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# CONTENTS

## 4 ARTICLES

### 4 Magdalena Klimiuk

Conundrums of Assimilation – Rethinking the World Presented in Philip Roth’s “Defender of the Faith” and Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use”

### 16 Angelica Michelis

Foreign Recipes: Mothers, Daughters and Food in *Like Water For Chocolate*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *A Chorus of Mushrooms*

### 34 Joseph Osoba

A Linguistic Analysis of Wole Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero*

## 50 CROSSROADS OF POPULAR CULTURE

### 50 Peter Foulds

Steinbeck, Guthrie and Zanuck: a Dust Bowl Triptych.

The Intertextual Life of *The Grapes of Wrath* on Paper, Celluloid and Vinyl

## 59 A NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Magdalena Klimiuk**

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# Conundrums of Assimilation – rethinking the world presented in Philip Roth’s “Defender of the Faith” and Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use”

**Abstract:** This article presents a comparative reading of Philip Roth’s “Defender of the Faith” and Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use.” The purpose of this article is to analyze the conundrums of assimilation in both stories, the main characters’ state of being, “not-at-home,” and their representation as ethnic Others, in order to point to the Biblical terrain of interpretation of the two stories. “Defender of the Faith” and “Everyday Use” skilfully explore the theme of Biblical redemption and present versions of a wise son and a mocking child from the Biblical Book of Proverbs. By deploying these metaphors they embrace larger issues such as the clash between ethnic/cultural authenticity and forged identity, individuality and conformity, tradition and modernity.

**Keywords:** ethnic Other, assimilation, redemption, “not-at-home-ness,” masquerade, identity.

Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use” and Philip Roth’s “Defender of the Faith” address the problems individuals have to face when trying to construct their ethno-racial identity under the pressure of assimilation. The aim of this article is to indicate a linkage between these short stories and to propose a comparative reading of Jewish and African American literature with regard to the assimilation experiences of the characters in the stories, and the characters’ representation as ethnic Others. I would like to look at “Everyday Use” and “Defender of the Faith” through the prism of postcolonial theory, which perceives the world “in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007: 19), and to focus on the important distinction of the colonizer/the colonized. I will also examine the main characters’ state of being displaced, “not-at-home,” in order to point to the Biblical terrain of interpretation of the two sto-

ries. “Defender of the Faith” and “Everyday Use” skilfully explore the theme of Biblical redemption and present versions of a wise son and a mocking from the Biblical Book of Proverbs. By deploying these metaphors they embrace larger issues such as the clash between ethnic/cultural authenticity and forged identity, individuality and conformity, tradition and modernity. The likeness between the two stories is found in the way they represent their ethnic characters as distinctly different, as outcasts and strangers taking part in a kind of ethno-racial masquerade.

However, juxtaposing Jewish literature with African American literature may be considered risky because there has been a certain kind of abrasiveness between Jews and African Americans since the 1960s. The tensions and complexities in relations between these two groups have been discussed by Karen Brodtkin, who states that “analyses of minstrelsy and working-class immigrant whitening expand the argument that inventing blackness and speaking for African or Indian America has been a conventional way that immigrants and working class whites have made themselves white and American ‘on the backs of blacks,’ as Morrison put it” (Brodtkin 1998: 152). Although the experiences of African American and Jewish assimilation vary, one can find more arguments for an affinity between these experiences through a close examination of the world presented in both Roth’s and Walker’s stories.

James Duban underlines the fact that Roth resembles Bellow and Malamud, as stated by Roth himself, in “transcending the immediate parochialism of [our] Jewish background” (qtd. in Duban 2011: 44). Duban suggests that Roth is “comfortable enough in his Judaism to use his characters, their religion, and their dilemmas as points of departure to arrive at universal truths about human nature and its dilemmas” (2011: 43). Reading Roth’s “Defender of the Faith” with Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use” is a way of finding a new ray of light to shine on the current discussion about these short stories, a way of revising “the hallowed process of Jewish assimilation” through a striking juxtaposition of this experience with the African American one (Freedman 2008: 184). Roth has already pushed the limits and reshaped the understanding of Jewishness and the African American experience through his revisionary portrayal of Coleman Silk, a light-skinned African American passing for a white Jew in *The Human Stain*. Moreover, the juxtaposition of these two stories adheres to Emily Budick’s binding representation of Jews and blacks as groups declaring their separateness, homelessness and strangeness. Budick notes in *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* that

the African American becomes a nostalgic marker of what, as Jews, they feel themselves to have lost in their acceptance into the American mainstream. At the same time the black character signifies the incorruptible and indestructible vessel of their own Jewish ethnicity. [...] the African American who becomes a metaphor for their [Jewish American writers’] own commitment. And it is lasting: the image of the American black further reassures Jews that their difference, albeit moral rather than physical, will no more rub off from them than colour from black people. (Budick 1998: 121-122)

While Roth’s “Defender of the Faith” is a good example of the short story in which the moral difference/ethics of Jews is discussed, “the incorruptible and indestructible vessel of [...] Jewish eth-

nicity” is mirrored in Walker’s black characters Mama and Maggie, who are ardent “indestructible” pillars of African American ethnic culture.

## On Detour

Sam Whitsitt notes, with regard to the home in Walker’s story, that “there must be a certain detour, a departure; one must leave home in order to become aware of the home, even though this departure holds no guarantee of a return” (2000: 447 – 448). The statement perfectly lends its meaning equally to both Roth’s and Walker’s stories. Roth’s character Marx supposedly reiterates the stereotype of a Jew who has broken with ethnic tradition, lost his/her connection with the family home, and is portrayed as a person deprived of the so-called “collective identity.” There are no references in the text to suggest that he has any contact with his family home or Jewish community. He seems to be displaced and “not-at-home” with his Jewishness. He appears to be presented as one who has lost his “sense of Jewishness” (Roth 1994: 642). However, Marx unconsciously embarks on a spiritual journey within himself, rebuilding his Jewish identity through dealings with his manipulative recruit, Grossbart. This spiritual journey in the story is associated with the quest for identity, as Nathan Marx remarks “in search of more of me, I found myself following Grossbart’s track to Chapel no. 3 where the Jewish services were being held” (Roth 1994: 640). In other words, Roth’s story becomes a story of self-rediscovery after a long period of “detour” as Marx rediscovers his “sense of Jewishness,” which has been lost because of war troubles: “I came to what I suddenly remembered was myself” (Roth 1994: 640). That identity transformation, the assumption of a “new-old” Jewish identity is signalled in the opening paragraph of the story when Marx states that “there was an inertia of the spirit that told me we were flying to a new front” (Roth 1994: 634). The “new front” is an indicator of a new stage in Marx’s life, the stage of coming to terms with his Jewishness. His subordinate Grossbart’s invitation to the “shul” and his “singing a doubletime cadence” brings to Marx’s mind many sweet memories of his childhood and home:

I was remembering the shrill sounds of a Bronx playground, where, years ago, beside the Grand Concourse, I had played on long spring evenings such as this. ... It was a pleasant memory for a young man so far from peace and home, and it brought so many recollections with it that I began to grow exceedingly tender about myself. In fact, I indulged myself in a reverie so strong that I felt as though a hand were reaching down inside me. It had to reach me so very far to touch me! (Roth 1994: 640)

Marx recognizes that he is not only physically far away from his home, but that this statement acknowledges his being spiritually far away from his Jewish tradition. He interprets Grossbart’s Yiddish expressions as “rumour of home and past time” which become a catalyst of change in his attitude toward his Jewishness (Roth 1994: 640).

Walker’s story begins with Mama and Maggie Johnson waiting outside their new house. But their “departure” had started earlier. Although the Johnsons now have a new house “in a pasture” Mama and Maggie still tend to occupy the yard, which is “an extended living room” where “any-

one can come and sit and look up into the elm tree” (Walker 1993: 371). Mama admits that she has consciously turned her back on the new house, indicating that it bears a similarity to a ship: “there are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship” (Walker 1993: 373). This ship imagery is an obvious allusion to a slave ship with little windows for light and ventilation. The fact that Maggie and Mama occupy the territory around the house is indicative of their metaphorical displacement. Dislocation is derived from Heidegger’s “*umheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit* – literally ‘unhousedness’ or ‘not-at-home-ness’ – and is a marker of ‘colonial hegemonic practices’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007: 65). By deliberately choosing to occupy the yard Mama demonstrates that she understands the dominant practices of neo-colonialism by identifying the origin of her dislocation within the practice of slavery. The old house seems to be an allegory of the homeland, Africa, which explains why Mama is so sentimental about “the old house”. A new house is a symbol of oppressive America, which is portrayed as a hermetic, homogenizing space where “breezes never come” (Walker 1993: 371). Mama’s reluctance to occupy that space signifies her resistance to the position assigned to her by racist America. Mama’s mode of behaviour is a way of decolonizing her world.

## Biblical analogies

Apart from the main characters of the two stories, who seem to be metaphorically displaced, or ‘not-at-home’, both stories can be paralleled through their exploration of the Biblical theme of redemption. Sam Whitsitt, in his comment on Walker’s story, remarks that at the outset of the story Maggie and Mama “are waiting for redemption”, and that

in Walker’s writing, redemption will take one away and bring one back in a perhaps humbling but empowering way, to something close to home. This form of redemption takes place as an epiphany: You realize that what can save you isn’t out there, but has been nearby all along, beside you, even in you, but never noticed, never heard, or never given a second thought. (2000: 447)

In the story Mama’s daydream is a kind of prelude to the epiphany before Mama and Maggie are redeemed, before the value of their black existence is acknowledged through the recognition of their art of stitching quilts. In her dream Mama visualizes herself as “lighter” and better-looking, despite the fact that in real life she looks completely different. Mama’s and Maggie’s knowing self-identification of their codified slow-wittedness and ugliness is proven by Mama rhetorically asking, “who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue”, and by comparing Maggie’s brain to “an elephant’s brain” (Walker 1993: 372, 377). She recognizes their social assignment – the re-inscribed codification of African Americans as unintelligent. Mama and Maggie are longing for a change, for freedom and salvation from the re-inscribed codification of African Americans. Mama’s dream is an evident expression of that wish. Although in Walker’s story the dream seems unrealistic and has a bitter undertone, the story itself ends with a kind of awakening for Mama. The story ends on a positive note. The redemption for the years of social exclusion of

the African American experience and art/culture comes just after Dee announces her willingness to take the quilts. Mama states that she “promised to give the quilts to Maggie when she marries John Thomas” (Walker 1993: 378). Her daughter replies that her sister “can’t appreciate these quilts”, and “she would probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use” (378). Mama is surprised by Dee’s request since she remembers how Dee was offered to take the quilts in the past and refused to do so as she considered them to be “old-fashioned” (378). Although Dee changes her mind by deciding to make use of the quilts right now, she declares that she “would hang them” as “that was the only thing you could do with them” (378). Mama perceives Dee’s superficial interest in the quilts, as well as her recognition only of their artistic, decorative merit, as reflecting Dee’s disingenuous investment in the African American tradition and her shallow re-Africanization. Quilts seem to function in the story as a spiritual galvanizing element between the past and the present, the compilation of the knowledge and experiences of the African-American ancestors. Mama ultimately realizes that what matters in their lives is African American practicality, the “discredited knowledge” of black people, as Toni Morrison (1986: 342) calls it. “The discredited knowledge” in Walker’s story is the ability to make quilts or “whittle it [a churn top] out of a tree”, and the knowledge of their ancestors on how to put these objects to “everyday use” (Walker 1993: 376). The knowledge of their ancestors is what can redeem Mama and Maggie, and give them a meaningful existence in an oppressive America. Mama’s and Maggie’s ability to make the quilts is a symbol of their redemption for social injustice.

