component in them. Thirty of the seminar participants, who were taking a course in Advanced English for Nurses for a master's degree, talked about Nurse Mary's story and decided that a key component was being advised by a more experienced colleague. With the seminar leader (the first author), they developed several interview prompts, which are illustrated in the excerpted interviews. They interviewed each other in Mandarin and translated their interviews, as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

In Story 1, Claire identifies early nervousness, her concerns about the possibility of harming a patient, and the need to seek advice from her elder. Another elder teaches her skills and shows warmth, acting as both teacher and friend. In Tuan-I's response to Claire, Tuan-I shares a similar anxiety, since clinical work differs from school. She adds that her moving away from her hometown added to her concerns, but that she has a model who teaches her “how to become a good nurse” through deep study and sincere caring for patients.

Table 2 displays the turn-by-turn interview that Joanne and Joyce conducted with each other. Each faced a specific challenge to her ability to offer *caring*. Joanne worried about facing terminal patients and their families without the support of senior nurses. Joyce became nauseous at the sound of the ambulance, since it was the harbinger of severe problems and massive bleeding in the
Table 1: Claire’s interview-story

(1) Claire’s interview of Tuan-I

1. Please tell me about your experience when you first started working as a nurse.
   I entered my work at pediatric ward in a hospital, when I had graduated from junior college school. I felt nervous and fear at first, as a result of I never have the clinical experience. I always didn’t sure this is right or not when I to act and must ask for advice with elder nurse. Worry the carelessness of myself to harm the patient. But three months later, I had done skillfully little by little. This was also to increase pleasures that can contact lovable children in the work. For this reason I have worked as a nurse up to now.

2. In your工作中，曾有其他護士告訴你你應該需要知道的事，或是無法從教科書或正規訓練得知的事，幫助你成為一個好護士？
   我永遠不會忘記有位Lily學姊，她提醒我許多工作中應該注意的細節，教導我很多技巧，讓事情做得既好又快。除了做事的方法外，最重要的是她甜美、溫暖的笑容，解除了我緊張、害怕的心情，她是我的良師益友，過了這麼多年，我還是深深感謝她，且懷念以前共事的時光。

3. Did one of the other nurses at your job help you become a better nurse by telling you things you really needed to know, things you wouldn’t find out from a textbook or formal training?
   I never forget an elder nurse Lily, she reminded me to take notice of details in the work and taught me many skills to make things faster and better. Beside the way to work, it was important that her smile with sweet and warm. That releases my mood of nervous and fear. She is my good teacher and helpful friend. So many years so far, I deeply appreciated her kindness and remember the time that we work together.

emergency room. For Joanne, a “senior colleague” showed “how to treat every patient by your own heart” with her comforting voice. Joyce met a “good older sister” who taught her skills.

Even allowing for a tendency to follow the storyline modeled by Nurse Mary, in which an anxious novice is helped by a kindly expert, and for the occasional use of questions derived directly from the seminar interaction (“Did someone help you to become a better nurse by telling you things you really needed to know?”), the pairs of interviews nonetheless highlight similar experiences, and their descriptions of early experiences are suggestive of several discussions of Chinese nursing history.
Table 2: Joanne and Joyce exchange early experiences

(7) Joyce’s & Joanne’s interviews of each other
Joyce: Joanne, 請你告訴我你剛當護士時的經驗好嗎？
Joanne: 我當一個新手護士時，我第一個待的病房是腫瘤外科。常可以見到治療中或末期的癌症病人，我常覺得面對這些病人及家屬很難。
Joyce: 你呢？請你告訴我你剛當護士時的經驗好嗎？
Joanne: 我當一個新手護士，我在急診工作，我很害怕救護車的到來，他聲音很大聲而且會帶來一些重症病患，我會很緊張和焦慮，因為病患可能有大量的出血，我會感到頭暈與噁心。
Joyce: 要成為一個比較好的護士一些需要知道的事？
Joyce: 一個新手護士常受到資深護士的排擠，但是有一位和藹可親的學姊告訴我說：別擔心，我想你一定很快就會能跟他們一樣厲害。從那位學姊的照顧過程中我看見如何真誠的對待每一位病人，甚至臨末的病人。他的話語常常可以撫慰病人及家屬的心，因此很多病人及家屬都很喜歡他。那是無法從教科書中學習到的。從那時起我就決定要當一位像他一樣棒的護士。
Joyce: 有其他的護士幫助你，告訴你成為一個比較好的護士一些需要知道的事？
Joyce: 你是一個幸運的人。我面對不熟悉的工作環境，和厳しい看護師長，我有很大的壓力，但是很幸運地，我在單位遇到了一位學姊，他教我照顧病患的技巧與知識，我會每天唸書，這樣可以改善知識，增加照顧病患的自信心

The inspiration to be a new nurse:
Joyce: Joanne, please tell me about your ex-perience when you first started working as a nurse?
Joanne: When I was a new nurse, the first station is the oncology surgical department. Patients are almost under cancer treatment or terminal stage of cancer. I felt difficult to face these patient and family.
Joyce: And you? Tell me about your experience when you first started working as a nurse?
Joanne: When I was a new nurse. I was worked in Emergency Department. I was afraid of ambulance coming. It had the loud warning sound and the delivery severe patient to the urgent department. I felt nervous and anxious. Owing to the patients was active bleeding. My experience was very poor. I felt dizziness and nausea.
Joyce: Joanne, did other nurse help you to become a better nurse by telling you things you really needed to know?
Joanne: A new nurse was almost pushed out from senior colleagues. But, one of my senior colleagues is very kindness and affability. She took to me: Don’t worry! I think you would soon as good as them when you get used to these affairs. In that time, through her way to care patient. I realized how to treat every patient by your own heart, even the terminal stage patients. Her voice could comfort patients and family’s anxiety. So, a lot of patients and family liked her. It can not be learned from our textbook. From that time, I decided to become a nurse like her.
Joyce: Joyce, and you? Did other nurse help you to become a better nurse by telling you things you really needed to know?
Joyce: You are a luck girl. I faced unfamiliar envi-ronment of work. I met rigor doctor and head nurse. I had a lot of stress. Fortunately, I met good older sister in my work unit. She taught skill and knowledge to me for take care of the patient. I learned textbook ever day. It can improve my knowledge. Let me increase confidence to care patients
The Innovation: Phase Two

Two new groups, this time of novice nurses, reviewed the bilingual stories and wrote reflections identifying how those stories evidenced professional values. One group was comprised of 40 Chinese nursing students, and the other group was composed of 40 U.S. nursing students. While both sets of reflective reviews identified caring for patients as a primary value, not surprisingly, each framed that value slightly differently, identifying culturally different ways in speaking about the profession and about the development of clinical judgment.

The Chinese nurses seeking advanced degrees referred to senior nurses as seniors and as sisters in their interviews. The Chinese nursing students also consistently cited the models set by seniors, the desirability of good character, the importance of inspiration, and the need to listen to patients: “Giving your patients more opportunities to express themselves, and listening to them true-heartedly. As you guide the expressions in their minds, you will get to know their stories so that you can solve their problems more efficiently”. In their responses, we can see the maintenance of traditional values such as *cheng* as well as new awareness of best technical practices, or *jing*. We would assume that, at least for now, Chinese nursing students abstract salient features of best practices, as they dovetail with and fit into a traditional perspective on caring for people as if they were one’s family members.

Table 3: Two examples of Chinese nursing student responses to bilingual stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the nurse learns:</th>
<th>What I learn from the nurse:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She gained many things, such as knowledge and experience, from the instructor instead of the textbooks. Also, she got inspired from all these things.</td>
<td>When coming across problems, you have to ask for advice from seniors or notice how they deal with difficulties. Learn it as an outsider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the nurse learned:</td>
<td>What I learn about nursing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The fun at work.</td>
<td>In nursing, using your heart to feel everything around you, observing keenly and sympathetically people and things in order to create the fun and passion toward nursing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Thankfulness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U.S. nursing students were strongly focused on finding common ground with Chinese nursing students around being nervous when entering post-graduation clinical situations. For the Chinese nursing student, an admission of anxiety in such situations no doubt reflects the situation; however, it is also a cultural expression of humility, which is not quite required but is nonetheless expected. The U.S. students have no cultural obligation to present themselves as deferent and humble, and they are more interested in personalizing the Chinese interviews to themselves and their own emotional reactions. Table 4 displays two typical U.S. responses.
Table 4: Two examples of U.S. nursing student responses to bilingual stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the nurse learns:</th>
<th>What I learn from the nurse:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each of these Chinese nurses learned something from a senior nurse. The similarity in each of the stories was that something was learned when the situation was not turning out as planned. For example, one of the nurses learned to include the family in the patients’ care after she had an experience trying to give a child a shot who was not cooperating. Another nurse learned how to prioritize her patient care…</td>
<td>It is important to remember that it is okay for us to ask questions or ask for help. We are not expected to know everything when we first start working. Even some of the more experienced nurses have to ask for help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In each one of the three interviews, the new nurses explain how they were really anxious and nervous during the first few weeks at their job. In all three of their stories, they mention a mentor who taught them crucial aspects of their job and made them better nurses.</td>
<td>Once again, these stories highlight how common it is for new nurses to enter the workforce feeling inadequate and anxious. The stories encourage new nurses to acknowledge these feelings and realize that their more experienced co-workers are there to help.</td>
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Implications

This short study hopes to add to the growing conversation about cross-cultural pragmatics, particularly as associated with language expectations and language teaching, and to converse with other linguists who are focused on looking at constructs such as ‘caring’ from a metaphorical or idiomatic viewpoint. We construe the construct of ‘caring’ in this way:

1. Innate propensity (close to ‘denotation’ or ‘literal’ or ‘prototypical’) in the sense of instinctive altruism. An illustration: when a toddler gets his mommy on the playground to comfort another child, or when a newborn cries when hearing recordings of other babies’ crying (but not her own).

2. Associated with any event that conforms to a script: individual A, knowing that individual B is suffering and would not resent the attention, feels or expresses that sympathy through words or action, in good faith that B will not come to harm through A’s actions.

3. Idiomatic, as we see in advertising, such as a hospital or a boarding school advertising itself as a ‘caring environment’; the script is extrapolated here, not associated with an event, though the understanding is that events conforming to that script occur all the time.

4. Metaphoric, such as a robot in a hospital or nursing home ‘caring’ for patients by delivering medication and transmitting video images from a doctor elsewhere; this would be the case if the agent credited with ‘caring’ is not capable of satisfying the condition in 1. above.
There are additional implications for the field of nursing from studying cross-cultural differences in socialization into the profession, particularly given the global migration of nurses and the need for certification of nurses coming from one country to practice in another. Accordingly, we asked Dr. Mary Kotsakalis, an American Nursing Program Director with experience in training students and new nurses from a variety of cultures, to review the American and the Chinese responses to the bilingual stories, looking for commonalities and dissimilarities that could affect training delivery. For example, Chinese nurses focus on elders and seniors and are encouraged to memorize medication errors; geographical location and initial department may well have more bearing on Chinese nurse retention than on American nurses. Dr. Kotsakalis (2010) identified salient distinctions around 'respect.' These features are shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Review of Bilingual Stories by American Nursing Director

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>References to mentor / preceptors as elders.</td>
<td>Feeling of not enough clinical experience to do the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discussion of how the change in geographic location and different work department influenced career. Got degree and friend for good nursing life.</td>
<td>Reason for entering nursing is love of children and wish to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged to memorize the medication error.</td>
<td>Learned better ways of working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning English in order to emigrate and make a better life.</td>
<td>Encountered feelings of accepting attitude from mentor and has fond memories of same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on respecting parent / child as own family</td>
<td>School experience different from what work turns out to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxious, hesitant in the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nervous, difficulty adapting, stress, fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Found a mentor, learned good work techniques, assessment skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Made a medication error and felt guilt. Encouraged by mentor to pay attention to detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unable to finish work. Nightmares about work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nurse mentor to help learn skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involve parents in care of child for best results. Emphasis on communication, attention to detail.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is the resistance to incorporate new models for healthcare delivery an ‘inability to accept change’ in models for nursing, as one colleague suggested? Or is the resistance an insistence on culturally and linguistically appropriate use of language in adjusting the model to differing cultural contexts? And what do we mean by culturally and linguistically appropriate use of language in health and medical situations? In the example we have been using, is the problem in achieving consensus keyed to the literal ‘meaning’ of this complex and polysemic construct, or to its idiomatic sense, or to its metaphoric sense? Is it that one culture prefers one set of meanings to another, and neither has stopped to interrogate either set? The readers of each other’s commentaries in this study think
they understand each other, and each is confident not only that they believe the construct, they also attribute a similar belief to the other. Once either group – in this case, the Chinese – notices metapragnostic contradictions, they then realize that they might not understand and that they might not believe all of what the other is saying. Their common ground is only partial.

Moeschler (2007: 73) claims that “context and its content (a set of implicated premises) are the core issue for explaining intercultural misunderstanding,” which he sees as very different from ordinary misunderstanding. His data would seem to support his assumption that “intercultural misunderstandings are caused by the triggering of erroneous higher-level explicatures by the hearer” (75) – that is, an “erroneous evaluation of the communicator’s abilities and preferences” (82). Disambiguation in our example has not taken place, because the participants reading each other’s commentaries are not aware that such is needed; the implicated premises and eventually the implicated conclusions are faulty (85). The readers have each attributed to the other the notion that they shared the same beliefs and knowledge.

Identifying salience in the cultures of other people is as difficult as is finding it in one’s own. Perhaps only in comparisons can we begin to tease out the different ways in which we narrate ourselves into becoming professionals and start to hear the differences as resources. In a recent comprehensive systematic review, Jayasekara and Schulz (2006) examined whether, and under what conditions, it is appropriate to introduce Western nursing curricula into developing countries.³ Findings were limited because research in this area is just beginning; however, “direct applicability of a curriculum model from another country is not appropriate for different cultural context(s) without first assessing its cultural relevancy”. In Taiwan, as in China, the cross-cultural model for care most often adopted – not adopted – from the West is that of Leininger (2002); another frequently adapted model for caring is that by Watson (2002). The models differ in crucial ways; both their cultural and their linguistic appropriateness are now frequently discussed by Chinese nursing researchers in Taiwan. In professional collaborations across international boundaries, ideas and practices that educators and researchers think to be common ground warrant careful study and a commitment to teasing out linguistic practices that account for pragmatic differences.

In reviewing the interviews and the subsequent commentaries, we do not see evidence to suggest that American and Chinese nurses are unable to come to an understanding of each other’s notion of caring on account of linguistic or socialization constraints. Rather, we interpret the difference in how nurses on both continents frame their discourse on ‘caring’ as a reflection of what is salient in each nurse-patient environment.

We see the notions of cheng ‘familial compassion’ and jing ‘excellence in practice’ as scalar rather than polar, and we can readily project such a scale onto the four levels of meaning of the English word caring above. By default, we assume that all nurses can feel compassion at the most instinctive level of altruism (level 1). How they frame ‘care’ in their narratives must therefore depend on context. In each speech situation, speakers adopt a persona that responds to norms. In a hospital,

³ While Taiwan is not a developing country, China was so classified at the time in terms of healthcare.
the nurse’s caretaker persona will adjust to the roles of their discourse partners: the status and expectations of doctors, superiors/elders, and patients. Chinese patients may have expectations of their nurses that prompt them to emphasize cheng, whereas American patients are cast as active participants in their care – by giving informed consent, following a regimen (such as managing medication), and pushing the button to call a nurse only as a last resort since the nurse efficiently takes care of many other patients. Such a patient elicits a caretaker persona that emphasizes jing.

In each discourse situation from either country, whether with a doctor or with a patient, the nurse has to bring about an equilibrium of interests and demands to bring about a satisfactory outcome of care. The practiced social norms that achieve equilibrium have linguistic expressions, but they are also discoverable without them. While language may, as Boroditsky (2011) contends, “shape thought” to some degree, it does not determine or constrain thought. A personal anecdote may illustrate this. The second author learned to drive in his native Germany, where directions on the interstate system (Autobahn) are given in terms of major cities closest to the destination, e.g. “take a right on ramp 88 onto A1 towards Münster”. After moving to the US, he tried to adapt to directions given by hemispheres by mounting a compass on the dashboard of his station wagon, only to find out that it is quite possible to turn East on Exit 58 in order to go North on I-85. The task of navigation is the same, but the language used to describe (give, ask for) directions can emphasize either the largest city closest to the destination, ‘left’ and ‘right’ turns relative to the direction of driving, or terms such as ‘North’ and ‘East’ relative either to the current direction of the driver or the final destination of the highway itself. None of these frames have improved or harmed his sense of direction, but he can readily adopt and talk about each framework depending on the country in which he is driving.

Postema (2008) would contend that this kind of reference-frame recalibration needs no special instruction or training, claiming that as social human beings, we have an aptitude for “salience reasoning”. Linguists study pragmatics precisely because the linguistic expression must be interpreted within context. We propose that potential misunderstanding of a professional construct, caring, between nurses across two continents more probably reflects unfamiliarity with each other’s work environments, including cultural expectations for nurses and patients. Greater understanding can begin when training for the nurses in any country includes a greater focus on local and foreign contexts for major professional constructs such as caring, or cultural competence, and an awareness that different practices can sustain the same construct. Finally, we can postulate that Postema (2008: 43) is correct when he assumes that “Exercising our uncanny ability to identify and appreciate the practical significance of salient options available to us, we often solve our cooperation problems”.

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Abstract. The following paper analyzes how fantasy literature addresses the topic of religion. The discussion of the genre's dependence on myths, supported by Mircea Eliade's claims about the sacred and profane spheres of human life, offers an answer to the questions why religion is one of the most prominent themes in fantasy fiction. The analysis of a selected group of fantasy novels (the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, C.S. Lewis, Guy Gavriel Kay, Celia S. Friedman, Jack Vance, Poul Anderson, Philip Pullman, Dave Duncan, George R.R. Martin, and Brandon Sanderson) presents various ways in which a fantasy narrative may approach religious themes: by inventing secondary religions that enrich the imaginary realm, by reworking particular religious themes and turning them into an axis of the narrative, and by supporting, promoting, or criticizing a certain faith through the means of fantasy fiction.

Keywords: fantasy literature, religion, secondary religion.

The debate on the relationship between fantasy literature and religion has greatly developed after the immense popularity (and box-office success) of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* also significantly added to the growing controversy, but since Brown’s novel is not a pure fantasy narrative – perhaps only the author’s fantastic perspective on certain religious dogmas – it will not be included in this article). Suddenly, when the entire world was watching the screen version of Tolkien's trilogy and children around the globe were Potter-fans, people realized how greatly a work of fantasy can capture human imagination and this recognition was followed by general questions about the fantasy genre. Several of those questions were and are concerned with the spiritual and religious qualities of fantasy narratives. Readers and viewers of all backgrounds (people of different faiths, religious authorities, atheists, even those who consider themselves neo-pagans, as well as scholars and academics) expressed their thoughts and concerns about the transcendent nature of fantasy literature. Are books containing magic, witches, demons and generally “the supernatural” suitable for religious (Christian) people who fear that such works might lead them and their children to the occult? Do works of fantasy really possess the power to waver people’s faith or lure them to the occult? Where is God in the fantasy worlds? – if there is any God at all. What values are promoted by fantasy novels? The fact that people are raising such questions and have become so involved in the discussion
is evidence of fantasy literature's ability to transgress the borders of imagination and touch upon issues that people consider important, in this case religion and spiritual life.

Of course, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* have become the center of the debate, but the treatment of these two works has been remarkably different. In the case of Tolkien's trilogy, most people generally agree that despite the lack of God's direct presence in the narrative (Tolkien introduces a Creator figure in *The Silmarillion*), the work is an unquestionable repository of Christian morality. This opinion is based, first of all, on the recognition of Tolkien's devotion to the Catholic faith, which permeates his personal letters to publishers, colleagues, family and friends (Carpenter 2010: 113-4, 167-8, 183-5, 550-2). Secondly, critical analyses of the trilogy and of other works describing Tolkien's imaginary Middle-earth point to certain correspondences between Tolkien's creation and Christian (Catholic) faith: the genesis of Middle-earth; the recurring motifs of temptation, sin, and self-sacrifice; the presence of a benevolent Providence, and the angel-like existence of the elves to name just a few (see Bruner and Ware 2001).

In contrast, the *Harry Potter* series has been frequently and heavily criticized. Of course, Rowling's creation has also been praised by some critics who argue, for example, that the series teaches children about the importance of courage, friendship, and responsibility (Dalton 2003: 60-73, 82-97; Dickerson and O'Hara 2006: 227-260), but two claims against Rowling's work are particularly serious and cannot be easily dismissed. The first concern voiced by some people is that despite their courage and loyalty, the heroes of the series are not the best role models for children. Even though Harry and his friends manage to save their world, during their adventures they lie, cheat, and notoriously break the rules. Secondly, it is pointed out that the work contains some occult symbolism that might increase children's unhealthy interest in witches and magic, which might lead them to real-world occultism (see Abanes 2002: 132-140, 150-164).