In “Defender of the Faith,” all of Grossbart’s tricks, as well as his conscious hints dropped with regard to Yiddish tradition and language, become a catalyst for Marx’s change of orders. This change of orders constitutes a form of redeeming injustice. All soldiers, including Halpern and Fishbein, are supposed to be shipped to the Pacific, except for Grossbart, who is to be deployed to New Jersey. Marx changes the orders by asking Sergeant Bob Wright to allow Grossbart to be sent with the rest of his Jewish friends to the Pacific. When his trainee comes demanding an explanation Sergeant tells Sheldon that he is “the one who owes explanations. (...) To me. (...) Mostly to Fishbein and Halpern” (Roth 1994: 659). Marx believes that the change of orders is a way of implementing justice and moral rules which have been perverted by Grossbart, who has constantly been asking for special treatment. Giving special privileges to Grossbart may have given him a bad reputation by creating the suspicion that he is a biased superior. Marx’s riposte, calling Grossbart “a regular Messiah”, finally backfires by casting Marx as a kind of Saviour figure, the Messianic archetype who defends the integrity of Jews (Roth 1994: 648). Marx bears a collective responsibility for the fate of Halpern and Fishbein, who have been used by Grossbart for his own selfish purposes. Marx’s change of orders might be considered to be a means of atonement for his past sin of jettisoning the Jewish tradition, thus redemption.

While employing the Bible as an analytical tool to discuss “Defender of the Faith” and “Everyday Use”, one can further elucidate these two narratives. Robert McMahon and Patricia Cane state that “Everyday Use” can be interpreted as a modified version of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and Dee represents the prodigal child, with the important exception that she is not endowed with gifts

from her mother as she returns home at the end of the story. Sam Whitsitt points to the Bakers' interpretation of Dee as a kind of "serpent", who intrudes into the rustic garden of the Johnsons (Whitsitt 2000: 449). However, "Everyday Use" is Mama's story; it is not Dee's story; it is narrated in the first person, and she is the one who ultimately faces the dilemma of setting the dispute over the quilts. Mama's conundrum can be paralleled to that of Solomon's determining the true mother in the Bible. Just the same as Solomon, Mama has to determine who is authentic in their motives. Mama's world is a world of polarized values and concepts, it is a world labelled good and bad, false and authentic, foolish and wise. It is a world filtered through the prism of Mama's perspective, and that is why it is not completely reliable. The story also brings to mind the biblical quotation which says: A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes (Proverbs: 13:1). Dee's figure is close to that of a mocking child who mocks the wisdom of Mama and her ancestors. Dee's character also raises the question of the hierarchy of knowledge. Since the concept of knowledge is subjective, and knowledge itself is a tacit phenomenon, readers are left in a quandary as to whose perception of the world is right: Dee's or Mama's.

In "Defender of the Faith" the readers are also put in the position of the Biblical king Solomon when they are to verify which character represents the world of inauthenticity/duplicity, who is the imposter, and who personifies the good Jew. By using the Biblical Proverbs' terminology the readers are to determine who is the wise son and who is the mocker. Gillian Steinberg argues that "Roth's creation of Grossbart, Marx and Grossbart's two friends, Halpern and Fishbein shows him [Roth] consciously engaging with Midrash and with the textual traditions of religious Judaism" (2005: 9). She draws a parallel between Roth's characters and the characters in the passage in the Haggadah, which "speaks of a wise son, an evil son, a simple son, and one who cannot even ask a question" (Steinberg 2005: 9). But bearing in mind that Roth desires to go beyond the "immediate parochialism of Jewish background," finding biblical resonances in Roth's story offers an interpretative midpoint between the world of traditional Orthodox Jewish values and Roth's humanistic approach. The world in Roth's story is also polarized like Walker's, and polarization of the characters increases from the outset of the story. At the beginning of the story Nathan Marx attempts to unify the resentments of "a goddam" war hero with a stereotypical Jewish "antihero" who assimilates into the American mainstream (Roth 1994: 647). He does not obey Jewish dietary laws because he treats religion as a separate secular institution. He seems to be presented as one who has lost his "sense of Jewishness" (642). However, as the story progresses Marx undergoes a serious change of attitude that accounts for his final decision, and he finally defends his "Jewishness". At the other end of this moral binary opposition one can find Private Sheldon Grossbart, who seems to excel in his religiosity, tries to obey dietary laws, attends Jewish services and speaks out on behalf of the Jewish community. He projects an image of himself as being attached to old-fashioned cultural Jewish morality. Roth entirely deconstructs this dichotomy of characters and values by reversing the roles of the characters. He portrays the characters of Grossbart and Marx in such a way that it becomes apparent that these two characters do not fit the categorizations they were assigned at the beginning of the story. The religious Jewish private Grossbart turns out to be an unscrupu-

lous man faking his devotion to religion and moral values, while the highly assimilated Jewish Sergeant Marx, showing little interest in maintaining a link with his Jewish heritage, becomes a universalized representative of this ethnic group. Marx is confronted again by his persuasive trainee when Grossbart comes pleading to give him a pass to celebrate a Passover dinner. Unfortunately, Grossbart comes back to request a pass for Fishbein and Halpern, who finally manage to get their leaves. During the next encounter, when Grossbart inquires about the change in the direction of the front, Marx notices that his soldier has brought him a non-kosher Chinese roll as a gift instead of “a piece of that gefilte fish” (Roth 1994: 653). He becomes very much enraged when he finds out that the supposed Seder feast was a lie. His subordinate proves to be a calculating selfish liar. Grossbart’s non-kosher Chinese roll epitomizes the world of the inauthentic, the world of mockery. Gillian Steinberg (2005: 15) notes that “his substitution of Chinese food” is a “demonstration of his secularism,” of his forged Judaism.

In questioning who is a better “Defender of the Faith” Roth presents religious identity as an element operating separately from Jewish identity. Roth debunks the stereotypical preconceptions of ethno-racial representation by demonstrating how stereotypical categorizations do not always fit the characters presented in the stories. Through an exaggerated portrayal of his characters Roth demonstrates that the world is not solely divided into morally clear-cut and defined copies of walking stereotypes of the Orthodox Jew or the assimilationist-type Jew. Readers seem to be left with no answer as to how to perceive Marx’s assimilation because it is this highly assimilated character that saves the integrity of the Jews. Roth’s story proves that assimilation may not necessarily be burdened with total dis-identification with the ethnic minority group from which the character originates – just as religion is not always the hallmark of belonging to the Jewish community. I suggest that Roth’s story consciously opposes traditional framing and common stereotyping through building upon Jewish stereotypes and playing with them. Through the caricatural depiction of Jews Roth runs the risk of being called an anti-semite. On the other hand, via Nathan Marx’s standpoint and his moral dilemmas Roth proclaims the distance from schematized thinking about *Yiddishkeit*. In the past Roth had to repeatedly dispel the charge of being a “self-hating” Jew, especially after the publication of “Defender of the Faith”, along with other short stories in *Goodbye, Columbus*, as well as *Portnoy’s Complaint*, a novel which generated a lot of controversy.

During the first encounter Grossbart aims to shorten the distance between himself and his first Sergeant by making a witty remark about Marx’s surname: “We thought you... Marx, you know, like Karl Marx. The Marx Brothers. Those guys are all... M-a-r-x. Isn’t that how you spell it, Sergeant?” (Roth 1994: 636). This joke about Marx’s last name becomes a living representation of Grossbart’s forged Jewish faith. The reference to Jewish-American comedians has a hidden agenda in that Grossbart’s behaviour can be compared to taking part in a kind of masquerade, a comedic performance which can be observed by the reader as the story develops. Marx perceives Grossbart as “entirely strategic”, which makes him a kind of player in a game of ethno-religious masquerade (656). Grossbart himself turns into a Jewish caricature at the end of the story. The crafty allusion

to the Marx Brothers foreshadows the way in which Grossbart will be unmasked. Grossbart is later exposed by Marx by using the same canny strategy that he uses while confronting his superior.

In fact, in Roth's story the readers are presented with two highly assimilated Jews: Grossbart and Marx. Grossbart puts on the mask of an "unassimilable" dark Oriental Jew of the 19th century, as presented in Johnathan Freedman's *Klezmer America: Jewishness, Ethnicity, Modernity* (2008), with strange eating habits, when in reality Grossbart is all white, fully Americanized in his white practices, and is caught eating a non-kosher Chinese roll. The fact that Grossbart identifies himself as "different," the Other, casts him as the non-white. This conscious transition from a white to a non-white position suggests a racial degradation which can be best illustrated through the symbolic use of blackface. Although blackface specifically refers to the experience of African-Americans, Grossbart's metaphorical "blacking up" resembles the use of blackface by the main Jewish character, Jakie Rabinowitz, who impersonates an African American jazz singer in the musical *The Jazz Singer*. Stephen Whitfield (drawing on Michel Rogin's arguments about the linkage between Jews and blackface) claims that the blackface metaphor in *The Jazz Singer* "signified a strategy of assimilation", and "that blacking up was the vehicle for becoming white" (1999: 150). I have appropriated the "blackface metaphor" because Grossbart's categorization as the Other possesses a performative quality and may surprisingly be considered as a medium for becoming white. It allows the readers to discover that he is white – fully Americanized despite his temporary suspicious mask of "darkness" – "Otherness." The more "non-white" (Other) Grossbart tries to become, the whiter he appears. It is a startling way of drawing attention to his Americanness/whiteness.

Dee's re-Africanization also resembles a more conscious masquerade, which can figuratively be compared to a minstrel show through the performative quality of her African-Americaness. Although Dee maintains the appearance of appreciating African-American tradition Mama perceives her daughter as a person who undergoes a steady process of dis-identification with her African-American traditions and community by conforming to white standards. Mama emphasises Dee's passive consumerism by stating that "Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit" (Walker 1993: 373). The oddness of Dee's racial performance is marked by Mama's seemingly unimportant allusion to her daughter's dress, which is described as "a dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun." (Walker 1993: 374). Dee becomes an object of suspicion through wearing a dress that seems to be brighter than the sun. It is as if Dee's performed blackness is ridiculed through the lightness of her dress/looks. It is as though Mama states that Dee's blackness is a sophisticated cover for ascribed moral whiteness, Dee's more assimilationist way of being promotes white values and a white viewpoint on African-American tradition.

## The Stereotypical "Other"

In "Everyday Use" Walker deals with preconceptions about African Americans, their representation as ethnic Others. Sam Whimsitt notes that Dee, who wants to take a picture of the house

without herself, aims to “frame the world, define its borders” (2000: 448). He also claims that “this is what the Bakers call Dee’s fashionably ‘aesthetic’ distance from southern expediencies” (2000: 449), which slightly complicates one’s understanding of “Everyday Use”. Dee’s “aesthetic distance”, her attempt to take a picture, which is not fully understood by Mama and Maggie, may also have another meaning. Mama notices that Dee “stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included” (375). Mama and Maggie are photographed as if they were exoticized objects, but they are always photographed in the vicinity of the house, they cannot get out of the shadow of the house. Even when Dee takes a photo of a cow Mama states that Dee “snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house” (375). The Johnsons’ new house is at the same time the backdrop and the normative racist framework of the picture. Since the house functions as a metaphor of a racist America Mama and Maggie are left at the very bottom of this white normative framework – they are outcasts. This explains why Mama consciously turned her back on the house. They are exotic objects to be gazed at, but they seem to exist only within the white normative space of America. Mama and Maggie are rendered Others, strange and ugly. Mama describes herself as “a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands,” which is metonymic of black womanhood and the defeminized preconceptions of black women that are present in the dominant white culture (371). Stereotypical values attributed to black women are those of uneducated, masculinely-built super workers. Mama’s perception of African-Americans goes back to the time of slavery. This is especially evident in her portrayal of Maggie, who presents a servile mentality and manner with her “chin on the chest, eyes on the ground, feet in the shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground” (372). Maggie is an African-American whose mind and body tend to be “locked” in the past. Her body not only bears signs of “the burn scars” after the fire of their old house, but her psyche is distorted by the internalization of myths present in a white culture depicting black women as ugly (371). Maggie and Mama are the sufferers and martyrs of the American racist perspective. However, Dee, who receives a replica of Walker’s name – Wangero (the same name Walker is given on her trip to Africa in the late 1960s, as Sam Whimsitt and other critics have pointed out), does not want to fit into the stereotyping normative framework. She never places herself in the picture – in the white normative framework of America – although one can get such a mixed impression when looking at Dee’s playful attempt at re-Africanizing herself, renaming herself.