Opponents of this last claim frequently object by arguing that books like *The Lord of the Rings* alsocontain magic, but are not criticized for its presence as with *Harry Potter*. However, this defense seems inaccurate for two reasons. The magic in *The Lord of the Rings* is a gifted power accessible only to a few figures: the protectors of the land and the angel-like elves. Tolkien's magic bears no resemblance to occult practices; it is inaccessible to humans (and hobbits), and appears only as an additional help, not the driving theme of the story; in addition, the destructive power used by the evil forces is clearly different from the power of elves or wizards, because it is corrupted by the hunger for domination. In contrast, Rowling based Harry's magic on “real-life” magical practices (e.g. learning spells and their intonation, preparing potions, using divination) and in her imaginary world this magic is widely accessible to humans who possess magical abilities. The only difference between the heroes and the enemies in terms of power is their personal choice of spells: while Tolkien's good and evil are clearly separated by their natures, Rowling's magic is an indifferent entity that can be used by both good and evil characters. Secondly, Tolkien's and Rowling's depiction of magic cannot be compared because even though both works belong in general to the fantasy genre, they represent various sub-categories of fantasy (for different attempts at classifying fantasy literature, see Tuttle 2005: 10-13). Tolkien's trilogy is called high/epic fantasy which is set in a completely
imaginary realm, while Rowling’s wizards are neighbors of ordinary British citizens. The real-life setting of Rowling’s narrative is another reason why children’s interest in witches and magic as developed through her books might be transformed into a real interest in the occult (while perhaps only a few people will be tempted to go out and search for hobbits after they finish Tolkien’s trilogy). In time, the discussion revolving around Tolkien and Rowling (unfortunately, while Rowling may support or refute some claims about her works, Tolkien – who died in 1973 – may be “consulted” only through his non-fictional writing) has encompassed other works. Before we can concentrate on the religious and spiritual quality of some other fantasy books, it is necessary to ask about the reasons for the presence of religious ideology within the structures of the fantastic.

Religious ideology within the structures of fantasy

The creation of a fantasy narrative rests upon the author’s imagination, so it is true that the worlds and creatures depicted by fantasy are alive only thanks to the language – outside the pages of a book (and outside human imagination) they simply do not exist. But this does not mean that everything in fantasy literature is fleeting, ephemeral, and devoid of significance for the real world. The fantasy genre uses its own fantastic devices (witches, dragons, elves, kings, magic, etc.) to comment on real-world issues such as love and loss, joy and despair, freedom and oppression, life and death. As Richard Mathews puts it, fantasy literature is “a literature of liberation and subversion. Its target may be politics, economics, religion, psychology, or sexuality. It seeks to liberate the feminine, the unconscious, the repressed, the past, the present, and the future” (Mathews 2002: xii). In other words, writers use the structures of fantasy literature – just as any other type of literature – to express their comments on all of these (and other) topics, including religion.

One reason why religious themes and motifs so frequently appear in fantasy literature is because the genre greatly relies on the world’s mythological heritage. Myths from around the world have long been a source of inspiration and a repository of ideas for writers of fantasy who indiscriminately use the various fantastic images and themes. Certain mythic patterns have even become standard within the structures of fantasy, e.g. the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the figure of a savior, the rites of passage, and the pattern of the hero’s quest, called by Joseph Campbell ‘the monomyth’ (in The Hero with a Thousand Faces). Writers of fantasy do not purge these borrowed themes and images of religious/spiritual significance and that is one of the ways by which fantasy fiction is saturated with religious issues. For instance, the cosmic struggle between good and evil requires the presence of gods or other divine figures to form the basis for such a conflict, and an array of heroes that will have to choose sides and who are, as a result, entangled in a web of serious moral choices. The conflict frequently requires a savior figure, i.e. someone to suffer and sacrifice himself for the benefit of the community; this savior figure can be easily related to various myths and religions of the world, including Christianity. The rites of passage are also spiritually significant: they prepare the hero for a particular challenge, make him/her a member of the community,
and grant him/her the extraordinary power and wisdom that brings the hero closer to the sphere of otherworldly events. A quest fraught with several dangers and challenges is usually one of the driving themes of a fantasy novel. The quest's stages are often those identified by Campbell within various myths and are also related to otherworldly issues: the hero frequently encounters gods and goddesses, enters a land of the dead, and even undergoes the process of divinization before (s)he is able to achieve the final goal. The monomyth is in essence the journey of one's spiritual transformation. Whether authors of fantasy incorporate the monomyth and other mythological elements into their stories consciously or not, the patterns have been used so frequently that at time the works based on them tend to be formulaic and even predictable. But this is only one of the dangers of having fantasy literature rely on mythological heritage. Scholars of the genre have observed that fantasy has granted itself the right to transform and adapt mythological material according to its own needs – a process which might be beneficial for fantasy, but not entirely so for the mythological traditions (see Attebery 2007, Trocha 2009).

Furthermore, fantasy fiction is filled with religious ideas because the genre has inherited from mythology not only its various themes and images, but also the sphere of *sacrum* (Latin “sacred”). The spheres of *sacrum* and *profanum* (the sphere devoid of religious entities and manifestations) within mythologies has been extensively studied by Mircea Eliade who, in his research, points out that together with rites, ceremonies, religious symbols and activities, myths once allowed people to preserve their sacred beliefs (Eliade 2008). In contrast to their ancestors, modern people have changed (or blurred) the boundaries between their own sacred and profane spheres to the point that they have created (or attempted to create) for themselves a desacralized world (Eliade 2008: 9-14). Nevertheless, Eliade claims that elements of *sacrum* can be preserved unconsciously even in such a desacralized world, for instance, in the celebration of birth, marriage, and the New Year (2008: 100-103, 220-232; 2009a: 20-23). Moreover, Eliade has no doubts about the presence of *sacrum* within the boundaries of art, including contemporary books and movies (2008: 222-223). Eliade acknowledges the fact that the form of a myth can be transformed or even corrupted when the myth becomes part of a new medium of expression, but he argues that despite such distortion (and degradation), the core message of the myth might still be preserved and transmitted thanks to the new form (2009b: 15-17). As a result, fantasy literature, which greatly relies on mythological heritage, can also be treated as one of those modern forms that preserve the *sacrum* once found in mythology. The growing readership of fantasy and its recognition among academics can be treated as a sign that modern people, who have surrounded themselves with high-tech devices, still want to read about good winning over evil, still want to experience the marvelous and other-worldly, and still want to find spiritual sustenance (the forgotten or dismissed *sacrum*).

Fantasy literature can fulfill the above-mentioned expectations and address religious issues in a few ways. Firstly, authors of fantasy invent their own secondary religions (frequently derived from religions existing in the real world) to enrich their secondary reality and place their heroes in a web of meaningful moral choices and obligations. This invention of secondary religions can be taken a step further when religious/spiritual motifs become indispensable elements for the entire quest/
adventure and are situated in the center of the plot. Finally, the secondary religion may become
the author’s personal comment on, or criticism of, existing religious systems. This paper will give
specific examples for each of the abovementioned categories.

However, as their boundaries are rather fluid than clear-cut, the three proposed categories cannot
be treated as entirely separate groups; the difference between them frequently lies only within
the degree to which an author emphasizes the religious/spiritual themes in the plot – and that degree may change even in a single work which consists of several volumes. To successfully illustrate the different ways in which authors of fantasy approach the topic of religion and to demonstrate that the presence of religious themes within fantasy is not simply a recent phenomenon, the selection here consists of books that are popular at the moment and of those that are a couple of decades old. Each category will be exemplified by two or three independent works/cycles, but of course several more examples could be added.

Secondary worlds and secondary religions

Religious/spiritual issues are present in fantasy books when writers of fantasy invent secondary religions which might either simply enrich their imaginary lands or become a central theme in the narrative. These imaginary religions frequently come fully equipped with gods, venerated figures, holy places, dogmas, codes of conduct, mythologies and prophecies; they are well-established and believable within the boundaries of the imaginary realms. Dave Duncan, for instance, in his series *A Man of His Word* (*Magic Casement, Faery Lands Forlorn, Perilous Seas, Emperor and Clown;* 1990-92) presents an original way to link religion with magic. People of Duncan’s world can gain power by learning very rare magical words. Throughout the work it is repeated that knowing four words is the maximum and anyone who has tried to obtain a fifth was destroyed by the power. However, at the end of the story it is revealed that when two people – who share in total five magic words – are in love, a new god is created from their union; the lovers become one immortal entity. So the words are powerful not because they offer magic, but because they lead people closer to the state of divinity in which nothing is beyond reach; and for Duncan love is the key to divinity. Though such a divine union of a man and a woman does not happen often, Duncan’s world possesses several gods who display both male and female features. But Duncan’s protagonists, Rap and Inosolan, do not want to be immortal; they do not want to judge human existence, punish people who do not worship them enough, or play with human lives (this is Rap’s accusation against the gods). So in the end they find a way to reduce their powers and live together without the threat of unwanted divinity.

A greater diversity of competing denominations and ways to worship the gods exists in the world created by George R. R. Martin in the multi-volume, on-going series *The Song of Ice and Fire* (started in 1996). Martin’s characters resemble real people because they ask questions about the spiritual life, respect or disregard the faiths of other people, or do not believe in any kind of god(s) at all. In Westeros the majority of people believe in the Seven, which seems to be an extended version of the
Catholic doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Seven represent seven divine aspects of one god: Father, Mother, Maiden, Crone, Smith, Warrior, and Stranger (who represents the mystery of death). Another reference to Catholicism comes with the hierarchy of this faith (the leader is the High Septon elected by a council) and with the existence of orders devoted to serving the Seven. However, some parts of Westeros worship other gods. People of the northern parts, for instance, pray to the Old (nameless) Gods who had been worshipped long before the faith of the Seven appeared in Westeros. The belief in the Old Gods was established by the Children of the Forests (an ancient race inhabiting the lands before the first people came from the East) and focused on the forces of nature (a form of animism). Contemporary people of the North do not need scriptures or spiritual leaders; following ancient practices, they pray before Weirwood trees: white trees with red leaves and red sap. The trees have faces carved in the bark and the red sap creates an illusion of bleeding (or bloody tears). The tree's colors and the atmosphere of otherworldliness that surrounds them create a sacred sphere that links people of the North to the ancient mysteries and forces (though Christian imagery is present also in this case: the tree and bleeding are an echo of Christ's crucifixion).

The people of the Iron Islands also have their own faith: they believe in the Drowned God who rules the seas. The Iron people are thus portrayed as ruthless seamen who never fear the open waters. Martin presents a ritual (which might be an echo of Christian baptism) in which a person is drowned in sea water and brought back to life by a priest of the Drowned God to become stronger. So while for the people of the North the sacred sphere is associated with the forests and the Weirwood trees, the Iron people worship the sea.

Martin also invents the cult of R'hllor, who is called the Red God and whose attributes are fire and light. R'hllor's divine opponent is called the “Great Other” who is the god of ice and death. The cult of R'hllor claims that the cosmic battle between the two gods will be resolved by the reincarnation of Azor Ahai, a messianic figure destined to saved mankind (the motif of a messianic savior figure is still not fully developed in Martin's series, but might become more significant for the entire plot in future volumes). However, despite the religion's messianic character, the worship of R'hllor is quite disturbing: priests of R'hllor engage in cruel and dark rituals, for instance, bringing the dead to life (which does not resemble resurrection, but rather creating zombies), sacrificing people in fire to obtain the god's favor, and creating shadows that follow the creator's every command.

Apart from these religions, The Song of Ice and Fire frequently has short references to other exotic or forgotten cults. Still, none of the invented religions seems to be the dominant one or the one most accurately reflecting the sphere of the divine (manifestations of power appear on every side), though Melisandre frequently states that only belief in R'hllor is the true religion that can bring salvation (and perhaps she is right, because Westeros is threatened by an invasion of ice-cold, blood-thirsty creatures appearing during winter). Readers may thus speculate about the relations between the different faiths, their followers, and their displays of “magic”. The religious variety offered by Martin enriches his secondary world and makes it more believable.

Guy Gavriel Kay develops his own secondary sacrum in Fionavar Tapestry (The Summer Tree, The Wandering Fire, The Darkest Road; 1984-86). Kay's Fionavar is a blend of mythological bor-
rowings (particularly from Celtic and Norse mythologies) and Christianity. The supreme being is called the Weaver and his antagonist is evil Rakoth Maugrim, but Fionavar has also other, lesser gods: Mörnir of Thunder, Dana the Mother, Cernan of the Beasts, and Liranan the sea god just to name a few. Though for most of the time the gods are hidden somewhere in the background of the story (particularly the Weaver who is only worshipped as the Creator), they sometimes become active participants in the adventures, displaying very human emotions and behavior. Kay’s heroes – five people transported from modern-day Toronto to Fionavar – become immersed in the land’s *sacrum* by participating in sacred rituals, acquiring divine-like power, and coming into close contact with the gods, which are all very important moments for the development of the entire narrative. On such occasions it becomes clear that, despite its mythological borrowings, Kay’s *sacrum* is interwoven with Christian ideas.

For instance, the significance and power of self-sacrifice is strongly highlighted when Paul, one of the five visitors, volunteers to hang for three days and nights on the sacred Summer Tree – a scene which strongly resembles the Crucifixion. The results of his decision are the redemption of the land (the dying kingdom is saved by long awaited rain) and of Paul himself, because the man – who is spiritually reborn after the event and called “Twiceborn” – is able to reconcile with the death of his girlfriend. Another theme recurring throughout the trilogy is the significance of one’s free will. Kay’s heroes (Diarmuid, Kim, Darien) struggle against fate, make their own moral choices, and deal with the painful consequences. Kay shows that acting according to one’s own conscience and making individual choices will in the end lead to success: Diarmuid’s sacrifice for a fellow warrior, Kim’s refusal to use her power, and Darien’s choice of light instead of darkness ultimately contribute to the final victory. Kay clearly elevates the freedom of will above other divine gifts and praises people’s ability to choose good over evil according to their own conscience (which is also a virtue emphasized by the Christian tradition).

In Brandon Sanderson’s *Mistborn* series (*The Final Empire, The Well of Ascension, The Hero of Ages, The Alloy of Law;* 2006-2011) the invented secondary religion is, from the very beginning, one of the central themes of the plot. Sanderson’s Final Empire is a world of red skies and constant ashfalls, dominated by the apparently immortal and divine Lord Ruler and a nobility (the descendants of his early supporters), while thousands of humans are slaves called Skaa. A half-Skaa, Kelsier, attempts to end the Lord Ruler’s reign and free the Skaa with the help of his companion, including a young girl, Vin. Kelsier devises a clever plan how to make the apparently immortal and indestructible enemy weaker and more vulnerable. But his companions do not know about the central element of the plan: Kelsier’s sacrifice. At the end of the first volume, the man attempts to rescue one of his companions from a public execution. However, when the Lord Ruler comes to the scene, Kelsier is unable to harm him; instead of running away, he allows the tyrant to kill him. That is because Kelsier had analyzed several religions and come to the conclusion that only unyielding courage and self-sacrifice for a good cause could give an enslaved people the hope and determination required for a rebellion against the ruler. That is why his martyr-like death (and the subsequent appearances of a man physically resembling him) pushes the slaves into revolution.
Vin manages to kill the Lord Ruler, but learns that in fact he was not the one destined to rule at all. He was a usurper who unrightfully gained divine power at the Well of Ascension, which allowed him to secure his evil reign, but also somehow kept the destruction of humanity at bay. With Lord Ruler's death, the people are again threatened by destruction. As the story unravels, the cosmic battle between two gods (Preservation and Ruin) and Vin's struggle to save the world become the central elements of the plot. Sanderson's formula is simple: to dethrone the old god a new one is needed, and the revolution in his secondary world is of both a social and religious nature.

Another series which revolves around religious/spiritual issues and reinterprets Christian themes is The Coldfire Trilogy (The Black Sun Rising, When True Night Falls, Crown of Shadows; 1991-95) by Celia S. Friedman. Friedman introduced two protagonists: Damien Vryce and Gerald Tarrant, whose world is a planet called Erna, colonized by humans hundreds of years ago. Damien is a Warrior Priest of the Church of Human Unification (which promotes faith in one God) and Gerald was once the Prophet of that Church before he had committed a sin in his pursuit of power and had been cursed by the Church. The main adventure revolving around the battle to save Erna forces these two men to cooperate despite their mutual hatred. This cooperation has a great impact on Damien's and Gerald's existence, and through their dilemmas Friedman addresses some questions of morality and faith. Damien, for instance, has to decide whether good goals justify bad means. In his quest to save Erna, he neglects his duty to kill Gerald (who is no longer a human, but an immortal creature feeding on humans), believing that Gerald might help him rescue Erna's community. His faith in Gerald is one of the reasons why Damien is expelled from his beloved Church, but the priest continues to do what he deems right to the point of rescuing Gerald from his private hell. Damien's friendship and sacrifice are the reasons why the selfish and power-obsessed Gerald slowly begins to care about other people and in the end decides to sacrifice his immortal existence to save Erna from evil reign. Through Gerald, Friedman shows that even the worst sin is no stronger than the power of self-sacrifice in the name of good. Apart from reworking the themes of sin, sacrifice and redemption, Friedman addresses some issues connected with religious institutions, because her Church of Human Unification seems to be a descendant of the Catholic church. The leader of the Church, the Patriarch, is a complex character troubled by the same question as Damien: are bad means justified by good goals? The Patriarch's answers are different from Damien's and he decides to protect Erna according to his own religious beliefs (without resorting to fae – the magic-like power of the planet). In the end, the old man also sacrifices his own life for a greater cause: to show his followers that violence is never a justifiable solution to problems, and to cleanse his people of the sin of violence with his own death (the scene is skillfully constructed as a distant echo of Christ's baptism and crucifixion).

Religion in fantasy: allegory or criticism?

The works mentioned so far have – to a various degree – developed their secondary religions on elements borrowed from existing religions and turned them into a more or less significant part of
Once we find the allegorical, we feel that we have done our jobs as readers and needn’t think any more. ‘Aslan is Christ,’ we say, much as we’d say 1 + 1 = 2, and we cease to wrestle with what Lewis might be showing through Aslan’s complex character. Thus, when a reader focuses on the allegory, the reader ceases to learn. (Dickerson and O’Hara 2006: 59)

After all, a fantasy novel cannot be equated to nor become a substitute for biblical revelation, so the work should be acknowledged also for its other merits, not only for its reconstruction and promotion of religious dogmas.

A completely different approach to addressing religious issues through a fantasy narrative is adopted by Philip Pullman in *His Dark Materials* (*The Golden Compass* – originally published in England as *Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*; 1995-2000), a series which is Pullman’s means of criticizing the Christian faith. The trilogy revolves around a battle between the evil Authority (God) which rules the Kingdom (and is worshipped by the church), and the Republic which wants to overthrow him. Pullman also creates Dust, a mystical force that is associated with the rebellious angels and that has influence on human existence. The central characters – Lyra and Will – are children entangled in the cosmic struggle, with Lyra being the prophesized new Eve (who succeeds with certain tasks mostly thanks to her ability to lie convincingly). By means of this fantastic reality, Pullman attempts to develop his critique of Christianity and God.

However, this critique might not be very successful. Dickerson and O’Hara, for instance, point out that the story lacks in several departments: the concept of the transcendent Dust is not well-developed as if the author was not sure how to define it, the final battle proves to be mildly significant and provides no real solution to the divine conflict despite the Authority’s death, and Lyra’s positions as the new Eve and her supposed temptation to love Will are unreasonably significant for the battle (2006: 194-199). In addition, all the questions about human freedom and submission to objective morality serve one purpose: to portray the Authority as an usurper who unrightfully
claimed the position of Creator, and as a liar who promised his believers heaven after death, while all they get is a barren land of the dead. As a result, the trilogy might seem too didactic, and it becomes clear that the author has

an unrelenting animosity toward God, church, religion in general, and especially Christianity. Every dialogue, every moment of revelation, every speech from a wise character, and every portrayal of an evil character becomes yet another chance for Pullman to rail and preach against the evils of the church. Everything that has ever gone wrong in any of the universes, it seems, is the fault of the Church or of those who believe in God. (Dickerson and O’Hara 2006: 199-200)

However, in contrast to Dickerson and O’Hara, Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware claim that even despite the author’s obvious attempts to discredit Christianity, the works correspond to certain truths of the Christian tradition. One of their most interesting arguments focuses on the descriptions of the Authority; Bruner and Ware state that the figure hidden behind that name does not resemble the Christian God, but the rebellious Lucifer who desired power for himself (2007: 78-80). In addition, though Pullman continuously criticizes the Authority and Magisterium (the church that promotes the rule of the Authority), he never criticizes Jesus Christ who, in fact, does not even appear as a figure in his vision of religious tyranny (Bruner and Ware 2007: 86). And in the end, Pullman’s heroes choose good, not evil:

Lyra, the consummate liar, eventually has to face the fact that truth is her only viable option. That’s why Will, the strong, self-reliant hero, is forced to admit his need for companionship, assistance, and grace. That’s why Mary, the atheistic rationalist, feels such a desperate need for purposeful “connection” with the rest of the universe. (Bruner and Ware 2007: 155)

The heroes’ search for truth, support and love does not point to an evil God (the Authority invented by the author), but to a God – the Heavenly Father – who is painfully absent from the story. Bruner and Ware argue that the visible absence of true God, paired with the presence of love, courage, and sacrifice, points to Pullman’s own quest to understand God, paradoxically expressed by his claims against Christianity (2007: 153-164). All in all, even though His Dark Materials presents the quest for religious answers and spiritual truths in a disturbing way (the fight against the evil Authority and the corrupted church), the trilogy shows that even a genre based on imagination can be deeply involved in addressing the problems and dilemmas of human existence.

While His Dark Materials is a very explicit critique of Christianity, in some fantasy books Christianity is incorporated into the secondary reality to be presented as something antagonistic to the imaginary world. For example, one of the despicable characters of Jack Vance’s Lyonesse trilogy (Suldrun’s Garden, The Green Pearl, Madouc; 1983-89) is Father Umphred, a missionary who comes to Lyonesse to build a church and convert the pagan people. Umphred finds an avid supporter in Queen Sollace who, encouraged by the priest, pesters the King for money in order to build the
church and to buy some holy relics (there is even a hint at the Holy Grail). But the Queen does not see that despite his magnificent proclamations about a holy mission, the priest is a cowardly egoist interested only in his own glory. When evil King Casmir is finally overthrown and Queen Sollace sent into banishment, Umphred tries to sneak away from Lyonesse with some gold. In the end, he his captured and punished for his lies and hypocrisy with death. Of course, Umphred’s presence in the narrative should not be treated as Vance’s critique of Christianity in general. But intentionally or not, the characters that support the Christian faith are either unappealing or morally disputable, while the good and kind protagonists seem not to really care about the new religion (as long as they do not have to deal with Umphred). As a result, Vance’s Lyonesse is portrayed as a legendary and mythic land where Christianity is not yet established (and apparently not needed).

A similar idea appears in Poul Anderson’s *The Broken Sword* (1954), a dark fantasy novel immersed in Norse mythology. Through Orm and his warriors readers learn that Christianity is slowly setting in among the Danes, and in order to marry an English woman Orm decides to convert to Christianity. However, he continues to worship the Norse gods and quite soon gets rid of the Christian priest. That is why his first-born son cannot be instantly baptized and is consequently stolen by a capricious elf. This is only the first of many scenes showing the clash between the old realm of legend and the new era of Christianity: elves, trolls and other creatures of legends speak about “the White Christ” with fear and contempt (but the greatest evil is represented by the figure of Sathanas and his witch-servant).

The stolen child, Skafloc, becomes a great elfish warrior and gets entangled in battles between trolls, giants, and the evil Valgard (the child left to Orm in his place); he becomes a part of the legendary realm that is so clearly separated from Christianity. But at the same time, Skafloc enters into an incestuous relationship with his mortal sister, Freda (not knowing they are related by blood). When the truth is revealed, Freda and Skafloc’s conversation reflects the difference in her and his perception of the world based on their morality and (lack of) religious faith:

‘Come – Freda, come, forget the damned law–’

‘It is God’s law,’ she said tonelessly. ‘I cannot disobey it, my sins are too heavy already.’

‘I say that a god who would come between two that love is an evil creature, a demon – I would smite such a god with my sword if he should come near. Surely I would not follow him.’

‘Aye – a heathen you are!’ she flared. (Anderson 2008: 154)

Their parting – the result of Freda’s adamant faith and Skafloc’s refusal to share it – is clearly the beginning of Skafloc’s downfall. He becomes blood-thirsty and obsessed with war, while Freda is tormented by sorrow and remorse. She also loses her newborn child to Odin to pay her debt for his past help. As a result, grief-stricken and extremely lonely, Freda decides to forsake her faith: “She took the crucifix from about her neck and kissed it. ‘Forgive me,’ she breathed. ‘Forgive me if You can, that I love him more than You or Your laws. Evil am I, but the sin is mine, not his.”’ (Anderson 2008: 219)
Her love is greater than her faith and Freda is able to reunite with Skafloc before his death. Despite the final victory, the ending is grim: Skafloc is dead, Freda has no prospects for the future, and the elf lord fears that gods and creatures of folktale will eventually disappear because of the advent of human civilization and its “white god”. Like Vance, Anderson creates a world in which the mythical and Christian spheres cannot coexist, but in contrast to Vance, for Anderson the opposition ‘Christianity – realm of folk tales’, expressed partially by Skafloc and Freda’s relationship, is one of the main axes of the narrative.

Summing up, the analysis of the novels selected for this article provides an outline of how fantasy literature addresses religious and spiritual themes. Authors of fantasy invent secondary religions which are, to a various degree, saturated with references to existing religions (Duncan, Martin); they turn religious/spiritual issues into a more or less significant part of the narrative (Kay, Sanderson, Friedman) or an antagonistic element (Vance, Anderson); they also imbue the narrative with allegory or criticism of a particular faith (Lewis, Pullman). Each of these categories might be studied separately, because there are still many more novels awaiting analysis (the category of secondary religions seems particularly interesting, because it offers a glimpse into the authors’ imaginations). The writers’ endeavors to address religious themes in their fiction not only enrich the secondary realities, but also prove that fantasy literature – by asking questions about the religious/spiritual quality of life and by inventing a fantastic sphere of *sacrum* for the literary heroes – is interested in connecting its readers, and the authors as well, with the *sacrum* present in the primary world.

References:


Abstract. It is an uncontroversial statement to say that we live in an age of the enormous influence of information technology. The Internet in particular has been instrumental in shaping and reshaping modern reality. It harbours millions of communities and social networks, where people interact with each other on a daily basis. What are we to think of them? Do they represent a new Renaissance of social interactions or rather a demise of the traditional community? In the following article I argue that it is something entirely different. The Internet, I propose, should be viewed as a new, different environment for communities to form and thrive. Not only are those communities formed online, they also display a wide range of features, which make them legitimate communities, and not entities impoverished in the social sense. Those communities have a profound effect on the identity of their participants.

Keywords: Cyberculture, online, the Internet, community, identity.

Introduction

The growing popularity of virtual communities in the cultural West, defined as European and North American countries along with Australia and New Zealand, is a fact. They have gathered millions of users from around the world in an environment that seems to lack limits in possibilities and dangers alike. Those communities have attracted significant attention, both from the media and scholars, who pose challenging questions about the nature of these entities. Can we really call them communities? Can they facilitate the formation of a healthy identity, or perhaps distort it? Can they hinder our abilities concerning face-to-face interactions? These are only a few among the many questions that seem to make both researchers and the media restless. One thing is clear, the changes and developments online do affect our lives, for better or for worse.

Theory and definitions

Howard Rheinhold coined the following definition in his The Virtual Community (1993:6): “Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal
relationships in cyberspace.” Later, he added: “A virtual community is a group of people who may or may not meet one another face-to-face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks” (1994: 57-58). In her essay, Jenny Preece defined an online community as “any virtual social space where people come together to get and give information or support, to learn, or to find company. The community can be local, national, international, small or large” (2001: 2). In the following paper, I will be using the term “virtual community” in accordance with both of those definitions. I would point out, however, that a “virtual community” is not synonymous with “social network”. While the former is focused on a specific topic, theme or interests, the latter is mostly concerned with gathering friends and an exchange of personal information.

In his Keywords (1976: 76), Raymond Williams says the following about the word “community”:

**Community** can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.

Two important factors stressed in the definition of “community” are relationships between their participants and the positive aspects of that form of organization. That however, might be problematic. Is it possible to say that the people living in Jonestown did not form a community? Naturally, for such an exploitive and ultimately destructive environment, in which hundreds of people were manipulated into committing mass suicide by a religious leader, we would rather use the word “cult”. Still, the word “cult” is notoriously hard to define in a way that would be objective, and widely accepted. According to Bakardjieva (2003: 291) Williams’ definition seems fuzzy and imprecise. She goes on to say that “There is no ‘genuine’ fact of nature or social history that the word community denotes”. For the purpose of this paper I have to adopt and utilize a definition of community that will be used consistently. The definition that seems to be most useful and consistent with the way the word “community” is being used, has been provided by Barry Wellman in “Community: From Neighbourhood to Network” (2005: 53): “Communities are networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity”. That definition, therefore, will be used throughout this paper.

The notion of self-identity will be discussed as well. The answer to the question “who am I?”, especially in relation to the social and economic environment is different from the Cartesian notion delineated by Stuart Hall (2000: 15) as essentialism – the notion of a fixed, inborn identity, remaining constant throughout one’s life. I will be looking at identity as dynamic – changing throughout one’s life, and depending on circumstance. In that sense, the key identity changes, even throughout the course of one day, when a person starts the day e.g. as a wife, proceeds to being a mother, then goes on to be a dentist, and upon arrival back home “transforms” into a wife once again. Identity is:
[T]he basic building block of social interaction. All of our interactions, even those with strangers, are shaped by our sense of with whom we are interacting. In face-to-face and telephone interactions there are a wealth of cues of varying reliability to indicate our identity and our intentions. Our clothes, voices, bodies, and gestures signal messages about status, power, and group membership. We rely on our ability to recognize fellow group members in order to know who we can turn to and what we can expect. (Kollock and Smith 1999: 8)

**A virtual community**

“There is nothing virtual about virtual reality” says John Murphy (1996). Is that the case? Logical as it may seem to say that “A is A”, Linda Carolli (1997) would perhaps disagree. Her claim is that the Inter-webs form “another place” in which certain relationships are formed. She also insists that what is being formed on the Internet is a new phenomenon, which cannot be simply transferred from the “real” world into virtual reality. She also discusses the seemingly contradictory notion of a “community of strangers”, an environment in which people interact with one another and form relationships that emulate a community, yet they do not form strong ties and “real” friendships. Sherry Turkle, a prominent researcher of online communities, in her Technology Education Design speech (2011: Web 2) talks about people holding one another in a form of Goldilocks situation, “Not too far, not too close but just right”. In the same speech, she calls it “The illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship”. That gloomy outlook is strengthened by Kollack and Smith (1999), who provide insight into the two, opposing views of the spaces created in virtual reality. In that view, the “Net” should be understood almost literally, as an entity that “traps and ensnares” its users, while giving the establishment even more power over the individual, through surveillance, manipulation, and control.

A different perspective on virtual reality is far more optimistic. It could be seen as an environment which will foster positive relationships, promote modern values, educate, entertain and inform people throughout the world, regardless of race, gender, nationality etc. (Kollack and Smith 1999). The Internet gives as many possibilities as the printing press, which popularized literacy and awareness; the telephone, which linked people through vast distances; and the automobile and airplane, which make the world a smaller, more accessible place (Wellman 1997). The Net has been very successful in bringing people together. One can easily discuss art with a Chinese person, chat about music with an American, and go visit a Dutch person whom he met online. Arnold Brown says that those who associate online communities with the withering of close friendships and strong ties, are making a grave error. “The big mistake that the fearful always make is to equate change with destruction. The social turmoil of the 1970s was heralded by such observers as “the demise of the family”. But the family did not die; it just changed - and it is still changing” (2011: 31).

Both sides of the debate present valid points in their assessment of the term communities in relation to online communities. This paper, however, will argue that even if one might say that virtual reality is, in Carolli’s words, yet “another place”, it is another place for genuine communities, with deep, strong ties to emerge.
Identity online, the role of the virtual world

Another issue, vital to the understanding of the online world, is the question of identity. Do we preserve our “true” identity, or does the new, frontier environment affect it? Is it possible, as some suggest, that there might be a split in identity, almost as in Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? In her Alone Together speech (2011: Web 2), Turkle ponders the issue of multiple identities that a person is able to hold simultaneously, while being engaged in online activity. In her view, one could be a different person when reading articles, compiling texts and chatting with other people via instant messaging services. Hall and Du Gay, quoted by J. C. Riberio (2009: 295) say that there are three major notions of identity, one of them being the individual properties of a person who is a part of society. Second is the interplay between the institutions of modern society, which leaves a “mark” on the individual. The third states that identity is “essentially dynamic, multiple, malleable and fragmented” (Riberio 2009: 294). Many scholars conceive of a new era, in which identity might be detached from the physical self, and imbued into a cyborg form (Riberio 2009: 295, Hardey 2002: 581, Wilson and Peterson 2002: 457). Arnold Brown foresees that “Now, and increasingly in the future, technology will let you make and remake your identity at will – virtually” (2001: 34). On a slightly different perspective, Turkle adds that virtual communities, and the Internet as a whole, is the ideal place to “act out” conflicts, and emotional and personal issues (1999: 644). She asserts that it could play an increasingly important role in the development of one’s identity.

Given those arguments and perspectives, I have to conclude that it is possible for the identity of a person to be highly influenced by the reality of virtual communities. Identity online, just as in the “real” world, may be dynamic, multiple and prone to changes throughout time and the environment. In that sense, not only are we looking at a new frontier in terms of technology, but also in terms of who we are, and how we perceive ourselves. The Internet has become a “digital Gutenberg” in terms of spreading information and ideas and by connecting people with one another, but also, just like the printing press, it is transforming society before our very eyes.

Imagined community?

Benedict Anderson in his Imagined Communities suggests that certain kinds of communities are, as a matter of fact, virtual, or imaginary. What he had in mind, were mainly communities on the level of a country, for instance, a nation. In his words: “All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even those) are imagined” (1983: 18). According to that definition, online communities are imagined as well. I accept that reasoning, as contacts in the virtual world, usually, lack the face-to-face interactions between community members, just as is the case with nations and even smaller communities. However, the Internet allows for the development of communities of even larger range than nations. Kathryn Pentecost in her “Imagined Communities in Cyberspace” writes: “In this twenty-first century era of cyber communication there are many ways to traverse and challenge national boundaries and concepts of national identity” (2011: 46). An obvious example of those ways are international social networks, discussion boards etc.
While discussion forums boast far less impressive numbers, still, the Gaia Online forum has over 25 million users, which is a number larger than the entire population of Yemen. Accepting Anderson's definition, it would be hard to imagine, if not downright impossible, to say that every member of those boards knows all of the other members, let alone maintain face-to-face contact. There is, therefore, a flaw in the argument which suggests a dichotomy between a virtual, and a “real world” community, as it suggests that they are fundamentally different in nature, and that the former is imagined, while the latter is “real”. Wellman and Gulia 1997: 12-13) argue that:

In fact most contemporary communities in the developed world do not resemble rural or urban villages where all know all and have frequent face-to-face contact. Rather, most kith and kin live farther away than a walk (or short drive) so that telephone contact sustain ties as much as face-to-face get-togetherness. […] While people now take telephone contact for granted, it was seen as an exotic, depersonalized form of communication only fifty years ago. We suspect that as on-line communication becomes widely used and routinely accepted, the current fascination with it will decline sharply. It will be seen as telephone contact is now, or a letter writing was in Jane Austen’s time: a reasonable way to maintain strong and weak ties between people who are unable to have a face-to-face encounter just then.

That is why we can accept that “there is nothing virtual about virtual reality”, while agreeing that the World Wide Web is yet “another place”, where contact can be maintained, and communities may form. Bakardijeva (2003: 294) suggests that we should refer to a virtual community as “virtual togetherness”, as it does not always connote the warm feelings and positive associations mentioned by Williams. She adds, however, that:

The opposite of virtual togetherness (and community) is not ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ community, as the current theoretical debate suggests, but the isolated consumption of digitized goods and services within the realm of particularistic existence. The issue then is not which (and whether any) form of togetherness online deserves the ‘warmly persuasive’ (Williams, 1985: 76) label of community. The challenge to analysts is to understand and appreciate the significance of those various forms of transcending the narrowly private existence and navigating the social world for individual participants, for society at large and for the shaping of the Internet. (Bakardijeva 2003: 294)

This means that it is not the use of the word community in the context of virtual reality which is mistaken, but the critics who conflate emerging cyber-communities with the cold, lifeless, digital world. The concept of virtual togetherness, therefore, will be used synonymously to the concepts of online or virtual communities throughout this paper.

**Are such communities so warm?**

In order to demonstrate the resemblance between “offline” and “online” communities I intend to present several characteristics of both modes of social organisation. The similitude of those two
worlds is remarkable, and while several divergences might be found, they stem from similar social and psychological dynamics.

Almost anyone, who has ever tried engaging in Internet debates or discussions, surely knows such terms as trolling or flame wars, the former being the provoking of aggression through mockery and cynical comments, the latter being an exchange of offensive *ad hominem* between a group of people. Yet the list of anti-social behaviours does not stop there. “Specific behaviours include rude, embarrassing, threatening or harassing comments; unwanted sexual comments; and exclusion” claim Werner, Bumpus, Rock and Werner (2010: 608); however, they add that most of the Internet encounters that people engage in are pleasurable.

Cyberbullying is a term that has been widely used to describe negative online interactions among adolescents. It is estimated that 72% of young people (ages from 12 to 17) using the Internet have experienced some form of abuse, a number almost identical (85%) to the number of those who experience violent behaviour at school (Gross and Juvonen 2008: 496). While cyberbullying does not involve physical threats or acts, it may be just as harmful. Christine Suniti Bhat, cites several cases, where bullying online led to the suicides of young people (2008: 53-54).

In addition to highly destructive and cruel bullying, there is an unpleasant phenomenon which requires two sides. Flame wars need at least two consenting participants: if either side of the conflict refrains, the vicious cycle breaks. Not only do they need the involvement of at least two sides, these modes of “discussion” are extremely unproductive, and can be best summed up as a series of *ad hominem* fallacies. In 1990, Mike Godwin, in part humorously, and in part as an experiment in mementics, proposed Godwin’s Law. The Law states that: “As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one”. While not scientifically tested, the Law is certainly an accurate observation, and is now known as *Reductio ad Hitlerum*, which, in fact, is an associative fallacy and an appeal to emotion. In his “Meme, Counter-meme” article, Godwin notes that this has evolved to another popular (so called “viral”) meme, which is: one should avoid Nazi comparisons in civil discussion. While Godwin’s Law of Nazi Analogies is perhaps lacking in terms of having scientific merit, it could be used as a yardstick in measuring the level of hostility or friendliness on a discussion board.

Why do abuses in cyberspace occur? If it is true that it is “there is nothing virtual in the virtual world” the reasons for causing harm, bullying and abhorrent behaviour should be similar to face-to-face interactions. It is important to remember that online abusers are just as real as those outside cyberspace. They are not trolls hiding under a bridge as the name suggests. These abuses happen in a certain community, and therefore in a social environment that permits them to happen. That is why here the assumption is that their reason is the *Lucifer Effect*, described by Philip Zimbardo in his book of the same title. In his view, people do evil when the interplay of the environment and personality allows it to happen by adopting a collective identity which de-individuates and defuses responsibility. Evil being “the exercise of power to intentionally harm, hurt, destroy or commit crimes against humanity” (Zimbardo, 2007), then Internet abuses, as mentioned before, may be extremely harmful to individuals. In addition, the Inter-webs give abusive people an important ad-
vantage – a sense of anonymity, hiding behind a screen, an avatar, or a nickname, similar to wearing a mask. Watson, in his study of cultures at war, confirms that by finding that tribes or countries which go to war in uniform, with masks, or painted faces are much more likely to murder and torture their enemies than those who do not hide their identity (Watson 1973: 342-45). While the sense of anonymity online is largely illusive, it still provides a sense of distance from one's verbal victims.

It is important to remember, though, that no community is exempt from violent people, who will act upon their anti-social beliefs. Bullying is omnipresent at schools, where children should, supposedly, be safe. Additionally, those who are most vulnerable to attack, such as children with disabilities or emotional problems, are the ones who are most frequently targeted (Gietz, Good and McIntosh 2011: 48). Exclusion, stalking or verbal abuse can and do happen in “real life” as well. The Internet is “just another place” for abusive people to exploit.

It is crucial to note that it is common practice for friendly and non-aggressive Internet users to use certain mechanisms in order to prevent such abhorrent behaviour. For example, most discussion boards have administrators and moderators, who are able to delete and block abusive comments. A system of “three warnings and you are out” is widespread. Reputation is another mechanism that ensures civility. On some discussion boards, users have the possibility to rate each others’ comments. In that way, other members are able to quickly see who is regarded as helpful, and whom they should avoid. If all these methods fail, the administrators or moderators, usually have another tool at their hand, which is IP blocking. To ensure that every member knows how to behave in a non-disruptive manner, Netiquette has been established. It is a set of rules and conventions on online behaviour that is supposed to facilitate productive and pleasurable interactions in cyberspace (Cindio, Gentile et al. 2002).

It is important to remember that the Inter-webs are not uniform. Some environments tend to favour positive interactions, while others facilitate the workings of Internet trolls and bullies. That seems outstandingly similar to the “real” world.

A world of distraction?
Another matter is the question of how focused we really are when engaging in a particular activity. When we have dinner with friends, or a chat with a spouse, we usually do not post instant messages while simultaneously watching a YouTube video. Face-to-face conversations are usually more focused than that, and if we consider the other person close and important, we give that person our full, undivided attention. We can certainly replicate that form of interaction online, for example, when using Skype, especially with a webcam. However, most interactions online do not occur in this fashion.

Most interactions online happen on social networks, discussion forums, instant messaging networks, sharing websites, virtual environments etc. In those environments it is difficult, if not downright impossible to pay undivided attention to one person or one pursuit. The PBS documentary film, Digital Nation, has an entire segment called “Distracted by Everything”. In it, the authors ar-
gue that in today’s digital world everything can distract us from what we are doing. This affects
the way schools work, the way students write their essays, even how ties between people form. The
research that they cite suggests that human beings are not capable of performing several tasks simulta-
neously and well. If such is the case, it might be a strong argument against the notion that strong
ties can emerge between people on the Internet. Perhaps, as Turkle (2011) and Carroli (2011) argue,
the Internet is not only bringing the world together, but is creating a paradoxical “community of
strangers” who are “alone together”, unable to connect on a deep level.

**Strong and weak ties**

Is developing a deep relationship, or strong ties in other words, even possible when no face-to-face
contact is maintained? Can we really claim to have intimacy with another human being without all
the social cues that facilitate such contact? Deprived of touch, sight, proximity, gestures, body lan-
guage and other forms of non-verbal communication while on the Web, we are seemingly destined
to live in a world where relationships are determined by letters and digits. Is that enough to breach
the void of distance, the lack of personal contact, and initial mistrust?

Consider the pace at which ties are formed. In his *Blink. The Power of Thinking Without Thin-
kling* Malcolm Gladwell argues that human beings make instant decisions on a variety of things,
including relationships as deep as marriage. That rapid decision-making process is possible due
to the subconscious analysing of non-verbal cues in human behaviour (2007: 31-47). Is it pos-
sible online? Can we use such mind-boggling interpersonal skills in cyberspace? Wellman and
Gulia (1997) point out that the relationship formation process takes much longer online, as the
bandwidth of communication is devoid of both verbal and non-verbal communication. They go
as far as to quote several opinions that maintain that such forms of communication are insuffici-
ent in developing any strong ties whatsoever. That claim contradicts, however, the research that
they invoke, which demonstrates that people prefer long lasting online groups to those that last
briefly. What is more, they come to the conclusion that “Strong online ties have many characteri-
stics similar to strong offline ties” as they are frequent, voluntary, companionable, reciprocal and
supportive (1999: 178). Those guidelines have also been the basis of the research questionnaire
conducted for the needs of this paper. Perhaps then, when Michael Hardey (2002: 754) asks if
meetings on the Internet are “pure relationships or impoverished meetings” the answer could
be both. As Bakardijeva points out, it may not be very productive to fall for certain dichotomies
and to assume that only two possibilities exist (2003: 305-10). There are numerous weak ties on
the Internet, some lasting no more than a few minutes. On the other hand, some relationships in
cyberspace meet all of the criteria of a strong tie. In addition there is a certain gradation between
the two dichotomies.