In “Defender of the Faith” Grossbart tries to project himself as the ethnic Other when he says, “Because I’m a Jew, Sergeant. I am different” (652). This way of “Othering” Grossbart as a Jew is also deeply embedded within common postcolonial discourse. “The construction of the Other is fundamental to the construction of the Self”, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim when analyzing the importance of Spivak’s theory of postcolonialism (156). The process of “Othering” starts with establishing the opposition, by creating the difference between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer defines himself against the colonized. In this case, the highly assimilated Jew, Marx, takes the position of “a goy” (non-Jew) against the supposedly oppressed Orthodox Jew,

Grossbart. Grossbart accuses Marx of being an Anti-Semite when he comes pleading to his superior to give him a pass to celebrate a Passover dinner. When the trainee sees his superior's reluctance to give him a pass he says that Marx sounds like a "goy" (non-Jew), and that for Grossbart "it's a hard thing to be a Jew. (...) it's a harder thing to stay one" (651, 652). Grossbart suggests that he is oppressed and stigmatized because of his ethno-religious identity. Roth's character Grossbart projects the features of Jonathan Freedman's "Oriental Jew", with his "unassimilability, due to his systemic constitutionally nonrational 'Oriental make-up'" (2008: 263). Roth's axis of difference in Grossbart's portrayal is grounded in the character's religious "Oriental" eating customs and Yiddish language.

The reader can find the colonized and the colonizer, respectively, in the figures of Dee and Maggie in Walker's story, particularly in the way Dee reads to Maggie and Mama. Maggie's and Mama's conscious resistance against being more educated and more sophisticated becomes an opposition to white knowledge and practices, which are markers of influence and power in a white dominant culture. The constant imposition of white values is illustrated through the underlying metaphor of Dee's reading to Maggie and Mama. Mama remarks that Dee:

used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand. (373)

The use of words in this passage is particularly interesting. Verbs such as "pressed", "burned" and "shove away" are signifiers of "epistemic violence" – a term coined by the postcolonialist philosopher Gayatri Spivak. Epistemic violence can be identified as a violent way of instilling knowledge on a group of ethnoracial minorities, and a means of replacing the knowledge of various "Others" with supposedly superior white practices. Mama and Maggie interpret Dee's habit of reading to them as a forceful attempt at whitewashing them. Amircal Cabral notes that:

in the effort to perpetuate exploitation the colonizer not only creates a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people; he also provokes and develops the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by so-called assimilation of indigenous people, or by creating a social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses. As a result of this process of dividing, or of deepening the divisions in the society, it happens that a considerable part of the population, notably the urban or peasant *petite bourgeoisie* assimilates the colonizer's mentality, considers itself culturally superior to its own people and ignores or looks down upon their cultural values (1994: 57).

In the story it is Dee who "assimilates the colonizer's mentality" and displays a feeling of superiority towards her black roots. Dee is also depicted as one who hated the old house, which burnt down some time ago, and exemplifies a person with a historyless attitude, although she maintains the appearance of just the opposite. Mama states that Dee would "do a dance around the ashes" of the old house, which functions as a symbol of Africa (373).

Roth's setting of the story, Camp Crowder, becomes the conflict site of pre-existing contesting Jewish stereotypes, just as Walker's setting, the Johnsons' pasture, becomes a contested space of contrary viewpoints and stereotypical preconceptions about African American women seen as ugly and not very intelligent. Roth deploys multiple stereotypical representations of a Jew: Marx, who seemingly falls into the category of an assimilationist Jew, and Grossbart, an outwardly Orthodox Jew who turns out to be the scheming Jew, and finally Fishbein, a weak and emasculated Jew. Both Fishbein and Halpern possess traces of a "not only feminized but hysterical Jew" (Freedman 2008: 266). The author of "Defender of the Faith" also builds upon Jewish stereotypes in his portrayal of Grossbart's mother as: "a ballabusta", who "practically sleeps with a dustcloth in her hand" (Roth 1994:647). Also, the stereotypical image of an overprotective Jewish mother adheres to what Karen Brodtkin calls "the image of smothering and emasculating mothers (of their sons)" (1998: 161).

While Marx tries to blur the differences between himself and the white mainstream, Grossbart uses "strategic essentialism" in order to gain personal privileges. Grossbart's rhetoric relies on some defined essentialist claims which attribute certain characteristics to anyone within the Jewish subset of the population. It presupposes the claim that every Jew is a religious person and that Jews as an ethno-religious group should "stick" together. In "Everyday Use" Walker brings forward the practicality of African-American women as an essentialist element of the African-American collective "we." According to Mama the essence of African-American women lies in their performance of everyday activities.

The worlds presented by Walker and Roth in their short stories are not one-dimensional; the readers' preconceptions that accrete around Roth's Jewish characters are challenged just the same as Mama's dualistic perception of the world is challenged by Walker's conscious choice of Dee's new name. Walker gives Dee the same new name – Wangero – as Walker was given on her trip to Africa in the late 1960s. This fact was not left unnoticed by many scholars, such as by Barbara Christian and Sam Whitsitt. The figure of Dee in Walker's story seems to destabilize the simplistic perception of Mama's world of stereotypical values. However, as a final effect the argument over the quilts is ruminated over by Mama and ultimately enriches Mama's perspective about the value of their African American existence. In Roth's short story the simplified division of the world into good, pious, Orthodox Jews versus evil, secular Jews is threatened by the revelation of the fact that the supposedly Orthodox Grossbart fakes his devotion to Judaism and Jewish customs.

Both the main characters of "Defender of the Faith" and "Everyday Use", Grossbart and Dee, perform a kind of masquerade. They are putting on the mask of the Other, which can be compared to the tradition of minstrelsy. Both Grossbart's and Dee's ethno-racial identities, respectively Jewish and African-American, possess a performative style; they invoke the world of duplicity. By taking on their performer's identity as Jewish or African-American, the characters bring the internal conflicts of American ethnic Others into sharp relief.

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# **Foreign Recipes: Mothers, Daughters and Food in *Like Water For Chocolate*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *A Chorus of Mushrooms***

**Abstract.** The following article will discuss the representation of food, eating and cooking in the context of fiction that focuses on the relationship between mothers and daughters by taking a closer look at the beginnings of contemporary 'food-literature' by female authors. By focusing on the novels *Like Water for Chocolate*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, three texts that were published before 'food-literature' turned into a mainstream sub-genre, this article will critically consider the various themes and ideas this type of literature introduced to the debate surrounding literary representation of gender and sexuality. Whilst the three texts differ in narrative structure and content, they share a specific preoccupation with food, cooking and eating which is linked textually and thematically to the relationships between mothers and daughters and the experience of cultural diaspora. The investigation will focus on the literary and formal modes that interconnect these themes, in particular when asking if food, cooking and eating should have a 'special' place in women's writing, as it has been argued in recent publications exploring food and eating as a theme in women's literature.

**Keywords:** Amy Tan, Laura Esquivel, Hiromi Goto, food, identity, gender, diaspora.

The following article will discuss the way in which the contexts of food eating and cooking problematize and critically comment on the representation of the relationship between mothers and daughters in the novels *Like Water for Chocolate*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *A Chorus of Mushrooms*. By exploring the impact of the theme of food and the acts cooking and eating on narrative structure, the discourse of gender and sexuality and the complexity of the generational relationships between women in a family, this article will investigate the specific place and function of food and eating in and for women's writing.

## **Introduction: Food, Gender and Theory**

Food is at the centre of life and our everyday existence. Its consumption is as ordinary as it is fundamental to our bodies and the culture in which we live and participate. Starting with the fairy

tales we consume as infants, literature is saturated with images of food, its overabundance as well as its painfully felt absence. In recent years, however, matters of the culinary have gained a more central relevance for and in literary texts. When perusing the shelves of contemporary literature in bookshops one is forcefully reminded of the various meanings of consuming in its relation to eating, reading and purchasing. Furthermore, whilst the trend to 'food-literature' is certainly not exclusive to female authors, there is a noteworthy tendency in contemporary writing by women to use food and eating as specific tropes when writing about historical, social and political issues. Sarah Sceats in *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (2000) points out that there is a special relationship between femininity and food, because traditionally it is still mainly women who take care of the provision and cooking of meals. However, she argues,

women eat as well as cook, starve as well as serve, and contemporary fiction is as much concerned with women's appetites as their nurturing capacities. ... women's writing manifests far more diverse areas of engagement than such basic explanations suggest, ranging from explorations of female culinary sensuousness, creativity and authority in cooking, to the exercise of power or political responsibility through food and acts of eating, to the revisiting of earlier depictions of women's sexuality through appetite and eating, from Genesis onwards (Sceats 2000: 2).

According to Sceats, food, eating and cooking, function as a means of exchange and take on the role of a universal signifier, particularly so in and for contemporary's women's writing. Susanne Skubal (2002) in her book *Word of Mouth*, similarly, reads food as a unique signifier when she argues that "food is a language that we speak, for the most part unwittingly" (Skubal 2002: 45). Whilst Skubal does not focus exclusively on women's writing in her exploration of food in relation to literature and language, the feminine, and here especially the maternal, is central to her investigation. Sceats and Skubal look at theorists in psychoanalysis such as Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva when they argue that culinary issues are ineludibly linked to concepts and constructions of femininity and female sexuality. Eating in general, and the preparation and consumption of food in particular, are in both publications linked to moments of the radical and subversive, a connection that is seen as caused by its proximity to femininity and the female. As Skubal points out when discussing the problem of eating disorders:

Underwriting the entire category of disordered eating is the assumption that eating, like other culturally controlled acts ought to be "ordered". But unlike the bulk of culturally and psychically ordered things, eating is in some fundamental way outside the Symbolic order to begin with, primitively and irrepressibly the mark of the pre-genital, of the maternal (Skubal 2002: 68).

By regarding food as situated outside the Symbolic, Skubal attempts to navigate the discussion of eating disorders such as anorexia out of the patriarchal sphere of hierarchical thinking. For her, laws of culture cannot control matters of food and eating, which are situated in the realms beyond the symbolic. However by doing so, her argument banishes discourses of eating and with it the maternal and femininity from the symbolic and from culture. This move is directly complicit with

the phallogocentric binary construction regulating the relationship between nature and culture, a structure that is mirrored in the relationship between male/female and masculine/feminine. This is rather peculiar since Skubal suggested earlier that it

might be said that all culture passes through the mouth. Food – its production and preparation, its distribution, its consumption – still comprises the central economy of life. There are no more elaborate social rituals than those associated with eating” (Skubal 2002: 43).

Here, food and its consumption is defined not only as part of the cultural sphere, when passing through the mouth and the body, eating is imagined as injecting culture into the corporeal which, via the act of ingesting, is demarcated as the locus of culture itself. Thus, rather than positioning eating outside the symbolic, its correlation to the cultural sphere could be understood as being regulated and maintained via extimacy, a process that complicates the relationship between inside and outside. Extimacy links the interior and exterior like a Moebius strip which means, as Jacques-Alain Miller explains, that the “most intimate is at the same time the most hidden....The most intimate is not the point of transparency but rather a point of opacity. ... Extimacy says that the intimate is Other – like a foreign body, a parasite” (Miller 1988: 123).

Whilst Skubal’s categorisation of eating as outside the laws of culture runs the risk of falling back into an overly simplistic binarity, her view of eating as pre-symbolic nevertheless alerts us to one of the most complex and confusing issues in relation to food: the way it muddies the waters between natural and cultural. However, rather than attempting to find the proper dividing line between nature and culture, the complexities and complications surrounding food and eating could be read as a problematisation of this very binarity. In this respect the processes of ingestion and digestion particularly in the ways in which they are refracted in literature are always much more than “a specific mode of communication to the reader” (Sceats 2000: 184). Citing Lévi-Strauss’s adage that food is good to think with, Elspeth Probyn revises the idea of food as a transcendental signifier when she argues,

Eating refracts who we are. Food/body/eating assemblages reveal the ways in which identity has become elementary, and that its composite elements are always in movement. As alimentary assemblages, eating recalls with force the elemental nature of class, gender, sexuality and nation. But beyond these monumental categories, eating places different orders of things and ways of being alongside each other, inside and outside inextricably linked. ... Now beyond a model of inside and out, we are alimentary assemblages, bodies that eat with vigorous class, ethnic and gendered appetites, mouth machines that ingest and regurgitate, articulating what we are, what we eat and what eats us (Probyn 2000: 32).