Moreover, there can be positive features even in weak tie relationships on the Internet. Though
such ties might not be as deep and profound as long-term friendships, they can still be supportive
and helpful. The large number of self-help communities online seems to support that claim. So
there might be some advantages to being “alone together” after all.
The world of ideas
When the first human being took the skin off a bear’s back in order to keep himself warm, it became apparent that a person can achieve in several hours what took thousands of years of evolutionary development. Human civilization began, and no longer would humans adjust to the environment, but rather would shape and reshape it to fit their needs. Just as other humans learned and transmitted the idea that one could wear animal fur to make oneself warm, they learned and transmitted ideas about washing one’s hands before a meal, or using indoor plumbing, central heating, and other facilities and practices we now take for granted. That transition of ideas, according to Ramachandran (2010: Web 8), requires the above discussed mirror neurons, and is central to the emergence of human culture. This is a Popperian view in which people exist not only in the physical realm, but also in the knowledge, ideas and know-how they possess.

Those ideas, crucial to the existence of human culture, spreading among people, are called memes. The term “meme” coined by Richard Dawkins in his important and highly-acclaimed book The Selfish Gene (1976). In it, he provides the definition of a meme, which is a replicating idea or mode of behaviour. He argues that memes spread and evolve similarly to biological genes; they also use people as “vehicles” for dispersion. However, unlike genes they do not exist physically, yet they function within a culture. The Internet facilitates the spreading and evolving of memes. It offers rapid transmission from one person to another and allows us to find people who share the same idea and to reinforce the belief in that meme. The spreading and finding of like-minded people is crucial for the proliferation of memes. “An epidemiological approach to model the viral propagation of memes” (Wang and Wood 2011), proposes that there are profound similarities between how memes and viruses spread. Richard Thieme (1997: Web 7) agrees, going so far as to say that “Memes are contagious ideas that replicate like viruses from mind to mind. The Internet is like a Petri dish in which memes multiply rapidly. Fed by fascination, incubated in the feverish excitement of devotees transmitting stories”. Though metaphorical, there are parallels between the spread of diseases and memes that cannot be ignored.

The Internet is an almost perfect environment for memes, both truthful and wrong. Memes thrive in that environment and spread like wildfire: some of them, like the belief in the crash-landing of an alien spacecraft in Roswell, New Mexico, last for decades. It is crucial to remember that in this cyber-world of ideas, ideas themselves deserve careful analysis and attention.

Methodology: qualitative and quantitative data gathering
Gathering information essential in the successful presentation of this paper required both qualitative and quantitative data gathering. Both were essential in understanding the phenomenon of online communities. The latter gave perspective on the size and vivacity of each community, while the former was to provide an in-depth understanding of their dynamics, their relationships, and how they influence participants’ view of themselves and each other. The quantitative research was
primarily based on the search engines provided by the discussion boards themselves. These offered reliable information concerning the number of participants, their levels of activity, and location. I have communicated both with the forums’ administrators and their active participants, some of whom contacted me via private messages. In addition, a survey has been conducted on each forum, except one (due to the denial of a registration request). In addition, numerous methods of research were utilized, for example, observation, comparison, and analysis of the forum content.

Research process

The main source of data were the discussion boards themselves. The quantitative data was gathered on one day (the 30th of September 2011) during which all the data available through the forum statistics and search engines was collected and saved for further analysis. The internet forums that I decided to study were centred around the ideas of the 2012 apocalypse and/or the existence of extraterrestrial UFOs visiting the Earth. While they do not constitute the average of Internet users, these communities are small and focused on a specific set of beliefs which bring them closer together.

The gathering of qualitative data was a much longer and time-consuming process. It consisted of several weeks of reading and participating in the researched communities. What is more, on the 1st of September a survey was posted on each forum on a general discussion thread. Data was collected and catalogued until the 30th of September 2011, upon which the survey was finalized. In each and every case, further contact with the survey subjects was required. In total, 20 people decided to fill out the entire survey, while numerous others left comments both positive and negative on the discussion thread. The answers varied in length and in depth. Some users decided to leave only yes/no comments, while others offered much deeper and elaborate insights. During the survey a discussion commenced on one of the forums as to whether users should participate in it or not. It was during that time that it became obvious that some members participate in multiple discussion boards of the same theme, due to the fact that they were already informed about the survey being conducted elsewhere. The number of people who participated in that part of the survey was not sufficient for a reliable, quantitative assessment; however, it offered valuable insights and an opportunity to match their answers with the reality of the forum dynamics.

Qualitative analysis

Since the 1st of September 2011 extensive qualitative research has been done on each forum, requiring registration on each discussion board and regular observation of the activity on them. That meant reading discussions, topics, and exchanges between users, in order to find information valuable for the following analysis. Thus, popular trends and memes can be detected. Additionally, the forums’ search engines have been utilised so that particular phrases, words and expressions could
be found. Naturally, all sensitive data and identification has been removed, so that the users’ privacy may be preserved.

“Us” versus “Them” mentality
After just a few moments spent on each forum it becomes apparent that an “us” and “them” attitude is almost omnipresent. Many users assert that, either by believing in the 2012 Doomsday predictions or in Alien visits to our planet, they possess a higher state of knowledge or superior intelligence to the “average Joe”. It is alarmingly easy to find examples in which outsiders, or members of the general public are referred to as “sheeple” or by other equally derogatory terms. Using such terms is in reality a very dangerous phenomenon, which is quite unlikely to be encountered on, say, a pet lovers community or on a gardening forum. Rather, it is common among fringe groups or subscribers to extreme and/or intolerant political ideologies. While there is absolutely nothing wrong in subscribing to an unorthodox or unpopular world-view, associating it with a sense of moral superiority and the inferiority of others is rather dubious in nature. As Zimbardo points out (2007: 318-321), such an act absolves oneself from moral responsibility towards others, which facilitates negative behaviour and abuse, as one weakens his sense of the humanity of others. This is the same technique used by Hitler when he called the Jewish people “lice”, or the Hutu referring to the Tutsi tribe as “cockroaches” in the prelude to the massacre. While it would be ludicrous to accuse the members of these virtual communities of genocidal attitudes, it can hardly be seen as positive to brand dissenters as animals or “zombies”.

On the other hand, it would be disingenuous to say that every member of the assessed communities has a negative outlook toward outsiders. Sometimes the “sheeple” term is used as a metaphor, much as is the case in Animal Farm by George Orwell, and not as a representation of one’s view of people outside the community. Some wonder how to “reach” the general public and convince them to change their minds in an intellectual manner, rather than by emotional appeals and offensive language. Others regret being isolated from the people outside their ideological communities.

In summary, it is apparent that the members of the analysed communities isolate themselves from the outside world to a larger extent than more “mainstream” communities. While in principle this is a negative phenomenon, it does not reach destructive proportions. In general, these communities do not shun outsiders; rather, they interact with them in a courteous manner, so long as they themselves are treated with respect. In conclusion, while the “us” versus “them” mentality is clearly present and creates a rather non-ideal environment, it does not reach pathological proportions, and does not hinder interactions with the outsiders in an extreme way.

Response level
On every community discussion forum, the questionnaire generated considerable interest, especially among active users with a large number of posts. Not everywhere were the responses positive. In some cases (the UFO Casebook) a large majority of the responses comprised direct answers to the questionnaire, and a rather friendly attitude. In other cases (Davidicke.com) a large majority of
the responders were negative, cynical, and refused to participate. In each instance, I had to respond to questions and criticism from the participants in order to assure them that my motives were not surreptitious – and in order to generate some interest in taking part in the survey.

The overall level of response was lower than expected. In total, 42 individuals responded to the survey, of which 19 decided to do so by answering the questions in the questionnaire, while the remaining 23 either gave their reasons for not participating, or basically responded negatively to the whole idea of such a survey.

Table 1. Who were the responders?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of responders.</th>
<th>42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responders who decided to participate.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responders who actively declined participation.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before analysing the responses themselves, it might be useful to take a closer look at the very people who decided to respond to the questionnaire. Whether they were long term users who have written copious amounts of material on their forums, or perhaps newcomers and neophytes eager to share their opinions with whomever, all responders were subjected to a background check.

At first glance, it is very difficult to distinguish any meaningful pattern in the types of users who responded to the questionnaire. Apparently, the majority (12 out of 19) of responders were experienced users, with a large number of posts (over 500). Most of them had written several thousand posts and have been participating in the community for several (usually 3-4) years. That division, however, does not tell the whole story. There is a correlation between the number of posts and the seniority of the users and the sincerity of their responses, as well as their willingness to respond. Those users who had a large number of posts and have been participating in the community for a longer period of time were more eager to respond in an exhaustive way. Their answers were also more positive towards the community. Even if they actively declined participation in the poll, they did so courteously and gave non-combative reasons, such as protection of their anonymity. Those, however, who had a much shorter experience in the community, or a significantly lower number of posts, reacted differently. One type of reaction was a very negative manner of answering the questions. They evidently wanted to dissociate themselves from the community, criticizing it and presenting themselves as more rational than the average community members. In some ways, this might be a valid claim, as such controversial forums and ideologies attract sceptics who often have a very combative attitude, challenging the claims of the community. Examples of such interactions could be found on every forum analysed in this paper. Another form of reaction from that group of users was mockery of the questionnaire, often giving blatantly untrue, exaggerated, or stereotypical answers. I have decided to include them in this analysis because they reflect the negative image of “outsiders” and the type of antagonistic reactions that they display when confronted by “others”. The third mode of reacting from that group of users was downright aggression, insinuation, and
discouraging others from participating in the poll, which was characterised as a form of infiltrating their forum by some nefarious, unidentified entity.

While a large variety of users responded to the questionnaire, two major groups could be identified: the group of senior users, who responded most positively or at least in a neutral manner; and a second group comprised of sceptics, who either felt no association with the community, or who responded aggressively, utilised irony and mockery, and/or felt threatened by the questionnaire posted on their forum by an “outsider”.

**Reasons for not responding**

The 23 users who actively declined to participate in the poll obviously had their own reasons for doing so, and decided to voice them. Those reasons might be important in understanding not only their state of mind, but also the general spirit of the forum, and the prevailing ideas.

The reasons given for not participating can be divided into two categories. One is either a concern for privacy and a general dislike of questionnaires. Those users expressed concern for privacy issues, questioning whether their anonymity could be protected effectively. Others verbalized a dislike in participating in questionnaires in general, or questionnaires of that sort. Some even suggested other forms of polling, for example adding a check-box using the forum engine, or using an outside polling service. While this could be considered legitimate advice, such techniques would have made it impossible to conduct qualitative studies and receive more detailed and in-depth answers, which was the case with the questionnaire. Interest in protecting one’s anonymity online should be viewed as a legitimate concern as well. Additionally, some people would prefer their views remain private, regardless of whether they concern the prospect of civilisation ending in a particular year, or the advantages of having a dog as a pet. Such concerns and wishes should be respected.

The second group, however, had entirely different motives for their declining participation in the questionnaire. Their reasons were grounded in a conviction that my motives as a researcher were somewhat suspect. Some suggested I might be part of an effort to gather personal data about them. They did not specify any particular agency or government that I might be representing; nevertheless, the implication seemed obvious that I was regarded as a threat. More often, however, it was implied that the research was aiming at discrediting the forum, the community, or particular users. This suggests that those users either fear or have encountered the above mentioned attitudes, which, when taking into consideration the extremity of their views, might be a valid concern. Criticism and scepticism, however, do not necessarily constitute ridicule and mockery, and certainly cannot be equated with invigilation by an hostile governmental agency. This attitude signifies an issue that was discussed previously, namely, a certain hostility towards the “other” and to “outsiders”, combined with a lack of comfort with challenging ideas and criticism.

To illustrate the above discussed points, it might be useful to present and analyse particular examples of declining answers from the users. One user wrote: “why don’t you just forget the answers and jump straight to the conclusion you would do anyway” (original spelling and grammar has been preserved in all quotations). This indicates suspicion, as well as a conclusion already reached
upon seeing the questionnaire, which is an interesting, as well as an obvious, contradiction. “[Y] ou’re going to create a lot of suspicion with that question” asserts another user, showing a suspicion of the “other”, “outsiders” who inquire about the nature of their community. Perhaps the most eloquent representation of those concerns was voiced by a member of the 2012 forum:

I’m all-too-familiar with college theses and how they are used to advance one’s personal agenda, sometimes for salutary purposes, and other times simply to deride. [...] I often read articles where those who express interest in the year 2012, and all the hype surrounding it, are regarded as nut-cases, which is absurd, of course, but the pejorative flows like insecticide on a wasp’s nest anyway.

Examination of the declining answers, along with examples of the responses presented in here, reveals a great deal about the general atmosphere of the forums. It suggests that, while some users were willing and honest enough to take part in the poll, others, especially less experienced members, viewed the questionnaire as a threat. That animosity, as discussed previously, demonstrates a general dislike of those outside the community, whether seen as “unwilling to see the truth” or as hostile agents of antagonistic interests. However, it is only fair to note that any fringe group is prone to harsh ridicule from outsiders, and negative reactions are often well justified.

**Quantitative analysis**

Table 2 below presents the number and types of responses obtained for each question.

Unfortunately, due to smaller participation than expected, the raw data is rather noisy. Still, patterns do emerge. For instance, though a few people feel some special relationship with other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Answer</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that your relationship with other participants of this forum is intimate and special?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel a desire for the companionship of other participants of this forum?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you interested in being on this forum as frequently as reasonably possible?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel a sense of mutuality in your relationship with other participants of this forum?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know and support the needs of your discussion partners on this forum?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
participants of their communities and desire their companionship, the vast majority wish to spend as much time as possible within them. This seems to be a blatant contradiction since the whole point of those communities is companionship with other members. It does, however, correspond with the results of questions 5 and 6. Less than a third express a desire for intimacy or the awareness of the needs of other members of the community. I would attribute that result to a general lack of interest in intimacy and close-tie relationships, rather than a shortcoming of virtual communities as such. It is not the case that every social community in the “real” world is warm, intimate, and supportive, as opposed to the cold and harsh environment of the Internet.

Another curious result is the denial of any relevance of the ideas of the community to one’s identity. How could that be the case? Even calling oneself a mother (a biological fact) or a bricklayer (a professional duty) denotes a certain identity. How could one call oneself a UFO believer or a doomsday foreteller, and yet deny its relevance to ones identity? It is my conviction that this is only possible through a lack of understanding of that connection, rather than an admission of reality.

Conclusions

The Internet, contrary to popular perception, is not a homogeneous entity. It is a decentralised, varied and practically anarchic environment (in the Greek sense of the word). It relies on servers, cables, and antennae, which goes without saying, yet it is predominantly a world of evolutionarily spreading ideas – memes. It is an entirely imagined community, perhaps more so than nation states, because the Internet has a much larger population that does not operate on a face-to-face basis. This is not a damning statement, though. It goes to show that the World Wide Web is very similar to the “real” world, comprised of a plethora of imagined communities. In other aspects, the need for intimacy, warmth, the presence of an “Us and Them” mentality, the Internet and the offline world are surprisingly alike. The key characteristic that differentiates those realms is that while memes are

| Do you have the sense or evidence that intimacy is bolstered by shared social characteristics such as gender/socio-economic status/lifestyle etc? | 5 | 3 | 11 |
| Would you say that the ideas central to this forum play a significant role in forming your identity? | 4 | 0 | 15 |
| Would you call yourself a UFO believer/2012 Doomsday believer? If not, is there any other name that you would use in association with the central ideas of this forum? | 12 | 3 | 4 |
| Do you think that you identify with this group more than with the society/nation you are a member of? | 6 | 2 | 11 |
| For how long have you been an active participant of this forum? | Under 1 year | 1-3 years | Over 3 years |
a part of offline culture, they are a predominant building block of cyberspace. Also, the possibilities for distraction and social anonymity are much greater in cyberspace, as we can hide behind the screen without revealing too much of ourselves; at least, that is our perception.

The theoretical discussion alongside the study conducted for this paper serves as a basis for my support for the claim that “there is nothing virtual about virtual reality”. The possibilities for strong ties, intimate relationships, and influencing one’s identity exist, even if not acknowledged by the subjects of the study. It may seem that we have replicated our culture, or rather many cultures online, and we are unaware of how similar they are to what we have in the “real” world. Flashing screens, digits, and icons may cloud our judgment, but not the reality that the virtual is synonymous to real.

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Abstract. Thomas Hardy’s novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* provides a stark contrast in how the characters project their *face* (Goffman 1967) and how they seek approval from others. Such a contrast can be analysed in terms of Bakhtin’s polyphony – the many voices found in a text which includes the author’s portrayal of his protagonists and how they interact with each other. In order to highlight this contrast and its way of coming across, I examine how three key characters in the novel, Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Frank Troy and William Boldwood, present themselves interpersonally. I use the concept of linguistic (im)politeness to demonstrate how the protagonists try to further themselves, especially in their pursuit of Bathsheba Everdene. I argue that a linguistic (im)politeness approach can also be applied to other novels of Thomas Hardy and indeed to a wider range of literature.

*Keywords*: impoliteness, polyphony, face, Thomas Hardy.

Introduction

Traditional rational social behaviour is pitted against the discursive and evolving construction of relationships in *Far from the Madding Crowd* as protagonists present contrasting conceptions of their *self* (Cupach & Metts 1994: 3) or what Goffman terms *face* (1967). *Face* potentially reflects three aspects of interpersonal interaction: how a participant wants to come across, how a participant interacts with others and how a participant expects to be treated by others. An author has the choice of conveying the *face* that his/her protagonists want to project and highlight how they seek to come across or, alternatively, he/she can let the characters speak for themselves and claim their own *face*. The latter choice reflects Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony as the protagonists find their own voice and thus enabling “characters and narrator speak on equal terms” (Vice 1997: 6). Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* offers a wide range of contexts for studying face and polyphony.

The concept of *face* is intimately related to linguistic (im)politeness. (Im)politeness, the accepted term for referring to politeness and impoliteness, is a key concept and refers to those strategies that aim to enhance, preserve, undermine or damage the *face* of other interactants. Whether intentional or unintentional, (im)politeness involves interpersonal work as interactants construct, develop, maintain or terminate a given relationship.
A writer can allow the protagonists to engage in (im)politeness and facework – “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face” (Goffman 1967: 12) by allowing them to speak for themselves (without authorial interference) or he or she can explain the characters’ motives, pretensions and objectives to his/her reader. In this paper, the concepts of face, polyphony and linguistic (im)politeness are examined to see whether they help the reader understand both authorial intent and protagonists’ motives in the novel.

**Positioning the novel**

The novel’s title supposedly portends a quiet pastoral narrative, but as Kramer argues “[t]he opening chapters of the first of the major Wessex novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), present a pastoral world and simultaneously invalidate the myth” (1979: 20). Any possible idea of rustic tranquillity is quickly undermined by Bathsheba’s rejection of Oak’s marriage proposal, the dramatic loss of his flock of sheep and his subsequent unemployment. Also referring to possibly dashed reader expectations, Nemesvari notes that “a novel like *Far From the Madding Crowd*, with its allusive title and early, literal representation of a shepherd and flock, prepares its audience for a pastoral idyll but then juxtaposes this with the harsh materialism of agricultural economics and a sensational love triangle resulting in murder and madness” (2009: 102). Focusing on changing economic realities, Page argues that “the contrast is between worlds and epochs, the Industrial Age represented by the steam-train, the Agrarian Age that has preceded it: in other words it embodies an idea as well as an image” (2001: 111). On a symbolic level, Oak represents tradition and stability whilst Troy reflects change, manipulation and new ways of interacting.

At an interpersonal level, *Far from the Madding Crowd* portrays contrasting norms and patterns of behaviour as Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Frank Troy and William Boldwood attempt to woo Bathsheba Everdene. Regan argues that:

> [a]t one level, the narrative structure of *Far from the Madding Crowd* seems very bold and simple. Three suitors compete for the affections of Bathsheba Everdene: a shepherd, a gentleman farmer, and a soldier. The narrative progresses according to three aspirations of each of these lovers, and much of the drama in the novel ensues from the overlapping and competing interests of the three, as well as from Bathsheba’s fluctuating responses. (2009: 249)

Therefore, the whole plot of *Far from the Madding Crowd* reflects a continual sea of change. Regan goes on to argue that “this stark outline, however, is given a highly elaborate design by the repeated emphasis on visual codes of conduct and by the shifting degrees of visual attention and discrimination with which the principal characters regard each other” (2009: 249). I wish to further pursue this idea of ‘codes of conduct’ by arguing that the suitors reflect three contrasting ways of presenting their face and interacting with others in terms of linguistic (im)politeness.
Putting on a good face

Before discussing ‘codes of conduct’ regarding key protagonists from *Far from the Madding Crowd*, I examine the concepts of *face*, *facework* and linguistic (im)politeness as part of a possible framework for understanding how Hardy himself describes and portrays the protagonists and also how they express themselves.

The term *face* is a key concept when trying to understand interpersonal behaviour. Goffman argues that in a given interaction a participant will act out a *line* “that is a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he [sic] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” (1967: 5). As participants express their view of the situation, they want to present themselves in a positive light which is achieved through *face* which Goffman argues:

> may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. (Goffman 1967: 5)

Participants want to establish a *face* that makes them ‘feel good’ as they seek support and approval from others which in the context of this paper means other protagonists in the novel. In contrast, if an interactant’s “ordinary expectations are not fulfilled, one expects that he will ‘feel bad’ or ‘feel hurt’” (Goffman 1967: 6). The concept of *face* therefore reflects an interactant’s identity in a given interaction as he/she attempts to come across in socially sanctioned ways. In a novel, this will often mean a character presenting himself or herself in a recognisably acceptable way to other characters and also to the reader and subsequently following established norms and patterns of behaviour. Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Frank Troy and William Boldwood, the three suitors in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, try to make a positive showing by highlighting their ‘approved social attributes’ especially in the eyes of Bathsheba Everdene, the object of their love.

Gabriel Oak projects himself as responsible and dependable. He is *self-effacing* as he quickly gives up his attempt to marry Bathsheba on hearing that she had other suitors: “I’m only an everyday sort of man, and my only chance was in being the first comer... Well, there’s no use in my waiting, for that was all I came about: so I’ll take myself off home” (Chapter 4). And, after being rejected by Bathsheba, he finally says “Then I’ll ask you no more” (Chapter 4).

In contrast, Boldwood is persistent and tries to project himself in a positive light:

> “I am now forty-one years old,” he went on. “I may have been called a confirmed bachelor, and I was a confirmed bachelor. I had never any views of myself as a husband in my earlier days, nor have I made any calculation on the subject since I have been older. But we all change, and my change, in this matter, came with seeing you. I have felt lately, more and more, that my present way of living is bad in every respect. Beyond all things, I want you as my wife.” (Chapter 19).
He attempts to make a good showing for himself as reflective and flexible by saying he is willing to change his lifestyle in order to accommodate a wife. His persistence continues throughout the novel through to his eventual killing of Troy. Meanwhile, Troy does not court in any conventional or expected way:

“I’ve seen a good many women in my time” continued the young man in a murmur, and more thoughtfully than hitherto, critically regarding her bent head at the same time; “but I’ve never seen a woman so beautiful as you. Take it or leave it – be offended or like it – I don’t care.” (Chapter 24)

Troy presents the *face* of someone who speaks their mind and supposedly does not care what the other person thinks about him. In reality, he very much cares as his *facework* is a carefully crafted strategy to entice his intended ‘victim’.

The process or result of *facework* may either help or undermine a character’s attempt to portray himself or herself in a positive light, as Shimanoff argues:

> facework may be defined as behaviors which establish, enhance, threaten, or diminish the images/identities of communicators. The images/identities of communicators have been linked to the basic needs of approval and autonomy (Brown and Levinson, 1978). Facework may be directed toward oneself or another. (1994: 159-160)

In the case of Oak, he diminishes his *face* by withdrawing from his pursuit of Bathsheba. Whilst only focusing on his own face, Boldwood persistently undermines Bathsheba’s face by only considering his needs rather than her feelings. Meanwhile, Troy focuses on the face of his victim making her feel special and consequently enhances his own face in her eyes. This politeness strategy has variously been described as face boosting acts (FBAs) (Bayraktaroğlu, 1991, 2001), intimacy enhancement (Aston, 1989), face enhancement (Sifianou, 1995) and rapport enhancement (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). They all roughly cover the same area of usage.

**Linguistic (im)politeness**

Linguistic (im)politeness is closely related to the concept of *face*, and Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that polite behaviour tries to avoid attacking the *face* of other interactants or refraining from face threatening acts (FTAs) (1987: 60). Lakoff (1973: 298) argues that there are rules of politeness for participants to follow (Don’t Impose; Give Options; and Make A feel good – be friendly) and Leech (1983) outlines maxims that should be adhered to such as those of Tact and Modesty. However, in this paper, politeness is studied from the point of view of expected and unexpected behaviour. Consequently, I adopt Watts’s (2003) terms: *politic* and *polite* behaviour. *Politic* reflects accepted forms and codes of conduct whilst *polite* behaviour reflects behaviour that goes beyond
expected behaviour. *Politic* behaviour is predictably courteous and respectful as can be seen in Oak’s abandonment of the idea of marrying Bathsheba as he complies with her wishes. In contrast, polite behaviour reflects the unexpected and reflects interpersonal risk-taking when interacting with others as reflected by Troy’s attempt to win over Bathsheba e.g. *Take it or leave it -- be offended or like it -- I don’t care* (Chapter 24). Watts distinguishes between *politic* and *polite* conduct in the following way:

linguistic behaviour which is perceived to be appropriate to the social constraints of the ongoing interaction, i.e. as non-salient, should be called *politic behaviour*. Linguistic behaviour which is perceived to be beyond what is expectable, i.e. salient behaviour, should be called *polite* or *impolite* depending on whether the behaviour itself tends towards the negative or positive end of the spectrum of politeness. (Watts 2003: 19)

Since linguistic (im)politeness is a way of initiating, advancing, upholding or ending a given relationship, interactants face choices regarding how they want to come across or be evaluated by others. They can follow pre-determined, stereotypical and appropriate norms of interaction as outlined by politic behaviour i.e. “that behaviour, linguistic and non-linguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction” (Watts 2003: 20). Such behaviour can be seen in Gabriel Oak’s conduct and his way of being and his actions reflect traditional norms and practices. In the following extract, Wotton contrasts Oak with Joseph, a farm worker:

It is with Oak that the reader identifies, Oak who here represents the voice of respectability, duty, the work ethic. He is the *responsible subject*, the centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for, his actions, who works by himself and wishes that Joseph would also show himself ‘a man of spirit.’ (1985: 66)

By contrast, polite behaviour “will therefore be behaviour beyond what is perceived to be appropriate to the ongoing social interaction, which says nothing about how members evaluate it” and “the definition implies that linguistic structures are not, *per definitionem*, inherently polite” (Watts 2003: 21). For instance, Troy takes a risk when courting Bathsheba with his outspoken, potentially rude and discourteous language which may be evaluated as either polite or impolite by her. On the surface, Bathsheba appears to see Troy’s behaviour as impolite but immediately asks Liddy, her trusted servant, for information about him.

There are occasions when girls like Bathsheba will put up with a great deal of unconventional behaviour. When they want to be praised, which is often, when they want to be mastered, which is sometimes; and when they want no nonsense, which is seldom. Just now the first feeling was in the ascendant with Bathsheba, with a dash of the second. (Chapter 24)
Just as Troy shows, Watts’ category of polite behaviour can come across as impolite, e.g. “I’ve never seen a woman so beautiful as you. Take it or leave it – be offended or like it – I don’t care”. Whilst complimenting Bathsheba on her beauty and presumably wanting her to feel good, Troy displays impoliteness by saying that he does not really care how she feels. Boldwood also demonstrates that politic can also have the same impoliteness effect, especially as he relentlessly pursues Bathsheba after she turns down his offer of marriage:

“Say then, that you don’t absolutely refuse. Do not quite refuse?”

“I can do nothing. I cannot answer.
“I may speak to you again on the subject?”

“Yes.”

“I may think of you?”

“Yes, I suppose you may think of me.”

“And hope to obtain you?”

“No -- do not hope! Let us go on.”

“I will call upon you again to-morrow.”

“No -- please not. Give me time.”

“Yes -- I will give you any time,” he said earnestly and gratefully. “I am happier now.”

(Chapter 19)

Whilst following the protocol of courting with “I may speak to you again on the subject?, I may think of you?” and “I will give you any time”, Boldwood comes across as face-threatening and potentially impolite. This can especially be seen when he renews his attempt to marry Bathsheba after Troy’s disappearance on a beach on the south coast and despite her reluctance to admit that her husband may be dead:

“Bathsheba, suppose you had real complete proof that you are what, in fact, you are -- a widow -- would you repair the old wrong to me by marrying me?”

“I cannot say. I shouldn’t yet, at any rate.”

“But you might at some future time of your life?”

“Oh yes, I might at some time.”

“Well, then, do you know that without further proof of any kind you may marry again in about six years from the present -- subject to nobody’s objection or blame?”

(Chapter 51)

Boldwood’s superficial demonstration of politeness, e.g. “you might at some future time”, indirectness, e.g. “would you repair the old wrong”, and conjecture, e.g. “suppose you” hides his underlying insensitiveness to Bathsheba’s loss of her husband and Boldwood’s self-serving motivation. His
supposed *politic* behaviour demonstrates, as Watts argues, how polite behaviour can be evaluated as rude:

Positively marked politic behaviour is open to an overt interpretation as polite. Hence only a relatively small subsection of politic behaviour is likely to be explicitly evaluated by participants as ‘polite’. Marked behaviour, however, can be noticed in two different ways. It may be perceived as negative either if it is open to an interpretation as impolite (or as downright rude), or if it is perceived as over-polite, i.e. both kinds of negatively marked non-politic behaviour tend towards similar kinds of affective reaction on the part of co-participants.

(Watts 2005: xliii- xlv)

To reiterate, Boldwood’s use of formulaic politic language such as “*suppose you*” and “*but you might*” thinly veil his true intentions, i.e. pressuring Bathsheba into remarrying.

Just as behaviour may be categorised as being politic and polite, I will argue that behaviour may also be impolitic and impolite within Watts’s framework. Impolitic behaviour reflects explicit and expected ways of being impolite. Meanwhile impolite patterns of interacting can be categorised as unexpected and salient examples of impoliteness or rudeness.

**Polyphony**

*Face* can be seen as individual possession or a negotiated position as interactants support each other in the way they want to come across. In the process they may lose a degree of independence as they accommodate to others. Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony restores individuality and independence to the protagonists: “The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order” (Bakhtin 1984: 21). The author has a choice when conveying linguistic (im)politeness, especially when it is analysed in terms of politic and polite behaviour. He or she can speak for the protagonists and explain their motives or they can be allowed to speak for (and between) themselves. Bakhtin describes this choice in terms of polyphony: polyphony “refers to the ‘many-voicedness’ of texts in which characters and narrator speak on equal terms” (Vice 1997: 6). Therefore, a reader of *Far from the Madding Crowd* needs to balance Hardy’s authorial voice and the voices of the protagonists. Morson and Emerson argue that polyphony is Bakhtin’s “most original and counterintuitive concept” (1997: 258) as “the reader is asked to engage directly with the ideas of characters, much as the reader engages with the ideas of the author” (1997: 259). Therefore, polyphony potentially liberates the reader from only following the writer’s interpretation of the text and allows him/her to construct his/her own understanding free from the monologic narrative of the author.

The novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* may not be considered to be a polyphonic novel since the author as narrator attempts to maintain full control of the story or, as Mallett argues, “Hardy’s
narrator typically retains the telling voice of the traditional story” (2004: 10). However, the protagonists’ voices, to varying degrees, come through in their interactions with each other. Therefore, polyphony may still emerge as the reader navigates his/her way through the author’s interpretation of events and the actions and dialogues of the characters themselves or, as Bakhtin argues: “novels usually present completely final arguments summarized from the author’s standpoint (if there are arguments at all) [...] But any novel is generally filled with dialogic overtones (not always with its heroes, of course)” (1986: 112).

Therefore a novel is filled with different characters’ revelations regarding their motives, their perspectives and their justifications. To fully appreciate the characters’ motivations in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the reader needs to understand, for instance, the primordial importance of Troy’s undying love for Fanny, who dies carrying his baby. In the same vein, Boldwood’s obsession with Bathsheba can only fully be understood in terms of the total abandonment of the economic well-being of his farm whereas before, his whole character was built on “dignity” (Chapter 12) since he “was tenant of what was called Little Weatherbury Farm, and his person was the nearest approach to aristocracy that this remoter quarter of the parish could boast of” (Chapter 18).

Bakhtin would argue that polyphony goes much further than just revealing the author’s descriptions vis-à-vis characters’ own version of events since it provides a “unity of higher order” (Morson and Emerson 1997: 261). Morson and Emerson add that

we might explain [polyphonic unity] this way: because each character is in a position to the author of a monologic work, each could in principle supply a monologic order to the whole. Hence the polyphonic unity of all these characters is a unity of potential unities, which is to say, is unity of a second (or higher) order. In this sense, the “unity of the event” is a unity of co-being (1997: 261)

Therefore polyphony is not an optional extra which provides an alternative reading of a text. It is a fundamental part of appreciating and valuing the novel. The author and the characters, whether they be heroes or villains, all contribute to the overall cohesiveness and coherence of the text.

**Codes of conduct**

The reader is faced with two codes of conduct, *politic* and *polite*, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* which are displayed by the author and in the interaction between the protagonists. The reader engages directly with the (im)politeness of the protagonists, just as much as he or she does with the author’s descriptions of (im)politeness. *Far from the Madding Crowd* reflects both Hardy’s perceptions of Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Frank Troy and William Boldwood and the protagonists’ own inner speech and thoughts. Hardy maintains full control of the story and his voice ‘tells’ the story but his characters display their own thought processes.
Oak: politic behaviour

Hardy strongly underscores Gabriel Oak's face and says that he should be seen as ‘a young man of sound judgment, easy motions, proper dress, and general good character’ (Chapter 1). However, this description is possibly contradicted later on in the chapter, when Hardy physically describes him as follows:

He had just reached the time of life at which “young” is ceasing to be the prefix of “man” in speaking of one. He was at the brightest period of masculine growth, for his intellect and his emotions were clearly separated: he had passed the time during which the influence of youth indiscriminately mingles them in the character of impulse, and he had not yet arrived at the stage wherein they become united again, in the character of prejudice, by the influence of a wife and family. In short, he was twenty-eight, and a bachelor. (Chapter 1)

Whether Oak should be described as a young man or not, he is portrayed as sound, proper and guarded. In terms of face, Oak does not appear to be interested in gaining the approval of others since he speaks his mind throughout the novel and does not mind upsetting others. For instance, he tells off Joseph Poorgrass, Jan Coggan and Mark Clark for getting drunk instead of making sure that Fanny Robin’s corpse is taken directly to Weatherbury for burial:

"Upon my soul, I'm ashamed of you; 'tis disgraceful, Joseph, disgraceful!” said Gabriel, indignantly. “Coggan, you call yourself a man, and don't know better than this.” (Chapter 42)

Page describes him as

a working man who will turn out to be the hero of the story, but this time he is presented as a solitary figure rather than a member of a group (2001: 41 - 42).

At the same time, Page argues that Hardy’s description of Oak reflects a stereotypical character:

Though Gabriel is depicted as an individual, there is in this passage a strong sense of community[...] He is defined partly in terms of his status as a farmer, with the social and economic implications carried by that status; this is a point of considerable importance since Gabriel’s fortunes in the course of the novel are to fluctuate dramatically and his status and occupation will undergo dramatic changes. (Page 2001: 44 - 45)

The question then arises concerning what Oak stands for. As Page indicates, Oak’s usefulness throughout the novel is largely connected with his knowledge, skills and experience of farming rather than in any ability at successfully undertaking interpersonal relationships. This assertion
can be seen in his original marriage proposal as he calls at Bathsheba’s house and talks to her aunt, Mrs Hurst:

“Yes, I will wait,” said Gabriel, sitting down. “The lamb isn’t really the business I came about, Mrs. Hurst. In short, I was going to ask her if she’d like to be married.”

“And were you indeed?”

“Yes. Because if she would, I should be very glad to marry her. D’y know if she’s got any other young man hanging about her at all?”

(Chapter 4)

Oak is only willing to do the proper and correct thing if she has no other suitors. This is a display of politic behaviour which can be seen throughout the novel since “life and work for most of the characters embody continuity and tradition” (Page 2001: 85).

However, the reader may decide that Gabriel does not always conform to the politic behaviour that Hardy carefully projects. His interactions with other characters do not always reflect the face that the author intended. Oak occasionally engages in Watts’ polite unexpected and salient behaviour. For instance, when he playfully hints about marriage with Bathsheba

“My name is Gabriel Oak.”

“And mine isn’t. You seem fond of yours in speaking it so decisively, Gabriel Oak.”

“You see, it is the only one I shall ever have, and I must make the most of it.”

“I always think mine sounds odd and disagreeable.”

“I should think you might soon get a new one.”

“Mercy! -- how many opinions you keep about you concerning other people, Gabriel Oak.”

“Well, Miss -- excuse the words -- I thought you would like them. But I can’t match you, I know, in napping out my mind upon my tongue. I never was very clever in my inside. But I thank you.

Come, give me your hand.”

(Chapter 3)

Oak can be seen to be playing with language e.g. “it is the only one I shall ever have” and hints at her possibly getting married i.e. “I should think you might soon get a new one” and breaks politic behaviour by saying “Come, give me your hand”.

In certain passages, Gabriel comes across in very rustic ways as opposed to one that shows ‘proper dress’. For instance, in the following dialogue which takes place at the Malthouse, Oak, who has just been hired as the new shepherd on Bathsheba’s farm, gets to know the other farm labourers, including Jacob Smallbury:

“A clane cup for the shepherd,” said the maltster commandingly.

“No -- not at all,” said Gabriel, in a reproving tone of considerateness. “I never fuss about dirt in its pure state, and when I know what sort it is.” Taking the mug he drank an inch or more from the
depth of its contents, and duly passed it to the next man. “I wouldn’t think of giving such trouble to neighbours in washing up when there’s so much work to be done in the world already.” continued Oak in a moister tone, after recovering from the stoppage of breath which is occasioned by pulls at large mugs.
“A right sensible man,” said Jacob.

(Chapter 8)

Gabriel conveys a practical and unassuming attitude regarding politeness and interacting with others. He does not maintain his sense of decorum and demureness that characterise his behaviour in much of the novel. He is quite willing to drink from a dirty cup that the others are drinking from rather than from a ‘clane’ one. His down-to-earth behaviour gains approval from Jacob, who calls Gabriel ‘a right sensible man’.

**Boldwood: impolitic behaviour**

Boldwood is another loner in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and, like Oak, Hardy projects him as aloof and distant:

> He saw no absurd sides to the follies of life, and thus, though not quite companionable in the eyes of merry men and scoffers, and those to whom all things show life as a jest, he was not intolerable to the earnest and those acquainted with grief. (Chapter 18)

Hardy portrays Boldwood as someone who can easily become focused on one desire: “His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was always hit mortally, or he was missed” (Chapter 18). Indeed, the only object of his desire is Bathsheba whom he relentlessly pursues and who becomes his obsession which eventually puts him in prison and “confinement during her Majesty’s pleasure” (Chapter 55).

Boldwood employs both politic and polite behavioural strategies to try to achieve his objectives. As Watts points out, politic and polite behaviour may be linguistic and non-linguistic. Boldwood engages in a range of non-linguistic strategies to win over Bathsheba including trying to bribe Troy into not marrying Bathsheba and his eventual murder of the Sergeant when he surprisingly returns after being presumed drowned, thus thwarting Boldwood’s wedding plans. He tries to bribe Troy in the following way:

“So all I ask is, don’t molest her any more. Marry Fanny. I’ll make it worth your while.”

“How will you?”

“I’ll pay you well now, I’ll settle a sum of money upon her, and I’ll see that you don’t suffer from poverty in the future. I’ll put it clearly. Bathsheba is only playing with you: you are too poor for her as I said; so give up wasting your time about a great match you’ll never make for a moderate
and rightful match you may make to-morrow; take up your carpet-bag, turn about, leave Weatherbury now, this night, and you shall take fifty pounds with you. Fanny shall have fifty to enable her to prepare for the wedding, when you have told me where she is living, and she shall have five hundred paid down on her wedding-day."

(Chapter 34)

Boldwood engages in direct and unambiguous (bald on record) impoliteness which Culpeper defines as impoliteness “in the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way possible” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69) (1996: 355). Boldwood attacks Troy’s “reputation, prestige and self-esteem” (Culpeper 2011: 24) which Culpeper closely associates with offence and loss of face.

So whilst Boldwood appears to reflect politic behaviour, his interaction with other protagonists reveals that he is willing to use a wide range of impolitic and impolite resources to achieve his goals.

**Troy: dangerous politeness**

Hardy claims that “idiosyncrasy and vicissitude had combined to stamp Sergeant Troy as an exceptional being” (Chapter 25) as he paints a negative picture of Bathsheba’s future husband who seems to be constantly changing course:

Troy was full of activity, but his activities were less of a locomotive than a vegetative nature; and, never being based upon any original choice of foundation or direction, they were exercised on whatever object chance might place in their way. Hence, whilst he sometimes reached the brilliant in speech because that was spontaneous, he fell below the commonplace in action, from inability to guide incipient effort.

(Chapter 25)

Troy’s casual ways also appear to extend to his treatment of women:

He had been known to observe casually that in dealing with womankind the only alternative to flattery was cursing and swearing. There was no third method. “Treat them fairly, and you are a lost man,” he would say.

(Chapter 25)

Just as Boldwood uses politic and polite behavioural strategies to achieve his objective, Troy uses (im)politeness to satisfy himself and to not cater to the needs of his women: Fanny and Bathsheba.

With regards to stereotypes, Troy contrasts strongly with Oak: Oak, the farmer and shepherd, represents tradition and predictability. Troy, the soldier, reflects the opposite: aggression and change. As Page argues, “the glamorous and somewhat exotic figure of Sergeant Troy is a disturbing factor. But at the outset the emphasis is on stability and conformity” (2001: 45). Troy upsets this emphasis with his demonstrations’ of military prowess and seductive way with words.
Troy also represents a different way of engaging in social relations and boosting the face of others (Bayraktaroğlu, 1991, 2001) as can be seen in the following excerpt when his military attire becomes caught up in Bathsheba’s dress and he tries to untangle his spurs:

His unravelling went on, but it nevertheless seemed coming to no end. She looked at him again.

"Thank you for the sight of such a beautiful face!" said the young sergeant, without ceremony.