Thus, rather than understanding food, eating and digestive processes as metaphors through which we can access texts, it might be more beneficial from a literary theoretical perspective to view texts as infected by the complexities underlying the culinary tropes and images they employ. The very meaning and procedure of ingestion and digestion relies on, and simultaneously results in, the blurring of boundaries and spatial categories; eating, it seems, always participates in some

act of contagion that brings into contact areas that are traditionally perceived as separate from each other. Any attempt to 'use' eating and food as tropes will therefore amplify the infectious or parasitic effect on the text that wants to incorporate them metaphorically. In 'Limited Inc' Derrida (1988) refers to the parasite as something that is

by definition never simply *external*, never simply something that can be excluded from or kept outside of the body "proper", shut out from the "familial" table or house... The parasite then 'takes place'. And at bottom, whatever violently 'takes place' or occupies a site is always *something* of a parasite. *Never quite* taking place is thus part of its performance, of its success as an event, of its taking place (Derrida 1988: 90).

Discussing Derrida's notion of the parasitic, Nicholas Royle (1995) elaborates on its spatial ambiguity when he points out that

the parasite both belongs and does not belong to what it inhabits, its 'own' identity is of a different order, being at once *para* ('beside') and *non-para*, inside and outside, coming to figure what is at once the same as and different from itself (Royle 1995: 147).

In literature, I want to suggest, rather than being used "to explore and convey philosophical, psychological, moral and political concerns" (Sceats 2000: 18), food and eating 'take place' in the violating and disruptive sense that Derrida assigns to the workings of the parasite. When incorporated into the text, food and eating refuse assimilation and act as foreign bodies that infect texts with the very same moment of self – alienation and internal alterity that complicates the way they make sense in and as frameworks of culture. With these reflections in mind, it will be interesting to return to the initial question why food and eating should have found such a privileged place in contemporary writing by women.

The relationship of women's writing to the kitchen and the dining room is often ambiguous and rarely uncomplicated. To a certain extent food as a theme and motif in women's literature leads the reader immediately into the sphere of gender and sexuality. However, it would be foolish to suggest that it is only in women's literature where the connection between the culinary, gender and sexuality is interrogated and debated. As Susanne Skubal suggests in her discussion of Marcel Proust's legendary *Madeleines*, as soon as we are in the sphere of eating we are dealing with the oral which itself is inextricably linked with the discourse of the mother:

The explicit pre-occupation with the oral in *Remembrance of Things Past* – the ubiquitous madeleine, the kisses managed and missed, the moth eaten notebooks, the invalids thin fare, the dinner parties and luncheons – is bound to Proust's meditation on memory implicitly and to the maternal inevitably (Skubal 2002: 20).

Eating and food are in a variety of manners intertwined with the sphere of the maternal and are thus always haunted by the ghost of the mother, or as Skubal puts it in relation to Proust: "we can taste the ma in the madeleine" (Skubal 2002: 21). Because of this implicit presence of the mother, food very often functions as a gender specific trope in women's literature. Whilst eating and food

do feature in texts by male authors, they are rarely linked directly to *men's* experience of sexuality and gender. In contrast, the alimentary and culinary in texts by female authors very often encourages readings and interpretations that link food and eating directly to the sphere of the feminine, which then tends to push the texts into the category of *women's literature*. Furthermore, as current publications on the subject demonstrate, the combination of the signifiers 'woman', 'food' and 'writing' are reproductive of each other and the very meanings underlying them. Sceats, for example, introduces the tenet of her book as an argument for

the centrality and versatility of food and eating in women's writing. Not only does the action of the novels examined often occur through food preparation and eating, or through oral and alimentary preoccupation of one sort or another, food and eating themselves convey much of the meanings of the novels. This results from diverse factors such ... deep associations between food and the psyche, specific socio-cultural pressures, especially on women's bodies, cultural and artistic inscriptions, and from the fact that food and its activities offer multiple possibilities for expression and action (Sceats 2000: 8).

The phrase 'especially women's bodies' suggests that in women's literature food and eating will always function, directly or more subtly, as tropes for femininity and the female. Writing by men, the passage seems to imply, is not marked by such specificities. Sceats' observation that the relationship between eating, food and the female body is of special interest is indisputable. Eating, as Maud Ellmann argues, "was traditionally seen as an unseemly and regrettable necessity for women" (Ellmann 1993: 8) and the open mouth of a woman has always seemed too close for comfort and as a signifier impinged on constructions of femininity in an abject manner. Food, its ingestion, digestion and the concurrent corporeal effects of these acts are different for men and women, and it is the ghost of the maternal that can claim responsibility for this discrimination. Hillel Schwartz (1986) argues in relation to the gender specifics of obesity:

Yet when men turned their eyes on overweight women, they made of women's dieting a fulsome and patent ritual. Since women's weights seemed to jump at puberty, marriage, pregnancy and menopause, women's reducing had to be spoken of in terms of fluids, internal secretions and sexual ichor, as if womb and stomach were identical twins. ... Where fat men inspire of terrify, fat women draw the camphor of sympathy and disgust – sympathy, because they cannot help themselves; disgust, because they are sexually ambiguous, emotionally sloppy (Schwartz 1986: 17-18).

Food appears to affect the female body by immediately gendering and sexualising it in a specific manner as suggested by the image of stomach conflated into a womb. The body of the pregnant and lactating woman and the taboos surrounding it are therefore always related to sexuality *and* eating since they function as an unconscious reminder of the sexual act as well as bringing to the fore cultural anxieties about cannibalism. If womb and stomach can be interchanged in the female body, the swollen abdomen can be a sign of the creation of life *and* the violation of one of the oldest taboos: the eating of human flesh. Whilst eating disorders do not exempt male bodies, it is in particular the images of the female obese or emaciated body that unnerve cultural sensibility and

trigger feelings of disgust and abjection and a sense of the grotesque. This 'special' sexualising and gendering effect of food and eating leaves its trace on sexual as well as textual bodies and, as I will argue when discussing the fictional works, on the discursive structure of literary texts that approach femininity via the culinary.

If concepts of femininity and female sexuality are influenced and 'infected' by the processes underlying ingestion and digestion, one could suggest that this would also have a direct effect on the relationship between women and writing in texts that are preoccupied with the subject of food. Is there something intrinsically gender specific in literature by women that revolves around tropes, images and themes based on food and eating? Furthermore, can this question be approached in a framework that will not put it automatically into the proximity of an essentialism based on a reductive, foundationalist view of femininity and female sexuality? Rather than viewing the relationship between eating and femininity as something that will affirm the meaning of woman, is it feasible that the concept of a given subjectivity is devoured by the very processes that are employed to gain access to a stable and fixed identity? Judith Butler (1990) asks these questions in a more general and abstract sense when she explores the relationship between signification processes and identity:

If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an "I" that preexists signification. In other words, the enabling questions for an assertion of "I" are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by which that pronoun can circulate (Butler 1990: 143).

When looking at the three examples of women's writing on food and the processes underlying them, the focus will therefore be on the ways in which women (and femininity) are consuming texts/food and, at the same time, are consumed by them.

## **Consuming Passions: Cooking, Eating and Gender in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate***

Published in 1989, Laura Esquivel's debut novel *Like Water for Chocolate* (1993) was an over-night success and gained much acclaim from critics as well as from the reading public. To a certain extent, the book can be described as a trendsetter when it comes to the genre of 'food literature', a genre that would evolve in full force from the 1990s onwards. The 1993 English translation of the novel comments on its back cover on its 'simmering sensuality' and praises it as a book that will be savoured and craved, as 'an adventure in the kitchen' that 'serves up the full helping' and thus sets the tone for a genre where food is subject as much as metaphor. *Like Water for Chocolate* inaugurated the food inspired lingua that from now on would become *de rigueur* when literary works on food and eating were reviewed in the literary supplements of newspapers and magazines. The book tells the story of the De la Garza family in revolutionary Mexico, focusing in particular on

the daughter Tita and her unfulfilled love relationship with Pedro. Tita, as the youngest daughter, has to obey Mexican tradition and stay unmarried to look after her mother, Mama Elena. Pedro, as a last resort to stay close to Tita, marries her sister Rosaura, a union also championed by the suspicious Mama Elena who wants to make sure that Tita will comply with the fate that tradition has allocated her. For more than twenty years Tita and Pedro will be unable to love for each other, they will be separated for long times and by long distances until they are finally united in passion only to die of the sexual ecstasy that proves too powerful for their mortal bodies. What grants the story its particular narrative and discursive *frisson* though, is the way it unfolds in relation to cooking and eating. Divided into twelve chapters, the text is based on an annual chronology from January to December. Furthermore, each chapter commences with a recipe for a dish which will be of major importance for the narrative, its characters and the overall development of the story. Tita and Pedro's fate is thus embedded in the preparation and consumption of food, mainly traditional Mexican dishes, which, as the granddaughter of Rosaura and the narrator of the story explains in the final chapter, was all that was left of their lives:

When Esperanza, my mother, returned from her wedding trip, all that she found under the remains of what had been the ranch was this cookbook, which she bequeathed to me when she died, and which tells in each of its recipes this story of a love interred (Esquivel 1993: 221)

The book the reader has been consuming is thus retrospectively categorised as being part of the genre of cookbooks. As a collection of recipes, the story is linked even closer to the culinary domain which transfers the location of the love story from the bedroom to the kitchen. This shifting of boundaries, the blurring of discrete categories and a general sense of the unpredictable runs like a thread through the novel and has a direct bearing on the directions into which the narrative and its characters evolve. Furthermore, written in the style of magic realism with its ventures into the fantastical, emphasis of the sensual, overabundance of imagery, direct references to the sphere of sexuality and the unconscious, distortions of time, and references to the oral tradition, the novel always works on the margins of plausibility and thus questions a stable notion of the real. Uncertainty and instability are further emphasised and put to the fore by the thematic focus on food, its cooking and consumption, which are then developed as the narrative's main subject and formal device, as Kristine Ibsen (1995) points out:

Food functions as a narrative device in the novel: like a cinematic montage, bridging both temporal and spatial displacements, it transports both the characters and the reader into a sensual dimension of reality. ... Esquivel ... approaches the subject playfully, as Tita compares her emotional and physical state in terms of ludicrous culinary metaphors that question both the "seriousness" of canonized discourse and the timeworn metaphors of popular literature... Clearly, then, the novel's culinary metaphors suggest an approach to reality that emphasizes what is tangible over what is abstract and theoretical (Ibsen 1995: 138-139).

Ibsen's discussion of *Like Water for Chocolate* is above all interested in its parodic character, especially in relation to the tradition of a more mainstream magic realism as, for example, rep-

resented by García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. She argues that whereas Márquez's novel focuses on a re-examination of historical trends,

Esquivel's work produces a meaning independent from the original text by concentrating on the individual experience in relation to history: rather than emphasizing issues of sexual domination and violence upon which the Americas were founded, Esquivel "feminizes" her novel through the exaggeration of traits traditionally associated with women such as irrationality and sensitivity (Ibsen 1995: 135).

For Ibsen, the achievement of *Like Water for Chocolate* lies in its successful attempt to challenge canonical literature by forcing it to take into account marginalized and excluded literary discourses resulting in a displacement of "aesthetic hierarchies and generic categories" (Ibsen 1995: 143). Furthermore, by dissolving "the borders between canonized and popular literatures, between oral and written discourses, the hierarchy governing such distinctions is subverted as well" (Ibsen 1995: 143).

Ibsen points out that her reading of Esquivel's novel is mainly concerned with the aspect of parody, a choice of focus that will evidently impinge on her evaluation of the role and relevance of food and eating. Whilst she mentions the aspect of food, the culinary as such is not a main point of reference when she discusses *how* the text subverts existing boundaries and hierarchies. Furthermore, whilst she regards the novel as radical in its formal structure as well as in its relationship to its readers, there is a tendency to cling on to a framework of binary oppositions in her interpretation. There are many instances in her article when she talks of 'real women' versus literary representations of femininity, the tangible versus the abstract and theoretical, the historical versus personal experience. Operating in a paradigm that relies on such clear distinctions and binarities somewhat undermines her argument and often reinforces the sense of discrete categories, in terms of gender as well as of genre. Focusing on food and cooking, and the way in which they are integrated into and at the same time disrupt the narrative and the presentation and construction of identities, I want to suggest, encourages a different reading, one that questions the existence of clear-cut boundaries and might thus offer a more radical re-appropriation of the magic in magic realism.

In "Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice" Lisa M. Heldke asks what would have happened to philosophy had Plato regarded "the preparation of food as a central source of philosophical insight" (Heldke 1992: 203). She argues that

had subsequent philosophers continued to attend to such activities as growing and cooking food, it is likely that the theory/practice dichotomy, which threads its way through much of western philosophy, would not have developed as it did. Foodmaking, rather than drawing us to make a sharp distinction between mental and manual labour, or between theoretical and practical work, tends to invite us to see itself as a "mentally manual" activity, a "theoretically practical" activity – a "thoughtful practice" (Heldke 1992: 203).

Esquivel's novel can be read as a literary example that speculates in a similar vein on the relationship between philosophy and food making, and by doing so promulgates a notion of cooking and the kitchen that allows them to be viewed and understood in a much more radical way than

they traditionally are. Whilst the novel is set in a mainly feminine environment, there is no sense of a functioning women's community or sisterhood. The most surprising aspect of the text, and incidentally also the case for *The Joy Luck Club* (1994) and *A Chorus of Mushrooms* (1997), is the state of war between many of the female characters, and here in particular mothers and daughters. Mama Elena practices a matriarchy based on a model of hierarchical patriarchy: only her opinion counts, no decision can be questioned, her daughters, and in particular Tita, are treated like servants, if not slaves. Her behaviour is put into context when, after her death, Tita discovers that her mother was passionately in love with a man she was not allowed to marry. However, even when it is revealed that she disobeyed convention and resumed sexual relations with her lover (an escaped slave from America) when still married to her husband, Mama Elena remains a rather reviled character throughout the narrative. Her lover was killed before she could elope with him and leaves Mama Elena in a loveless marriage and pregnant with his child, Gertrudis. Gertrudis eventually causes the death of her mother's husband who dies of a heart attack when rumour of the identity of Gertrudis' real father reaches him. Furthermore, after consuming Tita's Quail in Rose Petal Sauce, Gertrudis runs off with one of the revolutionaries and later lives in a brothel since she is utterly consumed by a sexual arousal that no single man can satisfy. Tita's discovery of the similarity between her mother's fate and her own and the identity of Gertrudis biological provenance does not result in forgiveness, though. The brutality of her mother's treatment and the effect it has been having on Tita's life is of major importance for the development of the narrative discourse. Even at her mother's funeral, Tita is unable to forgive and she can only exonerate Mama Elena's behaviour by dividing her retrospectively into a good and a bad mother:

During the funeral, Tita really wept for her mother. Not for the castrating mother who had repressed Tita her entire life, but for the person who had lived a frustrated love. And she swore in front of Mama Elena's tomb that come what may, she would never renounce that love (Esquivel 1993: 126).

This concept of the divided mother harks back to Klein's depressive position where infants experience guilt about the destructive impulses and phantasies that are directed against the primal object, the mother, and, at an even earlier stage, against the maternal breast. Changing between persecutor and loved object, the figure of the mother emerges here as divided, similar to her appearance in folklore and oral tradition in which she is traditionally presented in the dual roles of loving mother and witch who wants to harm the daughter. The co-existence of these two models of the maternal emerges in the novel via cooking and eating. Tita, a child prodigy in the kitchen, is also a child of the kitchen, since, rather than nursed by her mother whose milk dried up because of the shock over the husband's death, the cook becomes her substitute mother who feeds her and trains her in the art of cooking. Eventually Tita's culinary ability succeeds that of a skilled chef, because her unconscious emotions impact directly onto the food she is preparing. Furthermore, this osmotic transference will also affect everybody who consumes her food. Food, its preparation, consumption, the mixing of ingredients, do not strictly work as straightforward similes in the novel. It is not that Tita is *like* the food she prepares and feeds to her family; food and the culinary

rather than providing a purely identificatory mirror for Tita, function in the novel as a paradigm that in a ‘theoretically practical’ way offers a radical rethinking of agency and identity. Similar to food, which is always in a process of becoming and cannot be traced back to an original state, any notion of subjectivity in the novel is always one of being in a process of osmosis, in lieu of a better term. As a child, Tita developed a sixth sense

about everything concerning food. Her eating habits, for example, were attuned to the kitchen routine: in the morning, when she could smell that the beans were ready; at midday, when she sensed the water was ready for plucking the chickens; and in the afternoon, when the dinner bread was baking, Tita knew it was time for her to be fed (Esquivel 1993: 1).

Mama Elena causes her own death by continuously overdosing on emetic medicine because she suspects Tita of poisoning her cooking. Rather than giving up the illusion of agency, Mama Elena extricates herself from this process of ‘becoming’ by literally vomiting herself to death. The milk she never had for Tita returns in overabundance as vomit and as an inability to digest Tita’s alternative model of being which questions the idea of authority and hierarchical logic. After having alienated all servants, it is Tita in her role as the dutiful daughter who stays with her and looks after her. To a certain extent, this leads to a reversal of roles where Tita acts like the sensible mother who tries to feed a rebellious infant rejecting her meals:

After that, there was nothing Mama Elena could do except eat what Tita cooked, but she took any possible precaution about it. Besides insisting that Tita taste the food in front of her, she always had a glass of milk brought to her with her meals, and she would drink that before eating the food, to counteract the effects of the bitter poison that according to her was dissolved in the food. Sometimes these measures alone sufficed, but occasionally she felt sharp pains in her belly, and then she took, in addition, a swig of syrup of *ipecac* and another of squill of onion as a purgative (Esquivel 1993: 123).

Finally, it is the self-administration of the purgative that will kill her (a taste of her own medicine, so to speak) and, ironically, Tita’s obedience to her mother. Rather than refusing to fulfil the role her mother has chosen for her, she is heeding her mother’s exact words: “You know perfectly well that being the youngest daughter means you have to take care of me until the day I die” (Esquivel 1993: 14). By refusing Tita’s food, Mama Elena not only brings about her own death, her demise is also directly linked to her failure of accepting a self that is defined by ambiguity. Her reluctance to swallow can be read as a general unwillingness to participate in a ‘culinary philosophy’ based on interconnectedness and which questions a binary distinction between subject and object. As Heldke argues, it is exactly their ability to interconnect that allows foodmaking activities to “challenge the sharp subject/object dichotomy that characterizes traditional inquiry, and that serves to separate such head work from hand work. Preparing food encourages us to blur the separation between ourselves and our food ...” (Heldke 1992: 217). The text thus creates a direct philosophical relationship between Mama Elena’s death and her non-participation in cooking and eating.

Eating and cooking, in particular as demonstrated in the fate of Tita, are often dangerous acts determined by a contradictory nature that can make them wholesome *as well as* detrimental to bodily health, and it is this rather complex and ambiguous notion of the culinary and of identity that Mama Elena rejects when she chooses to vomit rather than swallow. Food as *pharmakon*, as something that can kill *and* cure, functions as the contradictory centre of *Like Water for Chocolate* and as a powerful formal and narrative device that affects the performance of identities. Elena (mother) and Tita (daughter) are the same *and* different; Mama Elena dies *because* Tita is doing her duty and feeding her; Pedro marries Rosaura *because* he loves Tita; John gives up Tita *because* he loves her. By focusing on the processes that underlie cooking and eating, the often anarchic effects they have on separate spheres, boundaries and the relationship between centre and margin, the novel, rather than *using* the culinary as metaphor, plays with the concepts of traditional logic and often reverses the rules governing cause and effect. By doing so, it comments pertinently on the complex ways in which food functions as metaphor and the way in which identity is only intelligible as the effect of narrative forces. Discursively structured by the deconstructive mechanisms of magic realism, cooking and eating emerge as an all – encompassing textual economy that de-regulates what is traditionally regarded as normal. When preparing the cake for the wedding between her sister and her lover, for example, Tita, overcome by sadness, cries into the batter with the effect that all wedding guests will share her tears. They, furthermore, will succumb to terrible nausea and vomiting which will prevent Pedro and Rosaura to consummate their nuptials. However, eating does not have the same effect on each person: whereas the dish works for Gertrudis and Pedro as an aphrodisiac, it makes Rosaura feel nauseous and sick. Thus, eating, in addition to something we do, the text seems to suggest, does something to us and the effect is more often than not unpredictable because consuming food impacts in a very direct manner on what is regarded as normal and real. When Tita and Pedro can finally consummate their passion for each other, a month after Mama Elena's death, it is ironically, the spectral presence of the latter that helps them to conceal their illicit affair. Because of the heat of their desire, plumes "of phosphorescent colours were ascending to the sky like delicate Bengal lights" (Esquivel 1993: 144). This phenomenon, however, is interpreted by the other members of the household as the presence of Mama Elena's ghost:

If poor Mama Elena had known that even after she was dead her presence was enough to inspire terror – and that this fear of encountering her is what provided Tita and Pedro with the perfect opportunity to profane her favourite place with impunity, rolling voluptuously on Gertrudis' bed – she would have died another hundred times over (Esquivel 1993: 145).

It is thus via her daughter's disobedience that her mother is resurrected. Going against the maternal will, Tita's act refers back to Mama Elena's own extra marital affair and the consequences it had on her family, in particular her daughters. This link between mother and daughter as determined by an oscillation between sameness and difference evolves as one of the major themes in the novel and is somewhat typical of this genre of fictional texts. *The Joy Luck Club* (1994) and *A Chorus of Mushrooms* (1997), although narratively and thematically dissimilar to *Like Water for*

*Chocolate* and each other, share many of its discursive elements in particular where food, eating and the relationship between mothers and daughters are concerned.

### **Eating Differently: Mothers, Daughters and Diaspora in *The Joy Luck Club* and *A Chorus of Mushrooms***

Amy Tan's and Hiromi Goto's novels are both situated in a cross-cultural and cross-generational setting, *The Joy Luck Club* (1994) referring to the lives of first and second generation immigrants from China, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* (1997) focusing on the relationship between a Japanese grandmother, mother and daughter who emigrated to Canada. Tan's novel, first published in 1989, not only topped the bestseller lists of many western countries but also subsequently triggered off the publication of many similar semi-biographical narratives about women in China. Goto's narrative, published five years later in 1994, is to a certain extent part of this trend set into motion by Tan's novel, but never reached the popularity of the former. Both texts share a proclivity to the oral, a fragmented and often disjointed structure that emphasises a self-referential foregrounding of the narrative and reading process, a notion that is further enforced by the inclusion of fairy tales, dreams and the fantastic in general. Each of these aspects can be related directly to the centrality of food, eating and cooking which play a pivotal role in the ways in which the texts problematise concepts of national and cultural identity and the complex relationship between mothers and daughters. In Goto's novel the narrative voice is shared between Naoe (the grandmother) and Murasaki/Muriel (the granddaughter) leaving Keiko (the mother) silent which means the mother as such only comes into being as the effect of the narrative. Being always under construction, the mother is what *A Chorus of Mushrooms* is about, but, by barring her from a direct narrative presence, the text also questions the mother as a self-identical entity. This non-identity of the maternal is in the text directly related to food and eating in the accounts of Naoe and Murasaki:

Keiko. My daughter who has forsaken identity. Forsaken! So biblical, but it suits her, my little convert. Converted from rice and *daikon* to wieners and beans. Endless evenings of tedious roast chicken and honey smoked ham and overdone rump roast. My daughter, you were raised on fish cakes and pickled plums. This Western food has changed you and you've grown more opaque even as your heart has brittle. Silver-edged and thin as paper. I love you still. You are my daughter, after all, and this you cannot change. For all that you call me Obāchan and treat me as a child. I am not your grandmother. I am your mother (Goto 1997: 13).

Because the mother is never literally present, her position cannot be taken for granted emerges here as a slippery notion that can only be claimed in a contextual manner. As soon as they have arrived in Canada, Naoe loses her position as a mother to Keiko by becoming grandmother *and* child to her. On the other hand, Keiko herself cannot claim the maternal position since she is not given a voice in the narrative. Naoe connects the loss of her daughter to the consumption of Western food that, according to her, has given her a "ketchup brain" (Goto 1997: 13). Murasaki, whose

narrative position in the novel is located in the past (reminiscing about her childhood), and in the present (sharing these memories with her lover), is on a quest to find her place in relation to the matrilineal line of her family and to her cultural and national identity: “The daughter of a daughter of ... the list is endless. But I am here” (Goto 1997: 52). But it is not at all clear where ‘here’ is, and instead of confirming the notion of a fixed presence, the text with its constant changes between narrative positions, places and times, is obscuring rather than clarifying these issues. Murasaki’s memory of childhood is narrated as an experience of confusion in relation to her own position in the family and to her cultural and national self. Her identity comes across as an assemblage of various factors such as, the experience of racism, the alienation from her mother who refuses to speak Japanese and only cooks Western food, and her nostalgic memories of her grandmother who, like her rebels against Keiko. In this act of rebellion, the grandmother shares the position of the child in the family hierarchy, but is at the same time also an alternative mother figure to her granddaughter who she feeds Japanese food and memories of her homeland.