She coloured with embarrassment. "‘Twas un-willingly shown," she replied, stiffly, and with as much dignity -- which was very little -- as she could infuse into a position of captivity.

“I like you the better for that incivility, miss,” he said.

“I should have liked -- I wish -- you had never shown yourself to me by intruding here!” She pulled again, and the gathers of her dress began to give way like liliputian musketry.

“I deserve the chastisement your words give me. But why should such a fair and dutiful girl have such an aversion to her father’s sex?”

“Go on your way, please.”

“What, Beauty, and drag you after me? Do but look; I never saw such a tangle!”

(Chapter 24)

Troy’s use of language contrasts heavily with the self-effacement of Oak and Boldwood’s direct face-threatening act i.e. bald on record impoliteness. He can react to (im)politic and (im)polite remarks through face boosting acts (Bayraktaroğlu, 1991, 2001), which aim to make the addressee feel good. For instance, Troy deftly deals with Bathsheba’s reprimands and reproaches by employing humour (e.g. “Thank you for the sight of such a beautiful face” when Bathsheba cannot untangle herself), language play (e.g. the use of drag and tangle), and enjoyment (“I like you the better for that incivility, miss”).

In one sense Troy adds a breath of fresh air and a certain degree of comic relief to the staid and predictable interactions of the protagonists of Far from the Madding Crowd but it turns out to be a dangerous and destructive breath of fresh air.

Conclusion

An understanding of face offers the reader a way of appreciating how Hardy as the author and the protagonists, such as Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Troy, and Boldwood attempt to engage in interpersonal relationships in Far from the Madding Crowd. In projecting their face, the protagonists demonstrate how they want to come across in the novel and they interact with others. Linguistic (im)politeness offers one way to appreciating how the protagonists project their face and undertake facework in Far from the Madding Crowd and can be described in terms of politic and polite behaviour: politic representing ordinary manners and conduct and polite reflecting behaviour that goes beyond the expected. The analysis shows how the protagonists use politic and polite behaviour to come across
in their own way and to achieve their interpersonal aims: the courting of Bathsheba Oak and Boldwood reflects politic behaviour and gives each man different results; Troy, on the other hand, uses polite and potentially impolite behaviour to win Bathsheba's hand.

An understanding of both politic and polite and impolitic and impolite behaviour allows the reader to examine not only the author's portrayal of the characters but, through polyphony, to examine for himself or herself how the protagonists interact with one another. This approach helps the reader develop multiple interpretations of the novel. As Regan argues:

what Hardy's novel repeatedly suggests is the fallible, tentative nature of human perception. This abiding interest in multiple perspectives and different angles of vision has a powerful impact on Hardy's understanding of what constitutes realism. Instead of an authoritative, single-minded account of what is true or real, we are much more likely to encounter a conflicting and competing series of impressions (2009: 249).

This paper has tried to demonstrate that the author may have extreme difficulty in controlling how the reader interprets events and the characters involved in them. The reader will often make his/her own judgements and therefore reach his/her own conclusions regarding how the protagonists of the novel, Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Frank Troy and William Boldwood construct, develop, maintain or even destroy their interpersonal relationships.

**References:**


Abstract: The article discusses the controversy surrounding the 1988 publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* from today's perspective, drawing on the writer's memoir *Joseph Anton*. It provides an overview of Rushdie's career, a brief résumé of the events that followed the Ayatollah Khomeini's edict calling for the murder of the novelist, as well as a critical assessment of Rushdie's latest book. Published in September 2012, the memoir fails to shed any new light on the debate concerning freedom of expression and a writer's social responsibilities. It mostly focuses on the singular plight of a novelist forced to live in hiding. The opportunity to bring out some important links between politics, literature and history, which Rushdie's autobiographical account might have provided, seems to have been wasted.


February 2013, the time of writing these words, marks the twenty-fourth anniversary of the *fatwa* – Khomeini's proclamation of a death sentence on Salman Rushdie, the British writer of Indian origin. Almost a quarter of a century has passed since the dispatch of this “unfunny Valentine” from “the lethal old man dying in his room” (Rushdie 2012:11), the news that hit the headlines in 1989 and condemned an active writer to a life in hiding, transforming him into a state-protected individual constantly surrounded by police officers of the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police. A period of twenty-four years in the life of a man counts as a long time, but in the history and development of humanity it may seem a mere trice. And yet the world of 2013, in which the memory of 9/11 is still fresh, and in which the word ‘jihad’ has entered the everyday lexicon for good, is a different world from that of 1989. Militant Islam, al-Qaida activities and the social unrest in a number of Arab countries have become daily occurrences. The year 1989 has gone down in the annals of history as the climactic moment of the downfall of communism and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, but for Rushdie it was the year when his private world collapsed. From today's perspective the lot of a single author may demand less attention than the upheavals in Central Europe and their social and political consequences, while the growth of religious fundamentalism and nationalism most certainly continues to invite serious discussion. Yet the 2012 publication of *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, Rushdie’s autobiographical record of his life under the *fatwa*, rekindles the ashes of what became known as the Rushdie Affair, calling for reflection and a brief résumé of facts and opinions, especially in the new socio-political context.

The phrase “Rushdie Affair” – written either with or without quotation marks – is a popular term which refers to the controversy over the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and its aftermath:
violent mass protests, heated public debates on the issues of freedom of expression and the nature of blasphemy, attempted and conducted killings, Muslim anger and wounded assertiveness. As both Rauwerda (2008) and Pipes (2003) stress, for the first time in the modern era a government (the political leader and head of state of Iran) called for the killing of a private individual who was citizen of a foreign country. For the first time a work of fiction caused an international diplomatic crisis and the official severing of international relations. And for the first time Muslim rage resulted in such large-scale public rallies, fire-bombed bookshops, and innocent civilians attacked, seriously injured or killed. “The Rushdie controversy raised important questions about the many millions of Muslims now living in the West and their relationship to the civilization around them” (Pipes 2003: 16). Some of these questions have remained unanswered.

Salman Rushdie: life and work

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay (today known as Mumbai) in 1947, the year when India became independent, the only son in a Muslim family, the eldest among three sisters. Islam did not play a significant role in the children’s upbringing or education. As he recalls in Joseph Anton, he hardly ever participated in religious ceremonies and never learnt to pray. Recitations in Arabic were for him “mumbling” unknown words in a language he could not speak (2012: 8). In a sketchy portrait of his family presented in the memoir, what comes to the fore is the father’s alcoholism with bouts of “unprovoked, red-eyed rage” (2012: 21) and his most cherished gift for future generations – a changed surname, his father’s own idea and invention. The name ‘Rushdie’ comes from ‘Ibn Rushd’, the name of the twelfth century Muslim philosopher of Spanish-Arab background who translated the works of Aristotle. The old Indian name of ‘Din Khaliqi Dehlavi’ was changed to ‘Rushdie’ when Salman was still a child. The real significance of this fact was understood by the boy much later. In the opinion of his son, Rushdie senior was “a true scholar of Islam who was entirely lacking in religious belief”, and “a godless man who knew and thought a great deal about God” (2012: 23). The name was chosen “because he respected Ibn Rushd for being at the forefront of the rationalist argument against Islamic literalism in his time” (2012: 23).

In 1961, at thirteen, Salman Rushdie was sent to Rugby, a prestigious English public school, where he felt profoundly sad and alienated. He recalls:

At an English boarding school in the early 1960s […] there were three bad mistakes you could make, but if you made only two of the three you could be forgiven. The mistakes were: to be foreign; to be clever; and to be bad at games […]. He made all three mistakes. He was foreign, clever, non-sportif. And as a result his years were, for the most part, unhappy, though he did well academically and left Rugby with the abiding feeling of having been wonderfully well taught (2012: 26-27).
It was at Rugby that Rushdie fully rejected faith. When he writes about it, as he does in *Joseph Anton* and in *Imaginary Homelands*, the tone is invariably jocular or even flippant:

> In the matter of God: the last traces of belief were erased from his mind by his powerful dislike of the architecture of Rugby Chapel […] ‘What kind of God,’ he wondered, ‘would live in a house as ugly as that?’ An instant later the answer presented itself: obviously no self-respecting God would live there – in fact, obviously, there was no God, not even a God with bad taste in architecture. By the end of the Latin lesson he was a hard-line atheist, and to prove it, he marched determinedly into the school tuckshop during break and bought himself a ham sandwich. The flesh of the swine passed his lips for the first time that day, and the failure of the Almighty to strike him dead with a thunderbolt proved to him what he had long suspected: that there was nobody up there with thunderbolts to hurl (2012: 31-32).

Then came his studies at King’s College, Cambridge, his father’s old alma mater. Initially, he was very reluctant to leave India and return to the UK and pleaded with his father “not to send him to Cambridge, even though he had already won his place. He didn’t want to go back to England […] to spend more years of his life among all those cold, unfriendly fish” (2012: 35). There were days when he would sit alone in his room and weep in loneliness. But studying history proved fulfilling. In the academic year of 1967-8, King’s College offered among its special subjects in history one entitled “Muhammad, the Rise of Islam and the Early Caliphate”. College regulations were such that a subject could not be cancelled even if there was only one student who wished to take it up. Rushdie was this single student and, under the supervision of Professor Arthur Hibbert, embarked on a journey of intellectual discovery and analytical study of the birth of Islam and the life of the Prophet. After graduation he worked briefly in advertising as a freelance copy-writer.

Rushdie’s first novel, *Grimus*, appeared in 1975 and did not impress either the critics or the reading public. The book’s bad reception “shook him profoundly” (2012: 51) and he had to fight off despair. Spectacular success came with *Midnight’s Children* (1981), often considered Rushdie’s masterpiece and “a landmark in late twentieth-century fiction” (Bradford 2007: 195). The title of the novel refers to the birth of one thousand and one children endowed with magical properties, all born on the 15th of August 1947, between midnight and one a.m., the first hour of Indian Independence. The subject matter of the book is India itself, its history and destiny. *Midnight’s Children* was showered with prizes. It won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction, an Arts Council Writers’ Award, the English-Speaking Union Award, and, most importantly, the coveted Booker Prize in the year of its publication. In 1993, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Booker Prize, it was judged to be “The Booker of Bookers”, the best novel among those which had ever been awarded the title.

Rushdie is a great erudite and a prolific author, a tireless exponent of the themes of migration and cultural hybridity, “a writer of prodigious if uneven talent who deserves his international reputation” (Shakespeare 2012). Especially praised for his contribution to the tradition of magic real-
ism and the development of the postmodern novel, he merits recognition as an ingenious postco-
lonial story-teller who has not only become widely read but is also regularly assessed by academia.
Critical studies of his life and work – in the form of dissertations, articles and full-length books –
can be counted in the hundreds. Steeped in the cultural memory of the Indian subcontinent and
in European heritage, Rushdie’s fiction takes inspiration from multiple sources: historical records,
contemporary cinema, and popular culture, peopled by a rich and varied cast of characters. His
“textual pyrotechnics and verbal exuberance” (Procter 2009) have earned him admiration and
high regard world-wide. Bradbury (1989: 360) asserts that Rushdie expanded the English lan-
guage “with the narrative freedoms afforded by the myths, the folklore, and the storytelling rituals
of the Indian narrative tradition”. A number of Rushdie’s uniquely brilliant metaphors have often
been cited as examples of his linguistic inventiveness that has added a completely new flavour to
the English language, as was the case with his “chutnification of history”. His best known novels
bring together the miraculous and the mundane, the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the
pedestrian, the East and the West, fact and fiction, mixing and co-mingling disparate elements.
They include \textit{The Ground Beneath Her Feet} (1999), \textit{Fury} (2001), \textit{Shalimar the Clown} (2005) and
\textit{The Enchantress of Florence} (2008). Rushdie has also published short stories and non-fiction: \textit{The
Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey} (1987), \textit{Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-
argumentative skills and admirable intellectual discipline and control in handling the brevity and
precision of the genre.

Engaging in a critical assessment of Rushdie’s \textit{oeuvre} invariably stimulates debate on literature
as a medium of cultural memory. Astrid Erll (2009: 219-222) argues that the ‘cuing function’ of
various works of artistic expression consists in their ability and power to recall the past and engen-
der memories, both on the individual level of a particular reader and the collective level of a group – a group that shares culture, nationality, ethnic or religious identity. Although literature’s ‘cuing’
function does not require social agreement about the content of reflection, a similar reaction may
ensue from the readers’ shared knowledge and cultural background. When Rushdie (1992: 74) ad-
mits: “I have never been able to read Kipling calmly”, it is a statement that challenges Kipling’s view
of India which was passed on to the British, a view predicated on the imperial ideology of the day.
Reading Kipling, as Edward Said maintains, one is bound to encounter the “Orientalized India of
the imagination” (1994: 181), very different from the India which many Indian readers may know or remember.

It is precisely because of literature’s appeal on the level of collective memory of a group that par-
ticular texts, or their fragments, resonate differently with different readers. For example, in Rush-
die’s novel \textit{The Ground Beneath Her Feet}, two short passages evoke the cultural memory of the Poles.
Although their significance in the context of the story seems negligible, yet they may unsettle or
even disturb. One fragment concerns the driver of the Polish Pope John Paul II when the Pope was
“plain Cardinal Woytyla” (2000: 502); the other uses the name of a Polish actor in a description of
an iconic movie scene presented as a real event. We read:
Apparently this driver had been with him for years, and when it was time to elect a new Pope the two of them drove down from Cracow in some little beat-up Polish pollution-wagon [...] the future Pope and his workingman sidekick strikin’ out for glory. Anyway, they get to the Vatican, the driver waits and waits, the smoke goes up, habemus Papam, and finally he hears the news, it’s his good buddy, his road pal, his boss. Then a messenger comes to see him. Drive the car back to Cracow and then find yourself another job, says the messenger. Your ass is fired (2000: 502).

And earlier:

A Polish patriot, Zbigniew Cybulski, has been murdered in a back yard, amid sheets blowing from washing lines. Blood spread across a white sheet held against his midriff. A battered tin mug that fell from his hand has become a symbol of resistance. No: it is a holy relic, worthy of worship. Bow down. (2000: 322).

It is only to those who have seen Andrzej Wajda’s film “Ashes and Diamonds” that the above excerpt rings with deception. Even though The Ground Beneath Her Feet is “about the permeable borderline between the imaginary and the real worlds” (2012: 553), the easy use of proper names of real people, rather than dramatis personae, calls into question the ethical nature of such a literary contrivance. Subjected to fantasy and speculation, recognizable men and women transform into characters as puppets in the author’s larger scheme.

Rushdie has often stressed the writer’s absolute freedom of expression and argued for recognition of the power of literature and its right to provoke. “Artistic freedom had been the air he breathed” (2012: 196). “He had always written presuming that he had the right to write as he chose […] and knowing, too, that countries whose writers could not make such presumptions invariably slid towards, or had already arrived at, authoritarianism and tyranny” (2012: 117). In Imaginary Homelands he asks: “What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist” (1992: 396). No other book has offended as profoundly as The Satanic Verses. No other book has been called an insult so often. No other book has touched the chord of Muslim sensibilities so tragically.

The Satanic Verses: facts and opinions

Before The Satanic Verses controversy, Rushdie had already been condemned for his treatment of India and Pakistan in Midnight’s Children (1981) and Shame (1983), both texts having been deemed offensive: the former because of the thinly disguised and extremely negative portrayal of Indira Gandhi, the latter due to its harsh criticism of the Pakistani ruling elite.

The publication of The Satanic Verses in 1988 was the most immediate reason for the Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa, on the grounds that the novel was a blasphemy against Islam. When today
people recall the moment of the book’s appearance on the market and in the public consciousness, they often erroneously think of 1989. This common mistake made, for example, by Melanie Phillips (2008: 45), results from the assumption that British Muslims’ angry reaction to the book was immediate, sparked off directly by its release. This was not the case. *The Satanic Verses* was published in September 1988 and the first street protests, which took place in Britain in December of the same year, did not arouse much interest. It was only in January 1989, when the novel was publicly burnt in Bradford, that the British media started to give the issue extensive coverage. Bradford, a large city in Yorkshire (today inhabited by over 500,000 people), with a substantial Muslim minority, is sometimes treated as a symbolic place. Presently, according to the 2011 census statistics⁴, nearly a quarter of the population of Bradford are Muslim (24.7%). In the previous census of 2001 the figure stood at 16%, with a marked increase to over 25% in the group of 16 to 24-year-olds. The city has the highest concentration of Pakistanis in the UK, a figure which rose over the period of 2001-2011 from 14.5% to 20.4%. Sometimes called ‘the curry capital of Britain’, Bradford provides the location for a number of British feature films which engage with the presence of the UK’s South Asians, notably Udayan Prasad’s “My Son the Fanatic”, based on Hanif Kureishi’s short story, and “East is East” – an adaptation of Ayub Khan-Din’s drama. It is in the latter movie that the road sign ‘Bradford’ becomes so meaningfully changed to ‘Bradistan’, alluding to the importance of Islam. In popular belief, the sheer concentration of Muslims in Bradford accounts for the city’s fame as a centre of Islamic fanaticism, turning it into “a city in which ideas carry knives” (Kureishi 1986: 165).

In 1986, three years before the *fatwa*, Hanif Kureishi wrote an essay about Bradford for the *Granta* Special Issue of Travel Writing, claiming that it was in Bradford that:

> [S]o many important issues, of race, culture, nationalism, and education, were evident in an extremely concentrated way […]. These were issues that related to the whole notion of what it was to be British and what that would mean in the future. Bradford seemed to be a microcosm of a larger British society that was struggling to find a sense of itself, even if it was undergoing radical change (Kureishi 1986: 149-150).

Today Kureishi’s words sound prophetic. The 1989 anti-Rushdie demonstrations in Bradford started an avalanche.

British Muslims’ protests against *The Satanic Verses* were preceded by a strong negative reaction outside the UK, especially in India. Prior to the novel’s publication, following a few interviews with the author and the inclusion of the book’s extracts in the Indian press, a campaign for banning the novel started. What Rushdie said to Indian journalists at that time reveals his awareness of a possible problem. Asked whether he feared a backlash from the mullahs, he answered: “Even

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"Shame was attacked by fundamentalist Muslims. I cannot censor. I write whatever there is to write" (quoted in Jain 1988: 32); and later: “I guess some people might get upset because it [The Satanic Verses] is not reverent, but the point is it is a serious attempt to write about religion and revelation from the point of view of a secular person” (quoted in Basu 1988: 33). Both interviews appeared in the Indian press in September 1988. A fortnight later, on the 5th October, India “earned the dubious distinction […] of being the first country in the world to have banned the book” (Mitta 2012). Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Syria, Lebanon, Kenya, Brunei, Thailand, Tanzania, Indonesia, and Sudan followed suit.

Events came in quick succession. In the early days of February 1989, seven people were killed during demonstrations in Pakistan and India, and on the 14th of the same month the head of state of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, called on Muslims all over the world to execute the author of the blasphemous novel. Rushdie was proclaimed guilty of apostasy and defamation. An Iranian businessman offered a $3 million bounty for his head. Khomeini’s edict reads:

I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled The Satanic Verses – which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur’an – and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death.

I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, whenever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr (quoted in Pipes 2003: 27).

The novel’s alleged anti-Islamicism rests on several pillars. At the centre stands a story that some of the verses of the Koran had been originally dictated to the Prophet Muhammad by Satan (hence the term ‘Satanic Verses’), and later removed from the holy book. In Joseph Anton Rushdie explains that among a number of historical sources which deal with the life of the Prophet Muhammad there are important and trustworthy biographical accounts, compiled by Ibn Ishaq, Waquidi, Ibn Sa’d, Bukhari and Tabari, which refer to “the incident of the satanic verses” (2012: 43), and which constituted the basis of his novel. As argued in the essay “In Good Faith”, the described incident is “the quasi-historical tale of how Muhammad’s revelation seemed briefly to flirt with the possibility of admitting three pagan and female deities into the pantheon” (Rushdie 1992: 399). Other contentious points include the fact that one of the protagonists, Gibreel Farishta, described in the novel as sex-obsessed and engaging in adultery, is believed to be a representation of Archangel Gabriel (“farishta” being an Urdu word for “angel”). Mecca, Muslims’ most sacred city, is called “the city of Jahlia”, which means “the city of Ignorance”. The names of the Prophet Muhammad’s wives are taken by prostitutes in a brothel to arouse their clients. Muhammad himself is referred to by the insulting name Mahound, which was used by the Crusaders in the Middle Ages, and presented as a businessman striking deals with God. Additionally, the novel includes a dream sequence which is a thinly veiled portrayal of Khomeini. Equally important is the question of form. Tariq Modood
Richard Rorty (1992: 70) writes about “the passages which reduce Islam to a sexual appetite: the vulgar language, the sexual imagery”, and the “cheap and offensive ways” of raising important ideas. In the opinion of Muslims, the novel spreads lies about Islam, is abusive in its treatment of the holy Prophet, demeaning and degrading their faith. The anti-novel multi-pronged campaign concerned accusations of an inaccurate portrayal of Islam, the use of foul language, the author’s derisive attitude toward religion, the abusive nature of both content and form, the defamation of the Koran, and staining the honour of Muslims worldwide. Thus, Rushdie was pronounced guilty of blasphemy and of committing libel against the community. Although most protesting Muslims have never read the book, they believe it to be an assault on the collective cultural identity of the whole Umma.

_The Satanic Verses_ is a work of fiction alternating dream and reality, written in a comic tone and often classified as a carnivalesque novel. It concerns the issues of the immigrant experience, alienation, transformation, and cultural crisis. In the words of the author, “it is a migrant’s-eye view of the world [...] written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition” (Rushdie 1992: 394). It is also “a work of radical dissent and questioning and reimagining” (Rushdie 1992: 395). Critics have called it “a late twentieth-century version of Joyce’s _Ulysses_, a dynamic leviathan that both bemoans and magnificently represents the state of humanity – a dream of lost faith mired in heartless consumerism” (Bradford 2007: 197). Interpretations and assessment differ, though. For Pankaj Mishra, _The Satanic Verses_ “is less about the immigrant condition than a helplessly Anglophilic Indian’s profound ambivalence about a British ruling class that regards him as a wog” (Mishra 2012).