Similar to *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, *The Joy Luck Club* is structured by a variety of narratives and narrative viewpoints that interconnect in multifarious manners. Organised in sixteen chapters the novel weaves together the voices of three mothers and four daughters, and whereas the mother and maternal is problematised mainly as absence in Goto’s novel, Tan’s narrative gives the mothers a direct voice in the different narratives. However, this voice comes across as a provisional one since the mothers’ stories are often focused on their memories as daughters and wives, which thus presents the concept of the maternal as neither fixed nor given, but contingent on culture, national identity and history. This has also a direct effect on the concept of the family and the manner in which it is under discussion in the novel. As Marina Heung (1996) argues:

In *The Joy Luck Club* family allegiances are complicated and disrupted within a kinship system in which blood ties are replaced by a network of alternate affiliations. ... These stories of disrupted family connections, of divided, multiplied, and of constantly realigned perceptions of kinship, constitute a pattern clearly diverging from the monolithic paradigm of the nuclear family (Heung 1996: 602).

Rather than offering a celebration of the special bond between mother and daughter, *The Joy Luck Club*, similarly to Goto’s and Esquivel’s imaginations of the maternal, approaches its subject in an inquisitive manner creating an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty. Tan’s novel constantly foregrounds the impossibility of ‘direct’ communication between the female generations, an issue that is emphasised by the way language is presented in the text. The mothers often revert to their Chinese dialects – the novel makes it quite clear that there is no such thing as one hegemonic ‘Chinese’ language – and most of them cannot speak English fluently. The daughters’ attempt to set themselves apart from their mothers is made evident in the way they fully embrace the American way of life and in their unwillingness to learn their mother tongue. However, the misunderstandings ensuing from these different positions in relation to language and culture are not presented as something typical to first and second generation Chinese Americans but are utilised as an example

for the problems that will ensue if language is perceived as a means to communicate meaning unequivocally. Stephen Souris (1994) argues that

Tan's multiple monologue novel seems to participate in the convention of having speakers speak into the void – or to the reader as audience. No actual communication between mothers and daughters occurs. ... ; the narrative makes the reader poignantly aware of the distance between each mother and daughter by showing the unbridged gap between them and the potential for sharing and communication that is only partially realized (Souris 1994: 107).

Indeed, the different narratives come across as monologues that reminisce about the past and project desires into the future, but there is never a direct dialogue between mothers and daughters. The club itself was founded originally in China by Jung-Mei's mother as an opportunity for the four women to socialise by playing mah jong and entertaining each other with stories. Every week the respective hostess had to serve food,

special *dyansin* foods to bring good fortunes of all kinds – dumplings shaped like silver money ingots, long rice noodles for long life, boiled peanuts for conceiving sons, and of course, many good-luck oranges for a plentiful sweet life (Tan 1994: 23).

The relationship between food and meaning that is created here hints already at the main function of the culinary and alimentary in the text: by endowing the different dishes with wishes and desires for the future, eating them will transfer them inside the body and, by doing so, making them come true. However, as the fate of each of the female characters in the novel demonstrates, this imagined transference of food cannot work as a straightforward conversion of outside into inside. On a more abstract level, this is the same for the production and dissemination of meaning and truth in the novel: it is never present as such, but always in a state of becoming with the effect that they cannot be 'owned' by either the mothers or the daughters. The complex link between food and meaning is implicitly referred to by Jung-Mei's mother who ironically suggests that food can neither mean anything in a direct manner, nor can eating it guarantee a straightforward transfer from outside to inside. The way we eat and what food means is always contingent on specific historic and cultural contexts, as are the bodies that consume the food:

What fine food we treated ourselves to with our meagre allowances! We didn't notice that the dumplings were stuffed mostly with stringy squash and that the oranges were spotted with wormy holes. We ate sparingly, not as if we didn't have enough, but to protest how we could not eat another bite, we had already bloated ourselves from earlier in the day (Tan 1994: 23).

The meaning of food comes here into being in a metaphorical and performative way since it is not intrinsically meaningful as the contradicting descriptions of the meal demonstrate. Food and eating are part of a more complex framework and, rather than providing answers about who we are and how we relate to each other, they provoke questions about agency and phenomenological knowledge as such.

Whilst the novel's discourse is set into and kept in motion by the desire of the mothers to make themselves 'known' to their daughters (and, of course, *vice versa*), this aim is never realised, neither on a formal nor on a narrative level. The alienation between mothers and daughters is narrated through food, its preparation and consumption and in the novel, rather than functioning as a way of enhancing communication, the culinary emphasises estrangement and the impossibility of self-knowledge. The few occasions when mothers and daughters do share food, result often in conflicts and animosity and never in harmony and understanding. When Waverly takes her mother Lindo out for lunch to her favourite Chinese restaurant to tell her that she intends to marry an American, Lindo dislikes the food ("Not too many good things, this menu" (Tan 1994:166)) and complains about the restaurant's standards of cleanliness ("This greasy thing, do you expect me to eat with it?" (Tan 1994: 166)). Of course, Waverly never even attempts to raise the subject of her marriage. When Jung-Mei remembers a particular New Year's dinner at her mother's house, she discovers that rather than having made her *own* choice when selecting a particular crab, she had been manipulated by her mother:

"What if someone else had picked that crab?"

My mother looked at me and smiled. "Only *you* pick that crab. Nobody else take it. I already know this. Everybody else want best quality. You thinking different."

She said it in a way as if this were proof – proof of something good. She always said things that didn't make any sense, that sounded both good and bad at the same time (Tan 1994: 208).

Jung-Mei's memory of her mother emphasises difference rather than similarity, and it is, paradoxically, only through difference that mother and daughter can know each other, even if this does not make sense to the daughter. Throughout the novel food is utilised as a means of highlighting estrangement and the impossibility of communication between mothers and daughters. The culinary in *The Joy Luck Club* thus contributes to an atmosphere of ambiguity, the unfamiliar and self-doubt, which not only dominates the relationship between mothers and daughters but also the ways in which cultural identity is experienced. Mothers and daughters are always in a state of in-between, and by questioning the idea of agency and self-knowledge, the novel distrusts the idea of the maternal as an essential, unchanging concept. With its many references to food and eating, the text encourages a re-thinking of the meaning of mother-tongue and implies that food, as well as language, complicates rather than eases communication and understanding. Furthermore, it is above all the sense of ambiguity and its inextricable link to orality, in relation to eating as well as speaking that connects questions of gender, national, cultural and ethnic identity in the novel. The atmosphere of the spectral and unfamiliar is all-encompassing and, as Ben Xu points out even 'the return to the motherland in *The Joy Luck Club* is temporary and disillusioning, no more than a "visit". Such a visit is at once an assertion of "going home" and a painful realization of "going home as a stranger"' (Xu 1994: 16).

Home as a place of estrangement and alienation is also one of the major themes in *A Chorus of Mushrooms*. Food and eating in Tan's novel, whilst central to the narrative in general, does not

function on the same level of performativity as in Goto's text, which is intrinsically structured by the culinary. For Naoe only Japanese food is proper food and her alienation from Western culture is above all a culinary one. Murasaki's father has been leading a double life for years, pretending to have perfectly adapted to Canada and its way of life. However, as Murasaki finds out when shopping at the Oriental food store, her father had been a customer there during all his time in Canada, indulging in his favourite Japanese food, salted seaweed paste. When Naoe 'runs away from home', and thus refuses to adopt the subject position allocated to her by society and culture, her daughter is not only bereft of her mother but also of her appetite and language. Her mother's departure results in a crisis of identity for Keiko since she has lost her position as a daughter which she only regains when her own daughter agrees to mother her. When Murasaki learns to cook and feeds Keiko traditional Japanese food, her mother can be coaxed back into language and into accepting that her cultural identity is marked by ambiguity. "Eating is part of being" (Goto 1997: 138), as the owner of the Oriental food shop tells Murasaki, a message that becomes even more forceful when Murasaki discovers that her surname Tonkatsu is actually the name of a Japanese dish. *A Chorus of Mushrooms* unfolds as a type of quest narrative in which Murasaki by searching for her run-away grandmother is also searching for her own identity, in relation to gender as well as culture and ethnicity. Food, particularly in the telepathic messages from Naoe to Murasaki, is represented as directly interwoven with these questions. Furthermore, whilst the grandmother points out: "There is a time for words, but there is a time for food also" (Goto 1996: 146) which might suggest that words and food are antagonistic to each other, more often than not, food and language are represented as dialectically interlaced. Towards the end of *A Chorus of Mushrooms*, in one of her reflective monologues which implicitly address the reader, Murasaki links the culinary directly with the discursive properties of language and narratives:

I suppose there was a time when a body could travel with only a light backpack and a sturdy pair of shoes. Trade a bowl of soup and a slice of bread for a tale or two. If anybody could live that way, it would be Obāchan. Who knows, she may be doing exactly that and, even now, be putting words into my mouth. ... But there must be a lot of people out there just starving for a filling story. Something that would leave a rich flavour on their tongue, on their lips. Lick, then suck their fingertips. Let me feed you (Goto 1997: 201).

Food, as Murasaki realises at the closing pages of the novel 'is the point of departure' (Goto 1997: 201) and partaking of it will send her on a life-long quest that has only just begun.

## **Conclusion: Eating/Speaking like a Mother**

Whilst displaying a range of differences in relation to structure, narrative voice and the ways food and eating are problematised, all three novels suggest that there is a proximity between language and eating, the culinary and the linguistic. However, this does not suggest that eating and food function in a straightforward manner as systems of communication and understanding, in particular when it comes to the relationships between mothers and daughters. Rather than creating

a one-dimensional bond between female generations in a family, food is presented as part of the complexities that govern the often unbridgeable gaps and differences between them. The moment of otherness and subjectivity as defined as an investment in the other, delineates the signifying power of both food and language. In order to connect to the outside other, it has to be internalised by the self, which paradoxically annihilates it by way of processing it. However, the self is as unstable as the other since consumption will leave its effects on the body that devours. Motherhood and the relationship between mothers and daughters refract these complex politics of otherness in the way their representation pertains to repetition and reproduction. The mother recognises her past self in the daughter whereas for the latter imaginations of the future are often directly bound up with the maternal body, particularly in a culture where femininity and femaleness are still inextricably linked to the position of the mother. Food and eating are directly involved in producing the positions of mother and daughter, but rather than allocating spaces of subjectivity in a straightforward manner, they contribute to complications and doubt by showing that the idea of identity as a discrete entity can only ever be an illusion. As Murasaki puts it at the end of *A Chorus of Mushrooms*: “When does one thing end and another begin? Can you separate the two?” (Goto 1997: 213).

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# A Linguistic Analysis of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*

**Abstract.** The application of linguistic theories and concepts as tools for analysis of literary works provides one of the most fascinating and illuminating insights into how they may be read, interpreted, and understood. This assumption underlies the objective of this paper in which I attempt to explicate an interpretation of Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* through an application of the pragmatics tool of presupposition. Thus an attempt is made in this paper to present a linguistic analysis of the play by an examination of its meaning potentials in terms of presuppositions. In this regard, utterances of two major characters, Jero and Chume, his Assistant, are selected and analysed. It may be interesting to note that fictional characters express presuppositions as much as people in real life. Thus this study is a presentation of an interface between linguistics and literary works. In this linguistic study, literary discourse is exploited using the pragmatic concept of presupposition which underlines and underpins the explanatory adequacy of its explication. Stimulating insights are presented in the interpretation and understanding of Wole Soyinka's *Trials of Brother Jero* as a piece of dramatic discourse which constitute and promote the interface of linguistic science and literary science.

**Keywords:** meaning potential, presupposition, pragmatics, dramatic discourse.

## Introduction

The study of how language is used in practical or real life situations may be appropriately referred to as pragmatics. Thus all actual uses (including in literary works) of language come under the purview of pragmatics. Moreover, every use of language can be described as a speech event or discourse. Hence literary works are more or less forms or types of speech events or discourses. In this light, presupposition as a conceptual pragmatic tool appears to be adequate, useful and appropriate for an insightful and illuminating explication of literary and non-literary works. This perhaps makes Elam's claim very apt: "Whatever the properties ascribed to dramatis personae as individuals in a fictional world, and whatever personal, ... social and other roles they are seen to fulfill as functions of dramatic structure, it is in the first instance as participants into speech events that they are usually perceived" (Elam 1980: 36).

In fact, all literary uses of language may be said to be subject to some kind of linguistic enquiry or investigation. Thus it seems productive to employ the linguistic/ pragmatic tool of presupposition in the analysis of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a play. This approach may shed some light in terms of how the play may be interpreted, perceived and comprehended by its readers/audiences.

This view is well-butressed by Elam's explication that dramatic speakers are expected "to produce utterances which are informative ..., 'true' with respect to the dramatic world (unless strategically insincere), comprehensible and relevant to the occasion" (see Elam 1980: 173). Thus, whether in fiction or in real life, the use of language tends to signify the relationship between interlocutors as interactional and transactional. In this regard, in both literary and non-literary discourses, people are seen to employ language to establish or contract relationships which are based on mutual understanding or common / shared values. In this paper, I attempt to investigate, analyse and explicate features of presupposition in selected speeches or discourses of two major characters (Jero and Chume) in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

The choice of literary text was warranted by the fact that *The Trials of Brother Jero* is a popular comedy in the language (perhaps it is the only work by Wole Soyinka that is written in simple English!) of the masses. Its audiences tend to cut across social and intellectual classes. Moreover, though it was published in the early 60's, it is very relevant to the contemporary socio-political and religious situation in Nigeria. The choice of the two characters was determined by their roles as protagonist (Jero as a charlatan) and antagonist (Chume as a victim). An extract from the play is considered sufficient in order to explicate the features of pragmatic tools. The extract is reproduced in the Appendix to allow the reader to consider it in its entirety.

The actions, in a play, embody what the play is about. Thus, according to Richard Gill, a plot is about what the characters are up to, what they want and what they do to achieve their goal (see Gill 2006: 104). Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, portrays the protagonist, Prophet Jero, as charlatan who attempts to achieve his ambition as an important and distinctive prophet by appearing immaculate in a velvet cape, which he had not yet paid for, and articulate in prophecy. His ultimate ambition is to be called the Velvet-hearted Jeroboam, Immaculate Jero, and Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade. The scene starts with Prophet Jero, a much altered man with his clothes torn and his face bleeding, asking his Assistant, Brother Chume, to dismiss the congregation. In their discussions, it was revealed, to the reader or audience, that it was Brother Chume's wife that Prophet Jero had an unpleasant encounter with that morning. It was also revealed that, initially, the prophet was not aware that that woman was Brother Chume's wife. Ironically, Brother Chume had come to report the wife's cruelty to the prophet oblivious of the fact that Jero was actual the man the wife had forced him to carry her to his place to collect the money she was owed. Brother Chume needed the prophet's advice on how to discipline the wife and would be glad to exchange his own marital troubles with the prophet's crosses. Paradoxically, the prophet's advice changed from prayer and forgiveness to punishment and the use of whip as soon as Jero realised whose

Chume's wife was. In the next subsection, I intend to examine the relationship between linguistic form and literary form as some kind of discourse.

## The Interface Between Linguistics and Literary Works

Linguistics, the scientific study of language, seems to be concerned with all aspects of description, analysis and explication of the form, structure and function of language in theory and application. In this regard, it seems appropriate to examine the form, structure and function of language in literary works. By this approach, it may be possible to provide a significantly illuminating insight into the interface between linguistics and literature as a verbal art. Since all uses, forms and functions are of interest in linguistics and its application, the use of language in literary works, such as drama, prose and poetry, appears to be one of the most significant expressions of human social and emotional communication. This communication is seen to take the form of verbal and non-verbal art that is embedded in the mutual, collective and common values, knowledge, practices et cetera of the speech community of the interlocutors. Thus all literary uses of language may be described as exposition of linguistic discourse. Nigel Fabb's explication of the literary form is instructive as follows: "Verbal behaviour is the production of texts, products which have verbal form in the media of writing or speech. Some of those texts are verbal art, also called "literature": they are literary texts. Literary texts have linguistic form because they are texts (the product of verbal behaviour), and they also have literary form (Fabb 1997:1-2).

Boulton (1977: 1) makes a bold attempt to distinguish drama from other forms of literature in his insightful argument that:

There is an enormous difference between a play and any other form of literature. A play is not really a piece of literature. A true play is three-dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended that the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions which occur literally and physically on stage. Though in fact plays are often read in silence, if we are to study drama at all intelligently we must keep this in mind.

What Boulton (1977: 97) seems to point out succinctly is that "A PLAY is its dialogue". What is important here is that, in a play, characters use language pragmatically as in real life unlike in other genres like prose or narrative poetry where the personae is the narrator talking about himself and/or others. The narrator here may be the first person, omniscient, third person or effaced narrator. The point is thus that the audience or the reader/hearer is exposed to fictional scenarios through the eyes and words of the narrator. In a play, the verbal communication involves verbal exchanges that can be described as interactional or transactional in nature. The success of this communication may be said to depend largely on whether or not the hearer /listener understands the message or information the speaker intends to convey. This idea is well noted by Fabb (1997:10) when he argues that communication may sometime be imprecise and, therefore, unsuccessful.

Communication can be vague. For example the speaker may say ‘my love is a red red rose’. The hearer may use this as evidence that the speaker intends to tell him that the loved person is beautiful, precious, will not live forever, and so on: the analogy with a flower means that various characteristics of the flower will be carried over to the loved person. Successful communication involves the hearer reconstructing some of these thoughts and attributing them to the speaker: the communication is successful with different sets of thoughts. There is no single tightly constrained set of meanings intended, just some sets of meanings which can be inferred from the utterance.

Thus one can assume, based on Fabb’s argument, that the utterances of the protagonists and antagonists in plays can be studied using relevant theories of or concepts in pragmatics. Insights from an application of pragmatic theories and concepts, such as presupposition and implicature, ultimately provide some useful illumination in one’s attempt to understand how language is interpreted and understood by interlocutors. A pragmatic analysis of the literary form should be as informative, insightful and discursive as a study of any other form of language use. This assumption is premised on the argument that a valid theory of or concept in language must be able to account for all or at least most of the possible recurrent or regular or irregular patterns as well as available choices. Hence if a theory of language is able to account for one form or function of language it should be able to account for all other forms or functions (see Halliday 1973).

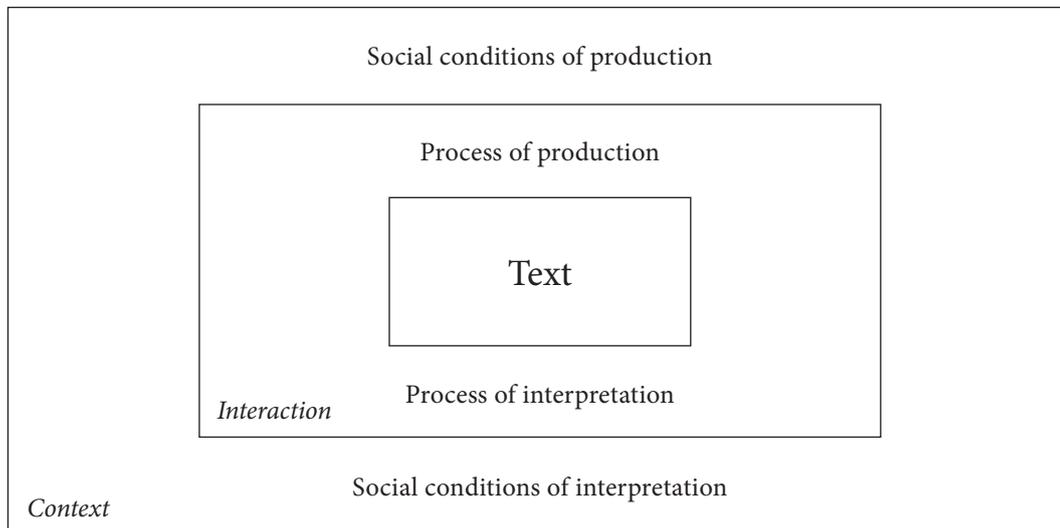
This point is germane here because of the fact that I am primarily interested in ‘understanding how a particular function of language is determined linguistically’ (see Birch 1989:119). In this regard, I am talking about the literary function of language. Grice’s maxims of cooperation may be relevant here since speakers must first cooperate before they can communicate. And the point is that, whether in life or in fiction, cooperative principle seems to come to play. Thus, as a matter of fact, it comes to play in all cases of verbal or sometimes non-verbal exchanges or discourses (see Jianmin 1999: 8). In essence, in all aspects of verbal communication or discourse, Grice’s cooperative principle tends to be applicable but for this study only presupposition is employed because it tends to be both adequate and appropriate to explicate the goal as well as the aim of this paper.

In every communication, the interlocutors tend to be concerned with the way information is organized. Thus any form of communication, such as dialogues, poetry, drama, prose, memos, letters, commentaries, etc. in any linguistic form or language can also be described as a piece of discourse.

In his work, *Language and Power*, Fairclough (2001: 16, 18–19) provides a fascinating conception of language as discourse, language as a form of social practice. In an attempt to make clear what discourse is, he differentiates discourse from text. To him, “a text is a product rather than a process – a product of the process of text production.” In his work, the term, discourse, is used to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just one element – the visible, final one – of discourse. This process is said to include both process of production and process of interpretation, for which the text is a resource. In this regard, drama is taken as a text.

Thus a dramatic discourse may also be seen as involving two types of social conditions: (1) social condition of production and (2) social conditions of interpretation; which relate to three dif-

ferent “levels” of social organization, the level of the social situation, or the immediate social environment in which the discourse occurs; the level of the social institution which constitutes a wider matrix for the discourse; and the level of the society as a whole. In sum, discourse can be described as the relationship between texts, interactions and contexts. Fairclough (2001: 25) illustrates this in the following diagram:



On the basis of Fairclough’s (2001) illuminating argument, drama is the most immediate, impactful type of discourse.

## **An Overview of Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero* as a Dramatic Work**

The play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, was first published in Great Britain in 1964 by Oxford University Press. The Nigerian edition was published in 1981 by Spectrum Books Limited. The cast comprises the following: Jeroboam (Brother Jero), a Beach Diviner; Old Prophet, his mentor; Chume, assistant to Jeroboam; Amope, his wife; a trader; the Penitent, a woman; the angry woman, a tough mamma; a young girl; a drummer boy; a man and an old couple (worshippers) In the play, Brother Jero had a fine velvet cape, but he had not yet paid for it. This is the origin of one of the troubles referred to in the abstract.

## **Methodology/ Presentation of Corpus**

The corpus of my analysis is taken from pages 30 to 32 of the text (the main part of Scene Three), *The Trials of Brother Jero* and it is attached as appendix. Only a sample of my data is actually extracted for the purpose of my analysis since it tends to suffice for the explication of pragmatic features. The turns in speaking are serially numbered. Each text of the corpus is organised into clausal structures. These are then organised into their phrasal and categorial units in the analysis. How-

ever, since we are dealing with discourse, only the clausal and phrasal structures are considered for analysis. The excerpt is as follows:

*(Brother Jero has just come in view. They all rush to help him back into the circle. He is a much altered man, his clothes torn and his face bleeding.)*

1. JERO (*slowly and painfully*):

Clause 1: Thank you, brothers, sisters.

Clause 2: Brother Chume, kindly tell these friends

Clause 3: to leave me.

Clause 4: I must pray for the soul of that sinful woman.

Clause 5: I must say a personal prayer for her. (*Chume ushers them off.*

*They go **reluctantly**, chattering excited.)*

Clause 6: Prayers this **evening**, as usual.

Clause 7: Late afternoon.

2. CHUME (*shouting after*):

Clause 1: Prayers late afternoon as always.

Clause 2: Brother Jeroboam says

Clause 3: God keep you till then.

Clause 4: Are you alright, Brother Jero?

3. JERO

Clause 1: Who would have thought that...

Clause 2: she would dare lift her hands against a prophet of God!

4. CHUME

Clause: Women are a plague, brother.