Significantly, at the time of the publication Rushdie did not consider himself a Muslim. In his 1990 essay entitled “In Good Faith” we read:

> It feels bizarre, and wholly inappropriate, to be described as some sort of heretic after having lived my life as a secular, pluralist, eclectic man. I am being enveloped in, and described by, a language that does not fit me. I do not accept the charge of blasphemy, because, as somebody says in _The Satanic Verses_, ‘where there is no belief, there is no blasphemy.’ I do not accept the charge of apostasy, because I have never in my adult life affirmed any belief, and what one has not affirmed one cannot be said to have apostasized from (1992: 405).

Moreover, Rushdie has always claimed that writing controversial texts is an author’s right or even a calling, perhaps a solemn duty. It is through novels that ‘newness’ can enter the world. It is through literature that dissent and rebellion can gain ground and inspire. It is through fiction that the boundaries and limitations of language and form get expanded and open up the universe. Therefore, there should be no restrictions on the writer’s freedom in the choice of content and ways of presentation. Rushdie’s belief in his ‘freedom to offend’ echoes in all his books. The above-quoted passages from _The Ground Beneath Her Feet_ exemplify his non-discriminatory nature of ridicule. _The Satanic Verses_, besides the alleged slur on Islam, contains a scathing critique of the UK in the decade of the 1980s, the time of Margaret Thatcher’s premiership, alluded to through the figure of
Mrs. Torture. As Procter (2009) claims, the book is “as critical of Thatcherism as it is of Islam, with both 1980s London and ancient Jahilia/Mecca becoming parallel universes associated with emergent cultures of intolerance and fundamentalism”.

In the discussion that followed *The Satanic Verses* controversy and Khomeini’s *fatwa*, various important issues were hotly debated and public opinion in Britain became split. Many literary luminaries unreservedly took Rushdie’s side arguing for freedom from censorship. In *Joseph Anton*, he gratefully acknowledges the support, help and friendship offered by Harold Pinter, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Edward Said, Nadine Gordimer, Vaclav Havel, Bono of U2, and many more.

Regrettably, the defence of the novel focused entirely on the issue of freedom of speech, not the book’s merit. What the author hoped for was a more particular vindication,

like the quality defence made in the cases of other assaulted books, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Ulysses, Lolita*; because this was a violent assault not on the novel in general or on free speech per se, but a particular accumulation of words […] and on the intentions and integrity and ability of the writer who had put those words together (Rushdie 2012: 115).

This has never happened. Many years after ’the Affair’, Margaret Drabble revealed in her review of *Joseph Anton*:

I would have been more than happy to offer evidence in court for the literary merit of *The Satanic Verses*, a defence Salman would have appreciated. Like Michael Foot, I had greatly admired the novel, particularly the passages about Thatcher’s subversive, divided multicultural London. But this defence was never required. And, in the long run, it wasn’t needed. Rushdie’s work has rightly won worldwide recognition (Drabble 2012).

The public debate proved grossly disappointing also because it steered clear of some vital concerns of a more general character, namely the public role of religion and the nature of a modern multicultural society. As Parekh notes, the discussion in the media “largely concentrated on the threat to Rushdie’s life, and when it discussed Muslim demands, it conceptualized the issue as one of conflict between freedom and fundamentalism, the former central to and the latter representing a mortal threat to the British way of life” (Parekh 2000: 303). Instead of engendering an informed rational polemic, it polarized society. Although many British Muslims disapproved of death-sentences for writers, very few dissociated themselves from *fatwa*. The Rushdie affair boosted their assertiveness and self-awareness.

After Khomeini’s extraterritorial murder order, Rushdie remained in hiding for over ten years, the blackest and the bleakest time in his life. As a constantly protected captive, he found a security which could not be extended to everybody involved in the publication of his novel. After the Iranian leader’s death in June 1989, *fatwa* was not revoked and violent protests did not subside. The
American Center in Islamabad was attacked, Collet’s and Dillons bookshops in London firebombed. Rauwerda (2008: 431) writes that, in total, twenty-two people died “as a result of the novel’s publication”. Professor Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, was stabbed to death in 1991. The Italian translator, Dr Ettore Capriole, barely survived a similar attack. And a Norwegian publisher, William Nygaard, was shot three times and badly wounded. Rushdie notes that “[h]e thought every day of William Nygaard and his bullet holes, of Ettore Capriolo kicked and stabbed, of Hitoshi Igarashi dead in a pool of blood by a lift shaft” and that such attacks meant that literature itself “had been vilified, shot, kicked, knifed, killed and blamed at the same time” (2012: 428).

Whenever somebody asks Rushdie whether he would still have written *The Satanic Verses*, knowing the tragic toll, he feels hurt about such “shifting the blame from the men of violence to the target of their attacks” (2012: 226), and constantly repeats that “the consequences of violence were the moral responsibility of those who committed the acts of violence; if people were killed, the fault lay with their killers, not with a faraway novelist” (2012: 229).

*Joseph Anton*

Joseph Anton is Rushdie's pseudonym used during the thirteen years of his sequestered life, a false name by which he would be known to the people around him, including the policemen who protected him. ‘Joseph’ was taken from Joseph Conrad and ‘Anton’ from Anton Chekhov, two writers whom Rushdie holds in high esteem. The period between 1989 and 2002, during which he lived as Joseph Anton, was a time of frustration, agony over his lost freedom, psychological trauma from his life in captivity, and constant attempts to reclaim his normal life. The book illustrates it very well. Written in the third person, Rushdie's memoir painfully records his ordeal – repeatedly moving houses, negotiating with various officials and politicians, acute awareness of the danger to which his family was exposed (both in and outside Britain), unrelenting threats and hate mail. It is a very long book. On over six hundred pages the reader often finds information and comments he/she would gladly do without – details of the author’s infidelities and the problems of his four marriages, quarrels with agents and publishers, squabbles over money, drunken parties with various celebrities. Bringing up intimate particulars of the private lives of public figures – their diseases and medications, fits of anger, home addresses, even the look of their genitals – strikes the reader as both tactless and out of place. When in chapter four, entitled “The Trap of Wanting to Be Loved”, the author speaks of his yearning for understanding and acceptance, it seems deeply unfair that he himself so hastily denies such a wish to others. Too many people will not love him for what he has written about them. The Muslim leaders of Bradford are called “the Bradford clowns” (441), the writer Roald Dahl described as “a long unpleasant man with huge strangler’s hands” (101), and Ka-lim Siddiqui named “the malevolent gnome” (488). There is a graceless comment about the singer Cat Stevens (today, after his conversion, known as Yusuf Islam), who “bubbled up in the *Guardian*
like a fart in a bath” (436). Fellow writers, journalists, and one ex-wife in particular receive very cruel treatment.

The use of third person narration, meant as a distancing device between Salman Rushdie the writer and his alias – Joseph Anton – whom he became involuntarily, suggests an attempt at objectivity and reining back emotion. However, as noticed by Wilson (2012), by adopting this technique the author puts himself beside Julius Caesar and General Charles de Gaulle. They too published memoirs in which they spoke of themselves as if of their devolved selves and may seem highly appropriate company for a person often accused of vanity, arrogance, and even self-canonization. But the divided identity revealed in the title is much more than a literary ploy. At moments it becomes an intolerable burden. There is a two-tier division between ‘Joseph Anton’ and ‘Salman Rushdie’, as well as between ‘Salman’ and ‘Rushdie’. The author notes: “The gulf between the private ‘Salman’ he believed himself to be and the public ‘Rushdie’ he barely recognized was growing” (2012: 131). And later:

He was aware that the splitting in him was getting worse, the divide between what ‘Rushdie’ needed to do and how ‘Salman’ wanted to live. He was ‘Joe’ to his protectors, an entity to be kept alive […] ‘Rushdie’ was much hated and little loved. He was an effigy, an absence, something less than human. He – it – needed only to expiate (2012: 251-252).

Rushdie writes about ‘Joe’ as his “hated pseudonym” (2012: 466) and ‘Joseph Anton’ as “a sort of fictional character” (2012: 165), “the person he both was and was not” (2012: 177). He remembers and salutes each small step which could take him “back towards his real life”, “[a]way from Joseph Anton, in the direction of his own name” (2012: 458), and writes how he wanted to detach himself “from the body of the man scuttling from vehicle to vehicle” (2012: 466). The day when Joseph Anton, an international publisher of American origin, died and Salman Rushdie, the novelist of Indian origin, was re-born, would become one of the happiest and most celebrated moments of his life. There is also a revolting figure of ‘Satan Rushdy’, “the horned creature on the placards carried by demonstrators” (2012: 5), with a protruding red tongue, an effigy of himself as hanged, displayed by hostile cheering crowds in faraway cities.

All major British newspapers published reviews of the book and the opinions of critics, as was to be predicted, vary greatly. Wilson (2012) calls it “a most peculiar book” and “an artless ramble”, which unfolds “galumphingly” and “conveys a bewildering emptiness”. For Nicholas Shakespeare (2012), it is “awfully long, solipsistic and of necessity self-serving”, but also “funny, painfully moving and absolutely necessary to read”. Mishra (2012) asserts that the use of the third-person narration “frequently makes for awkward self-regard”. And the writer Margaret Drabble (2012) finds *Joseph Anton* full of both “telling trivia and profound insights”. Admittedly, large sections of the book provide a candid and earnest account of a fugitive’s secret life, “with its cringings and crouchings, its skulkings and duckings” (2012: 241).
Particularly moving is a scene describing Rushdie as a broken person re-embracing Islam. On Christmas Eve 1990, the writer met a group of Muslim leaders who demanded that he prove his sincerity. Believing that his statement of faith might put an end to ‘the Affair’, he signed a provided document. Later, he would look on the event with horror and shame, bitterly regretting his action, believing that: “He should have turned his back then and gone home, away from degradation, back towards self-respect” (2012: 274). Proclaiming shahadah, the first pillar of Islam, was a lie.

He had survived this long because he could put his hand on his heart and defend every word he had written or said. He had written seriously and with integrity and everything he had said about that had been the truth. Now he had torn his tongue out of his own mouth, had denied himself the ability to use the language and ideas that were natural to him. Until this moment he had been accused of a crime against the beliefs of others. Now he accused himself, and found himself guilty, of having committed a crime against himself (2012: 276).

Considerable attention is devoted to the activities and help provided by Article 19, the human rights organization set up in 1986, which promotes freedom from censorship, the name having been taken from article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which asserts the human right to freedom of opinion and expression. The organization started the Rushdie Defence Campaign and proved instrumental in finding support and facilitating Rushdie’s public appearances in many European countries as well as in the United States. Thanks to the work of the members of Article 19, those courageous, selfless and determined people who devoted their lives to a noble cause, Rushdie could hope that his ordeal would come to an end. He acknowledges this with gratitude.

However, most of the memoir, regrettably, lacks quiet and sober reflection. Drowned in petty concerns, submerged in the details of the publishing business, overwhelmed by the mood of hurt dignity, it laboriously re-enacts meetings, conversations, and journeys, suffering from its author’s obvious need to make the public know ‘everything’, ‘the whole truth’. Being a pawn in someone else’s game, feeling powerless and disenfranchised, having to accept that for every public appearance he needed official permission and security measures, injured his self-respect and bruised his honour. Especially painful were various public pronouncements about his monumental egotism, megalomania and assertions that he was “a social irritant” (2012: 550), “a troublemaker [who] didn’t merit […] assistance”, “that he had done nothing of value in his life” (2012: 455). Accusations that his special protection cost the British tax-payer huge sums of money also grieved him deeply.

It is especially Rushdie’s lack of forgiveness which creates the impression of small-mindedness and an ungenerous spirit, his holding a long-standing grudge against all those people who turned their backs on him in times of crisis, wrote unflattering reviews, or criticized his refusal to apologize. Borrowing an idea from a Grace Nichols poem, one may re-title Rushdie’s book as “He is a long-memoried man”, wishing at the same time that the author, like his mother, had been able to develop the technique of ‘forgettery’ which helped Negin Rushdie survive an unhappy marriage. It might have proved therapeutic again.
A high point and much welcome diversion comes in the form of several enclosed letters. Addressed to both real people and some fictional personae, they show Rushdie’s wry humour and determination. In a missive addressed to Robinson Crusoe he asks: “Suppose you had four Man Fridays to keep you company, and they were all heavily armed. Would you feel safer, or less safe?” (2012: 187, original italics). Turning to Bernie Grant, the legendary black MP elected to parliament in the 1980s as one of four non-white politicians, Rushdie expresses his disappointment when Grant refused to support him and accuses the black leader of representing “the unacceptable face of multiculturalism, its deformation into an ideology of cultural relativism” (2012: 187, original italics), finishing his message on an ironic note: “to quote the great monochrome philosopher Michael Jackson, it don’t matter if you’re black or white” (2012: 187, original italics). Unfortunately, such inclusions become badly counterbalanced by fragments of actual letters and statements which Rushdie received in support, as in: “We should really be grateful to Rushdie for having opened up the imaginary for Muslims once again” and “The only truly free man today is Salman Rushdie […] He is the Adam of a library to come: one of freedom” (2012: 410-411, original italics). All traces of humour suddenly leave the writer when the topic becomes his historical role and his self-image. In such instances he seems incapable of detachment.

The book also suffers from redundancy and too heavy a reliance on the author’s journal. To Rushdie’s readers, many passages echo his earlier statements, interviews, and essays too closely, incidentally giving the impression of calculated manipulation. For example, the memory of Princess Diana’s death elicits a comment: “[A]s she died, the last thing she saw would have been phallic snouts of the cameras coming towards her through the smashed car windows, clicking, clicking. He was asked to write something for the New Yorker about the event and he sent them something of this nature” (2012: 520). The original text appeared in the American magazine on 15th September 1997. Rushdie compared the circumstances of Princess Diana’s death to J. G. Ballard’s novel Crash and David Cronenberg’s subsequent film adaptation. Both the tragic accident in Paris which killed the Princess of Wales and Cronenberg’s movie are for Rushdie “a cocktail of death and desire” and he writes: “The object of desire, in the moment of her death, sees the phallic lenses advancing upon her, snapping, snapping. Think of it this way, and the pornography of Diana Spencer’s death becomes apparent. She died in a sublimated sexual assault” (Rushdie 1997). The remark in Joseph Anton about ‘something of this nature’ seems an understatement. The reason why Rushdie mentions his New Yorker article at all is not so much a wish to modify or rephrase his original crass formulations, or to mellow the tone, but to complain about the response of the British press. The media’s reaction to his text takes priority over the event itself.

Joseph Anton: A Memoir deals with the tragic period between 1989 and 2002 when Salman Rushdie was forced by circumstances to leave the limelight and had to lead the secluded life of a hunted person. The book was published in 2012, a full decade after the official information released by the intelligence services that the threat level had been drastically reduced and the protection no longer necessary. Technically, Rushdie had stopped hiding several years earlier when he moved to the US. The years 2002 – 2012 are not covered in the book, although sporadically there are some references
to the events after 2002, for example the death of Robin Cook, the foreign secretary in Tony Blair’s government, and the failure of Rushdie’s last marriage to Padma Lakshmi, which ended in divorce in 2007. One might have hoped that the considerable lapse of time which passed between the announcement of fatwa and the moment of the publication of Joseph Anton would encourage some critical reflection and careful reconsideration, that the sheer passage of time would create a new perspective, and that the occasion of speaking through a memoir would provide a chance for telling the audience something really important. Especially so, because, as Rushdie rightly points out, during the furore that accompanied the publication of The Satanic Verses “his voice had been too small to be heard above all the other voices bellowing from every corner of the globe, above the howling winds of bigotry and history” (2012: 227). Contrary to the reader’s expectations and disappointingly so, the potential of a memoir does not get fully exploited and the author fails to uncover any new dimension of the old battle which he was always fighting, the battle between secularism and religion, or shed some new light on debates of long-standing.

The predominant tone of Joseph Anton is that of grave injustice, the focus – on the writer’s singular individual plight and the evil of others. Not for a moment can the reader wonder who the good and who the bad guys are. The division into ‘our’ camp (Rushdie and the people who helped or expressed support) and the ‘enemy’ camp (fundamentalists as well as writers, politicians and other public figures who argued against The Satanic Verses, or, generally speaking, all his adversaries) seems very straightforward, the dividing line clearly drawn. However, the us/them dichotomy, although always present, momentarily makes room for a more inclusive, though hugely imprecise, ‘we’. Rushdie states:

The fundamentalist believes that we believe in nothing. In his world, he has his absolute certainties, while we are sunk in sybaritic indulgences. To prove him wrong, we must first know that he is wrong. We must agree on what matters: kissing in public places, bacon sandwiches, disagreement, cutting-edge fashion, literature, generosity, water, a more equitable distribution of the world’s resources, films, music, freedom of thought, beauty, love. These will be our weapons. Not by making war, but by the unafraid way we choose to live shall we defeat them. How to defeat terrorism? Don’t be terrorized. Don’t let fear rule your life. Even if you are scared (2012: 624).

The category ‘we’ pitted against ‘the fundamentalist’ and ‘the terrorist’ seems to envelop the neoliberal Western world with its values and personal freedom, affirming the collective identity of the enlightened ones. But the mood and style of the passage seem to carry undertones of superiority. And no allowances are made for the fact that on both sides of the divide there might be some shared experience and thought.

Joseph Anton gives hope, though. Towards the end of his memoir Rushdie writes:

This in the end was who he was, a teller of tales, a creator of shapes, a maker of things that were not. It would be wise to withdraw from the world of commentary and polemic and re-dedicate himself to what he loved most, the art that had claimed his heart, mind and spirit ever since he
was a young man, and to live again in the universe of once upon a time [...] and to make the journey to the truth upon the waters of make-believe (2012: 629-630).

Nothing would please Rushdie’s readers more than his withdrawal from the world of polemic and his return to the world of fiction.

Joseph Anton’s generic classification and disciplinary belonging is revealed in the second part of its title. Being a memoir, it can be approached as an act of self-representation rooted in a social context, and also “a tool for re-writing reality” (Buss 2002: xxii). Unlike autobiography, considered to be “the writing of one’s own history” (OED 1991, vol. I: 801), and traditionally concerning a whole life, often becoming a way to chronicle various achievements and accomplishments, memoir tends to focus on “one moment or period of experience rather than on entire life span” (Smith and Watson 2010: 3), “a single theme or emotional arc” (Larson 2007: 17), creating “a chamber-sized scoring of one part of the past” (Larson 2007: 19). Hart asserts that although memoirs are “of a person,” ‘they are ‘really’ of an event” (in Buss 2002: xi). In the case of Joseph Anton, this event is the Rushdie Affair, the claim justified by the book’s title and its time bracket. Thus, we can read Rushdie’s memoir as his intended contribution to the debate on The Satanic Verses and a chance to reveal a new self. Being “a mix of the personal with the contextual” (Adams in Buss 2002: 1), memoir is expected by its readers to offer “an author as guide, an informant whose presence lends a unique perspective to the historical moment or event” (Adams in Buss 2002: 1). Memoirs always give primacy to the viewpoint of the narrator and do not purport to be impartial, but they also demonstrate how their author/narrator relates to their community and the world, and how the self-reflexivity of the writing process gives strength to remembering and recollecting. The writing persona changes, repossessing the past and revisioning the selected historical moment, while the provided account is meant to bear witness to inner transformations, as well as serving as testimony to socio-political developments. Life-writing involves narrating the past “in such a way as to situate the experiential history within the present” (Smith and Watson 2010: 22). But the present which emerges from Joseph Anton lacks new knowledge and fails to reveal the world beyond the personal.

Concluding remarks

Looking back on the events following the publication of The Satanic Verses from today’s perspective, we may argue that although the controversy over Rushdie’s novel had serious social and political repercussions, the debate which it engendered did not lead to any deep and long-lasting soul-searching. Twenty-four years on, we find the world polarized and antagonistic on the same issues that divided public opinion in 1989. Although the present-day power of the Internet with its easy access to information creates a situation when banning or censoring news proves difficult, it is still paramount to consider whether there should be limits to artistic provocation and who has the ultimate decision on the publication of any material deemed to be of an offensive nature. If the Rushdie
Affair teaches us anything, it shows the fragility of intellectual discussion and the strong possibility of unprecedented and damaging fallout as a consequence of a literary event. A book, not addressed to the average reader, written in English and published in the West, and mostly known through hearsay, mobilized masses. Its author, who valued freedom over fame, paid a very high price for his decisions, losing what he cherished most. His memoir reveals his suffering but it does not offer a voice strong enough to be heard "above the howling wind of history".

References:


Abstract. Few things are more unpredictable than the convergence of people, landscape and memory. Often, the more time that passes, the more memory has to lean upon imagination to define experiences from the ever-receding past. “The present”, notes Ian Jack, “always depends upon the past, which makes the past a necessary subject of any reporter’s enquiry” (Jack 2009: xiii). When the reporter is also a poet, however, the enquiry of which Jack speaks assumes a different character, different imperatives. The following essay considers Batmans Hill, South Staffs, 1961-1972, my themed sequence of poems, a return to the human and non-human landscapes of my childhood. One concern of the sequence is how locality defined people and people humanised locality in one region of post-war municipal England. Running alongside that, however, is an awareness of the caprice of memory and a fascination with the ways in which poetry tempers and exploits that caprice.

Keywords: England, imagination, landscape, memory, poetry, post-war, working-class.

When people, landscape and memory meet, the consequences are often unpredictable. Memory is, it would seem, the lynch-pin: that faculty which occupies the border between current and former life, but which so often requires that imagination should supply the deficits of recall. Journalist and social commentator Ian Jack observes that “the present always depends upon the past, which makes the past a necessary subject of any reporter’s enquiry” (Jack 2009: xiii). But what happens when attempts are made to convey the past in a themed sequence of poems? How is that dependency managed? What processes are required to strike a balance between the factual recovery and
the poetic re-imagining of lost people and places? And what part does landscape play in such attempts?

In Batmans Hill, a themed sequence of poems, I return to certain people and places of my childhood. Distance, differing paths of life and (in some cases) death separate them from me now. Yet, however clearly or imperfectly remembered, they played their parts, decisive or low-level, in shaping how I look back upon the often fragmented, misty reaches of Then.

This exploration, therefore, draws upon key elements from Batmans Hill in an attempt to discover how place defined people and people humanised place in one corner of post-war municipal England—and to determine, as far as possible, how the vagaries of memory and demands of poetry have tempered that discovery. Intrinsic to this attempt is the depiction of differing landscapes: individually, in uneasy concert and, sometimes, in clear collision. Unlike Maurice Chevalier, I cannot blithely claim, “Yes, I remember it well”. But perhaps, writing the sequence, I found an unlikely ally in capricious recollection. The following poems and reflections will demonstrate how far my aims have been realised.

Batmans Hill, Coseley, South Staffordshire, was an English council estate completed in 1953 and thus a target for all manner of epithets: ‘New Elizabethan’, for example, in vogue then and giddily revived and be-flagged in 2012. It was the kind of much-ballyhooed project that was covered in Pathe newsreels of the time: postwar housing clearance; blueprints for a starry future; the exodus of families and communities from Victorian or between-wars accommodation to the New Jerusalem (front-lawn laburnums optional). It is easy to imagine film footage of removal vans disgorging their contents in a Batmans Hill crescent while a school-of-Downton voice intones, A great day for the Figgises as they take occupancy of their dream home. Two-bar fires in every room, lavatories upstairs and down, even a serving-hatch to make Mum’s life easier when she’s dishing up the tea for her young Elizabethans. Hurry up, Grandma—you don’t want to be the last to drool over the Gas Board cooker!

Here, we encounter a familiar dichotomy of perspectives. The Pathe approach, freighted with the need to emphasise the upbeat, would obviously dwell on the shiny and new. Its approach was necessarily part of a larger project to present Britain as well and truly recovering from the depredations of 1939-45 and thus, in the current, desolating phrase, ‘open for business’. It contributes to the officially-sanctioned narrative. Alongside it, however, another narrative tells itself, as it always has and will: the realities of people’s lives, the everyday triumphs and reversals (sometimes occupying the same minute) that create the textures of their experience and make them who they are right up to any given point. In Batmans Hill, I focus on the latter narrative while acknowledging, albeit implicitly, that the former—progress, the construction of a new communal living-space to which a particular group of people is transplanted—weaves in and out of the writing. I am mindful that the landscapes of the poems are often the result of the negotiation between officially-constructed spaces and the idiosyncrasies of the behaviour that occurs within them.

Reading, drafting, re-reading (and occasionally despairing of) the poems in the sequence, I also discovered that a number of sub-landscapes were in play. These helped to define the people on
whom I focused and fix them in my mind—allowing, of course, for the undependable agency of memory. More, I was reminded of the different challenges faced by prose and poetic memoirists. Prose memoirs are challenging enough (to read, in some cases, as much as to write). A prose memoirist might decide to play fast and loose with, say, a sequence of remembered events, placing this one here even though it happened there, in the interests of dramatic effect, of reader engagement. However, they are still working with the most immediately accessible form of communication: prose narrative, with its implicit promise of sequence, of delineated cause and effect. This is not to say that prose memoir is an easy genre in which to work. Indeed, prose memoirists, like their fiction counterparts, might decide that it best serves their purpose to subvert development and sequence throughout an entire work, cutting and splicing them Citizen Kane-style. But poetry, with its compactness, its fondness for allusion and intimation—at times, its disregard for any sense of development—can intensify the challenges that the memoirist faces.

Batman’s Hill covers particular recollections from 1961 to 1972: in pop-cultural terms, the period from when the Beatles were riding to the rescue over a distant horizon to when Benny Hill was offering his mock-elegy for Ernie, The Fastest Milkman In The West. The poems I have selected for discussion include portraits of individuals, meditations on specific places and co-existent landscapes. In the poem that follows, I also unearthed conflict, realising that it did not arise solely from the mismatch between nation-centred and localised narratives:

**In Lilac Time**

1963

*Go down to Kew in lilac time, in lilac time, in lilac time*

*Go down to Kew in lilac time (it isn't far from London)*

Alfred Noyes, *The Barrel-Organ*

All I remember are small rooms
the shin-level gas of dissension
   the kitchen chirped once, at Christmas
   a red breast beat life through the transom-pane
come Boxing Day the snow was ash
the pantry-mouse flattened its back against another year
on telly people called Askey and Ray
staggered after comedy's clean heels
   at school we sang Rule Britannia
   glowed from it all over playtime like Windscale mistakes
the skin of Assembly visitors
sang Castile melodies
   clicked into line
like the sides of an overnight coffin,
voices bittered on early fog, snot a-tumble,
we went down to Kew in lilac time
in lilac time
mom's law came sideways: a maid-of-all-work
flaring a grate inside my face
dad's was the small kid's gambit
a bonny bunch deep in the spine.
At last I shut the gate
housefronts folded behind my steps
at the crescent's end I died, lived,
broke off a billow of lilac.

Three landscapes are in play here: those of home, school and nationhood, the last conveyed by the elegant tub-thumpery of Noyes' poem (a staple choice for class recitations in junior school back then). The home landscape is developed through allusions to household places: 'small rooms', 'the transom-pane', and the mouse-haunted pantry. It finds its tone through intimations of domestic argument ('dissension') and the pre-packaged fodder beamed in by Broadcasting House and Granada ('Askey and Ray'—about whom all this writer can say is, thank God for Hancock and Steptoe). A 'New Elizabethan' element moves the poem from home to school, with its communal rituals, its status as the first step towards socialisation and matters civic. We did indeed sing 'Rule Britannia', even though we were unaware that, in imperial terms, the shop was being rapidly dismantled around us. And the school setting offers what is arguably the clearest sub-landscape: the classroom recitation, rehearsed and performed for visitors of various provenance—school inspectors or benefactors with Humber Super Snipes parked outside. In retrospect, the scene suggests below-stairs staff dutifully trooping into the Hall to do their Christmas turn for 'Maister an' Mis'ress.'

As for the landscape of nationhood, its representative is a now rather fey Edwardian lyric. There is (possibly) some sardonic humour in the meeting of one world, Kew Gardens and all it invokes, with the world inhabited by a fidgety bunch of Junior 2 children in the decidedly un-Kew-like Black Country. My feeling was that this collision gave a sharper edge to that previously dramatized in the poem, between home and school. (It should be stressed, however, that such feelings may only emerge after re-working a poem. Writing first or early drafts can sometimes feel like tentative encounters with Sanskrit.)

The locations of the sequence are not restricted to Batmans Hill and its surroundings. The next poem moves into another world altogether, suggesting greater opportunities for contradictions and collision. However, placed as it is, near the end of the sequence, it derives much of its effect from the prior establishment of Black Country places and perspectives:
Upper Ballyroe, Kilfinnane

1968, the Uncle’s farm
We stand and watch the rain.
   The sloping field
   strikes loose its waters
   rides them down
   to pools of mahogany gumbo.
The hayricks are what’s left
when mountains unbuckle their splendours
fall by fall. Their crowns cave and suck.
   Chemistry happens. The rotten stem
   swaddles the firm.
One of us is leant against a tree,
swelling its black scars
with crooked breath, head stuck
in last night’s fuddle.
   His free hand wags at his hip,
   a cigarette strung on its fingers.
Someone forecasts: brighter than scrubbed beans
come teatime. Then we’ll get on.
   Fecksakes, the cig flares back at him,
its torrents now, well into the boozing hour
and down to the heel of tomorrow besides.
   We’ll see the summer out forking blancmange,
   and where were the bloody tarps?
The tarps are asleep,
interfolded like sofa cats
in the barn we walked past hours ago,
swatting off the sun...
   ... which someone else swears he’s glimpsed,
just, way and gone over the field:
a finger of it laid underside
the gaping wounds of cloud.
   Ah, he insists, it’ll turn for us now.
But it has business
with cliffs and trawling-roads.
   It slithers off (Fecksakes)—another kind of cat,
squeezing up space for itself
under the sag of a dresser,
or with the last of retreat up its tail
as a window unratchets and slams.

This poem could be taken as a moment of pastoral in the sequence, a breather from the corporation lamp-posts, the menace of *No Ball Games Here* signs. It records an incident from what was almost an annual event: the summer holiday on an uncle’s farm in County Limerick. It also symbolises some of the challenges of memoir-writing highlighted at the start of this exploration: principally, the attempt to balance factual recovery with the poetic re-imagining of lost people and places. The essential incident is true enough. Often more capricious than its English counterpart, the Irish weather beat down a field of carefully-built hayricks. Some exchanges, familiar blends of banter and pugnacity, did ensue about whether the sun would return and the day could be at least partly saved. The rest, however, is invention underwritten by a general experience of how my Irish family would behave in adversity and how the fields of the Republic would look when sodden. Perhaps, as with the other poems in the sequence, *Upper Ballyroe* supports the observation of French writer, Patrick Lagrange, as quoted by a character in Julian Barnes’ *The Sense of An Ending*: “History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation” (Barnes 2011: 17). After all, imperfect memory and inadequate documentation are meat and drink to the poet: the chip-board doors through which imagination can break and enter.

Whatever the poem has to offer, however, landscape plays the central part. Difference of landscape is presented through the fact that this is emphatically not where the sequence’s speaker spends most of his time. In that context, the visit to the Uncle’s farm would stand comparison with the crew of USS Enterprise breaching an unknown spiral arm. The poem, therefore, echoes the disconnection between Kew Gardens and the post-war school recital-fest in *In Lilac Time*. To the young observer, the ‘mahogany gumbo’ of the rain-soaked fields, the way the collapsing ricks ‘cave and suck’, the ‘gapping wounds of cloud’ overhead appear strange, even fantastic. Hayricks, after all, are in short supply in the environs of God’s Little Acre and The Celestial City, as Wolverhampton and Birmingham were popularly and respectively known. (It is worth noting here that a similar mordant humour informed the nicknames for other West Midlands localities. ‘The Lost City’ was an area of particularly dense housing beyond Princes End; while a beguiling mix of the salacious and the Biblical dubbed an adjacent district ‘Sodom.’ Comparable nicknames are used in other post-industrial regions, suggesting the same blend of defiance and self-deprecation.)

The sense of near-exotic difference applies also to the language ‘quoted’ in the poem. Here, admittedly, I have had to employ the *David Copperfield* manoeuvre, in which my younger sensibilities, such as they were, have been modified and put in their best suit by my older, more reflective self. I’d love to claim that the farmhand’s retort to the notion that the sun will return—

*Fecksakes […]*

*it’s torrents now, well into the boozing hour*
*and down to the heel of tomorrow besides.*
We’ll see the summer out forking blancmange,  
and where were the bloody tarp?—

was recalled verbatim. Instead, I have been obliged to create a response that draws upon a lifetime’s exposure to the rhythms and inventiveness of Irish-English (for example, ‘at the heel of the hunt’ for the deadly dull ‘at the end of the day’; and ‘between the hopping and the trotting’ for ‘what with one thing and another’). As for Fecksakes, this would appear to be a linguistic imperative now enforceable by EU law.

Batmans Hill, however, is not all group portraits in parti-coloured spaces. Some of the poems focus upon individuals and where they stand in my memories of those formative years: a blood-and-thunder parish priest; a young girl who died long before her time; and Raymond Earl, subject of the poem below. Focusing on these people, I found that they trailed specific landscapes in their wake: or, rather, that those landscapes constructed themselves silently around them, like the edges of a developing photograph. Indeed, in Raymond Earl, the eponymous character’s image and behaviour call forth landscapes both overt and implicit:

**Raymond Earl**

1969

Raymond Earl didn’t have a single doorknob
in all his head
  took a Shut sign to the world
  save when it fed and pillowed him
or dug about for a joke he might rattle to,
a face he might hail through his deepwater light
  but give him a ball and he could vapourize
the spleen of Hannibal. Thigh to foot
he drove without a car
wore down a realm of sixpences
  with brake and spin. Up close,
  skidding, despairing of a tackle,
you heard him prove the nothingness of words
bump noise far to the back of his throat
  show that language only worked
  when poured south to the engine muscles
then he was gone, leaving you
in your man-trap of turf
with a ghost on your right foot
re-tingling the jump of the ball.
He had a trial for Wolves.  
Didn’t fancy. Early mornings. No chips.  
  Last time I saw him was in the wounded hollows  
  of the district park  
  hup-humping a World Cup ‘66 ball—  
  Bobby Moore’s name, Nobby’s, Geoff’s and Jack’s  
  hanging like suns the sky was made for  
  petitioning the hem of an archangel’s gown  
  with mud and genius

I should say here that I’ve altered his name. The chances are that he won’t read this—but he was a big lad: why risk it? A much admired lad, too: as the poem tries to show, he spoke to the world largely through his footballing skill. He wasn’t much good with words and concepts: was seen as on the dense side. But by whose valuation? That of a society which, at the time, was even more infected than it is now by a sense of hierarchy, social confidence and eloquence at the top, slowness tending the horses down below? In one crucial respect, Raymond Earl was not slow. In fact, to reverse a comment above, it could be said that words and concepts weren’t much good for him: a perspective enforced by the real and implied landscapes that emerge in the poem.

The definable landscape is one part-admired, part-mocked by Paul Whitehouse in the character of Ron Manager from BBC TV’s *The Fast Show*: “Summer evenings. Kick-abouts in the park. Jumpers for goalposts. Marvellous, eh? Marvellous”. Shadowing it, however—even supplanting it in much of the poem—is the interior landscape I imagine Raymond to inhabit: the world of the genius, with Wembley, Munich, Rio de Janeiro contributing its hinterlands. The poem seeks to define the kind of language such a landscape requires—instead of intelligible words, the noises of intent, concentration, triumph. Raymond did indeed make such noises, as though he were charting the progress of his play like World Cup ‘66 broadcaster Kenneth Wolstenholme with a scarf where his mike should be. His footwork, then, did prove “the nothingness of words”, save as pockets of an energy which was quite properly “poured south to the engine muscles”.

This interior landscape, however, never made itself real for him. In the end, he was perhaps too firmly rooted in Batmans Hill to capitalise on the successful trial he had for Wolverhampton Wanderers. The landscape of Ron Manager’s goofy reverie emerges in full at the end of the poem: “the wounded hollows/of the district park”, exhausted from bike-tracks, fights, games of football and cricket in their seasons. Here, too, overt and implicit landscapes meet, like spectators watching Raymond’s solitary practice. Where he actually was in his head, I couldn’t presume to say. The end of the poem, however, offers a convergence between a definable place and a landscape of glittering possibility, symbolised by the “World Cup ’66 ball—/ Bobby Moore’s name, Nobby’s, Geoff’s and Jack’s”. The effect could variously be called poignant, wistful, a piece of suburban stoicism. Or, in Raymond’s world, nothing to do with language at all—just another outing for wondrous talent with a scuffed, beloved ball.
The above speculation suggests that, in *Batmans Hill*, characters and their places are indeed rendered as other than they actually were. This has little to do with deliberate falsification, but rather with the way that memory and imagination must work in concert to bridge the gaps that the years hollow out—and, in the interest of poetry, to make what is or is not clearly remembered as vivid and absorbing as possible. (And, whatever fond fancies the writer might entertain on that score, the verdict always rests with the reader.) Landscapes—definable or covert, as clear as paving-stones or shimmering about an action, a phrase, a conversation—play a crucial part in the endless negotiation between factual recovery and the play of the imagination. Often, of course, they do so by helpfully lingering longer: a memoirist might remember the geography of a pub or street-end long after the particulars of debates held there—Wolves’ chances (with or without Raymond Earl), the likelihood of World War III, why the new 10cc album isn’t a patch on the last—have faded away.

Other than they really were. Perhaps, in the end, that phrase is not completely accurate. Such, at least, is my hope in regard to *Batmans Hill*. In it, I have also sought to recover what might be called essences—of people, place, event—even if the way they looked, sounded, felt has required imaginative transfusion. Creative rendering of the past and its landscapes is, in equal measure, a tricky and beguiling business. Laura Marcus notes, “Much contemporary interest in autobiography [...] is in the interrelation between theory and experience, the interplay of different voices, and the representation of the past as a complex and elusive terrain” (Marcus 1994: 278). That last word. Never far from excursions into memory, prior selves, the “fair fields of folk” who populate the stages of life. Terrain. Country. Landscape.

References:

For most lovers of serious ‘literature’ – a term that now encompasses a vast number of works classic, historical, sometimes readable, sometimes less so – the problem of choosing WHAT to read can loom large. Long gone are the days when, with diligence, a large swath of the “greats” of “world” literature (meaning European culture) could be consumed. Too many other continents and their authors have crowded onto the scene.

Reading habits, of course, vary as greatly as eating habits at a buffet: some savor the singular flavor of each dish before passing on to the next; others enjoy the way each dish complements or clashes with its neighbors. Even on the plate, some diners eat all of one food group before touching the next while others eat sequentially, a slurp of soup, a bite of meat, a forkful of vegetable, in a continual circle. Similarly, some readers take on everything by a single author before moving to the next, while others jump about eras and genres in a less rigid manner. Both methods have their proponents – and in reading, at least, both have their drawbacks as well. The samplers can miss small delights while exclusively pursuing the great dishes, while the savorers can become so engrossed in the major and minor works of an author, an era, or a genre, that they have little time to pursue tasting much of what lies before them.

“Beyond the Canon”, then, will be an occasional feature in Crossroads soliciting recommendations of works which might otherwise escape notice: not necessarily “great” works – or even great reads – but ones which illumine, challenge, and/or entertain – though not necessarily all together. With the increasing interest in using literature as a tool for analyzing cultural values, some guidance or hints from those familiar with what’s out there will certainly be appreciated. There will be few limitations: Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso though well known goes mostly unread in its entirety. The same can be said of Edward Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Numerous early dramas languish anthologized but (for the most part) ignored. Washington Irving’s series of biographies surely offer some valuable insights, if not into the subject, at least into the mind of the author and the attitudes of the times. And whether obscurely familiar (like Matthew Lewis’s The Monk), lesser or failed (say, Mark Twain’s Joan of Arc) or nearly unknown (like George Schuyler’s Black No More), the right notice can prompt others to pick up the book and try it. Crossroads looks forward to your submissions.
After Herman Melville – indeed, after the failure of Reconstruction and the re-introduction of Jim Crow – few works by white authors featured a black character. Mark Twain created Jim – though he is arguably more saint than human – and attempted to somewhat tackle race in Pudd'nhead Wilson. Steven Crane created The Monster. Still, William Stanley Braithwaite, in his 1925 essay “The Negro in American Literature” which appeared in The New Negro, notes that beyond the 1891 An Imperative Duty by William Dean Howells (whom he mentions along with Joel Chandler Harris, George W. Cable, and Irwin Russell): “it is useless to consider any others [i.e. white authors], because there were none who succeeded in creating either a great story or a great character out of Negro life” (Braithwaite, 33). As to Howells’ book, Braithwaite calls it a “shadowy note” added to the “social record of American life.”

But Howells’ small volume deserves a look, both for its sincere (if timid) effort to explore the race issue, by capitalizing on the then-burgeoning interest in evolution and genetics, and for the mixed messages his image-making sends. For Rhoda Aldgate – the half-octoroon female lead and love interest in the story – is sympathetically intelligent and honorable though laden with self-loathing once the hitherto concealed secret of her slave origins is revealed to her. Howells’ narrative (through his narrator) contains numerous ambiguously objective comments which may in fact reflect the author’s versedness in the accepted stereotypes of the time. As with Harriet Beecher Stowe, much unwitting insult may be found within the language of the work.

The story reads well – quietly and pleasantly in Howell’s modest style – while tentatively raising some of the incongruities resulting from America’s fixation on skin color and what it supposedly reveals about an individual. Rhoda, unaware at first of her mixed race origins, begins as an ardent liberal when it comes to race relations, though she can still utter fatuities like “Oh, I can’t imagine a colored Catholic. There seems something unnatural in the very idea.” Her sentiments turn into a fairly oppressive horror once she learns the truth about her parents, but by book’s end she finally accepts her state – though she is quite reluctant to allow Olney, the doctor who loves her, to encumber his future life with a woman he can never appear with socially.

A rather disturbing, cringe-inducing scene unfolds when the newly enlightened Rhoda takes refuge in a black church and can only recoil from the congregation surrounding her:

Rhoda distinguished faces, sad, repulsive visages of a frog-like ugliness, added to the repulsive black in all its shades, from the unalloyed brilliancy of the pure negro type to the pallid yellow of the quadroon, and these mixed-bloods were more odious to her than the others, because she felt herself more akin to them; but they were all abhorrent.

It could be that Howells himself is expressing a personal disgust, but as a realist, his exploration of her new awareness rings at least true enough that it reflects what many might feel when their sense of identity is violently overthrown.

Other scenes throughout this short (150-odd pages) work continue Howells’ not-quite-daring efforts to scrutinize America’s racial fixation. But as at least some of the focus of literary criticism
is beginning to turn to cataloguing the values and attitudes promulgated by any era's works, An Imperative Duty provides an interesting example of the many books out there offering insights into by-gone but still prevalent eras.

We eagerly await the many surprises our readers have in store for us.
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