5. JERO

Clause 1: I had the premonition this morning

Clause 2: that a woman would be my downfall today.

Clause 3: But I thought of it only in the spiritual sense.

6. CHUME

Clause: Now you see how it is, brother Jero.

7. JERO

Clause 1: From the moment I looked out of my window this morning,

Clause 2: I have been tormented one way or another by the Daughters of Discord.

8. CHUME (*eagerly*):

Clause 1: That is how it is with me, Brother.

Clause 2: Every day.

Clause 3: Every morning and night.

Clause 4: Only this morning my wife made me

Clause 5: take her to the house of some poor man,

Clause 6: who she says owes her money.

Clause 7: She loaded enough on my bicycle

Clause 8: to lay a siege for a week

Clause 9: and all the thanks I got was abuse.

9. JERO  
 Clause 1: Indeed it must be a trial, Brother Chume...  
 Clause 2: and it requires... (*He becomes suspicious.*)  
 Clause 3: Brother Chume, did you say that  
 Clause 4: your wife went  
 Clause 5: to make camp only this morning at the house of a ...of someone  
 Clause 6: who owes her money?
10. CHUME  
 Clause 1: Yes,  
 Clause 2: I took her there myself.
11. JERO  
 Clause 1: Er...indeed. (*Coughs.*)  
 Clause 2: Is ...your wife a trader?
12. CHUME  
 Clause 1: Yes.  
 Clause 2: Petty trading, you know.  
 Clause 3: Wool, silk, cloth and all that stuff.
13. JERO  
 Clause 1: Indeed.  
 Clause 2: Quite an enterprising woman. (*Hems*)  
 Clause 3: Er...where was the house of this man...  
 Clause 4: I mean, this man  
 Clause 5: who owes her money?
14. CHUME  
 Clause 1: Not very far from here.  
 Clause 2: Ajete settlement,  
 Clause 3: a mile or so from here.  
 Clause 4: I did not even know  
 Clause 5: the place existed until today.
15. JERO (*to himself*):  
 Clause: So that is your wife....
16. CHUME  
 Clause: Did you speak, prophet?
17. JERO  
 Clause 1: No.  
 Clause 2: no.  
 Clause 3: I was only thinking of  
 Clause 4: how little women have changed since Eve,  
 Clause 5: since Delilah,  
 Clause 6: since Jezebel.  
 Clause 7: But we must be strong at heart.  
 Cause 8: I have my own cross too, Brother Chume.

- Clause 9: This morning alone I have been thrice in conflict with the Daughters of Discord.
- Clause 10: First there was...
- Clause 11: no, never mind that.
- Clause 12: There is another
- Clause 13: who crosses my path every day.
- Clause 14: Goes to swim just over there
- Clause 15: and then waits for me to be in the midst of my meditation before my eyes....
18. CHUME (*to himself, with deep feeling*):
- Clause: I'd willingly change crosses with you.
19. JERO
- Clause: What, Brother Chume?
20. CHUME
- Clause: I was only praying.
21. JERO
- Clause 1: Ah.
- Clause 2: That is the only way.
- Clause 3: But er ...I wonder really
- Clause 4: what the will of God would be in this matter.
- Clause 5: After all, Christ himself was not averse to using the whip
- Clause 6: when occasion demanded it.
22. CHUME (*eagerly*):
- Clause: No, he did not hesitate.
23. JERO
- Clause 1: In that case, since, Brother Chume, your wife seems such a wicked, willful sinner,
- Clause 2: I think....
24. CHUME
- Clause 1: Yes,
- Clause 2: Holy one...?
25. JERO
- Clause: You must take her home tonight....
26. CHUME
- Clause: Yes....
27. JERO
- Clause: And beat her.
28. CHUME (*kneeling, clasps Jero's hand in his*):
- Clause: Prophet!
29. JERO
- Clause 1: Remember,
- Clause 2: it must be done in your own house.
- Clause 3: Never show the discord within you family to the world
- Clause 4: Take her home and beat her. (*Chume leaps up and gets his bike.*)

## Presupposition in Dramatic Discourse

In any linguistic enterprise, effective communication tends to depend, to a large extent, on the shared knowledge or values that exist or prevail contextually among interlocutors. It is this shared knowledge or values that enhance the interlocutors' correct interpretation of each other's utterances and messages as well as their understanding by their audience. It is on this assumption that the pragmatic notion of presupposition rests (see Fairclough, 2001; Osoba, 2014b). George Yule regards the assumption that the hearer and the speaker have about what they assume to be true as presupposition. To him, "When a speaker uses referring expressions like *this*, *he* or *Shakespeare*, in normal circumstances, she is working with an assumption that the hearer knows which referent is intended.... What a speaker assumes is true or is known by the hearer can be described as a presupposition (Yule 1996:134).

As noted earlier, linguistic messages are designed based on the assumptions about what hearers are already familiar with. These assumptions are based on the shared knowledge or values that exist among interlocutors but may sometimes be mistaken. Yule (1996:132), Palmer (1996:166), Mey (2001: 28) and Levinson (2003: 167–176) provide illustrative accounts of the notion of presupposition. Levinson illuminates a set of important distinctions and alternative approaches adopted by linguists as follows:

1. the distinction between logical implication or entailment and presupposition (in the work of Frege and Strawson )
2. the contrast between assertion and presupposition (again in the work of Frege and Strawson)
3. the issue of whether it was proper to think of presupposition as a relation between sentences (as Frege sometimes did) between statements (as Strawson held) or between speakers on the one hand and assumptions on the other (as Frege did, on other occasions).
4. the issue of whether the apparent ambiguity of negation between a presupposition – denying sense and a presupposition-preserving sense is to be thought of as a scope distinction (a structural ambiguity) or lexical ambiguity.
5. the possibility that apparently background assumptions, presuppositions, could in fact be viewed as assertions of entailments (meaning that one thing is part of another thing), on a par with the rest of a sentence's meaning (Russell's approach) (Levinson 2003: 173).

In addition, he lists a certain range of presuppositional phenomena that had been adduced in the philosophical literature which includes the presuppositions of

- a. singular terms, e.g. definite descriptions, proper names
- b. quantified noun phrases, e.g. "All of John's children" can be claimed to presuppose "John has children" (Strawson 1952).
- c. temporal clauses (as in Frege's example quoted above).

- d. changes of state verb: e.g. “Betrand has stopped beating his wife“ can be claimed to presuppose “Betrand had been beating his wife” (Sellar 1954).]

From his explication of the various approaches to and distinctions (Frege and Strawson, Strawson (1952), Russell, Sellar (1954) of presupposition, Levinson (2003) identifies two distinct kinds of presupposition in natural languages: (1) *semantic presuppositions* expounded by Strawson (1952) and (2) *pragmatic presupposition* as expounded by Keenan (1971).

In the summary of his explication of semantic presupposition, Levinson (2003: 204) clearly argues and asserts that: “Semantic theories of presupposition are not viable for the simple reason that semantics is concerned with specification of invariant stable meanings that can be associated with expressions”.

For this reason, and others catalogued by Stalnaker (1974); Kempson (1975), Wilson (1975) and Boer and Lycan (1978), semantic theories of presupposition have been abandoned and replaced or substituted with *pragmatic presupposition* whose basic concepts are appropriateness (or felicity) and mutual knowledge or common ground or joint assumption. This is indicated in his definition which states that:

An utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B if A is appropriate and only if B is mutually known by participants.

Thus by uttering a sentence whose presuppositions are, and are known to be, false, we are merely producing an inappropriate utterance, rather than (on the semantic view) to have asserted a sentence that was neither true nor false (see Osoba 2014b). The point, as noted by Fairclough (2001:127), is that “Presuppositions are not properties of texts; they are an aspect of text producers’ interpretations of intertextual context.” Thus the utterances of *dramatis personae* may be accepted as been appropriate as textual discourse. The approach I have adopted in the analysis of Soyinka’s play is that of *Pragmatic Presupposition* for the reason that it is more relevant and provides a sound basis for the explication and analysis of my dramatic discourse corpus.

## Analysis

It is important to note that several presuppositions can be read into an utterance based on its historical series or backgrounds. According to Fairclough, it is also important to note that “As in the case of situational context, discourse participants may arrive at roughly the same interpretations or different ones, and the interpretation of the more powerful participant may be imposed upon others” (Fairclough 2001: 127). This provides the foregrounding of the analysis of Soyinka’s play.

Among the presuppositions in Clause 1 of Utterance 1, “Thank you, brothers, sisters.” are: “I am grateful to you, brethren.”, “I appreciate your kind gesture.”, “You are nice brethren”, “You brethren deserve gratitude or appreciation.” These presuppositions are deductive from our common knowledge of the historical context of the utterance. Having waited for their prophet for hours, the

brethren must be appreciated for their patience. But the tone of the utterance, which sounds hesitant, may also presuppose the need for them to leave the prophet alone. Hence, the presuppositions of “Please go now.”; “It is time you leave.”; “See you soon.” can also be read into the utterance.

Those presuppositions make the next two clauses in the utterance appropriate. Thus Clause 2 reads “Brother Chume, kindly tell these friends...” and Clause 3 “...to leave me”. What is presupposed in Clause 1 is explicitly stated in Clauses 2 and 3 of Utterance 1. But Clauses 4 and 5, which read “I must pray for the soul of that sinful woman.” and “I must say a personal prayer for her”, have different presuppositions which can only be interpreted or understood in the light of the previous stage direction or non-verbal context which states that Brother Jero was *a much altered man with his clothes torn and his face bleeding* as he entered the stage. This presupposes that he had had a bad encounter before entering the church. From Clauses 4 and 5, his sad encounter with a sinful woman is presupposed. Other presuppositions such as “I am a prophet of God, who needs to pray for the souls of sinner so that God can forgive them their sins.”; “As a prophet, I need to pray to be able to forgive the woman who has done harm to me”; “I am a true prophet, I pray and I forgive.” Similarly, Clauses 6 and 7, “Prayers this **evening**, as usual.” and “Late afternoon.” simply presuppose that Prophet Jero prays regularly especially in the evening or late afternoon. This seems to restate the previous presuppositions, “I am a true prophet, I pray.”

In sum, Utterance 1, with its seven clauses, can be said to presuppose that Prophet Jero is a true man of God who appreciates his congregation, forgives those who offend him and prays regularly, especially in the evening, with his congregation. This presupposition is what Brother Chume, his interlocutor, is likely to understand Brother Jero’s first utterance to be.

Utterance 2 is made by Brother Chume in reaction to Brother Jero’s first utterance. The utterance contains four clauses. The first two simply re-echoes the presupposition in Brother Jero’s first utterance. The third clause is a prayer which presupposes that Brother Chume also prays for and wishes the congregation well. The last clause is a direct question which presupposes that Brother Jero is not alright.

The third utterance is made by Brother Jero and contains two clauses. Clause 1: “Who would have thought that...” and Clause 2: “she would dare lift her hands against a prophet of God!” have the presupposition of “No one lifts their hands against a prophet of God.” And since the woman in question had lifted her hands on Prophet Jero two things could be also presupposed by the reader or audience: (1) The woman did not know that Brother Jero is a prophet and (2) Brother Jero is not a true prophet. These two presuppositions are deductive based on the historical context as well as the textuality of the third utterance. It is only in this context that the utterance can be appropriate. The fourth utterance is made by Chume and contains only one clause. It is an explicit statement about Chume’s general perception of a woman which presupposes that women are a nuisance! This may also presuppose that Chume is married; that Chume’s wife is troublesome. These presuppositions may be seen as foregrounding future revelations about the relationship between Chume and his wife as well as the relationship between her and Brother Jero.

Utterance 5 is made by Brother Jero and contains three clauses. The first two clauses presuppose that the Brother actually expects a sad encounter with a woman that morning. In the third clause, the presupposition of a spiritual encounter rather than a physical one is deductive. It is also presupposed, based on our common knowledge of the Bible, that Brother Jero must have a temptation, that morning, through a woman which would cause him to sin. This interpretation is appropriate based on the foregrounding of the fourth utterance made by Brother Chume. But Utterance 6, made by Brother Chume, contains only one clause and tends to reinforce the presupposition that women are evil in his preceding utterance 4. It also presupposes that his perception that women are naturally or generally bad is true. This verbal interaction between Jero and Chume follows the principle of conversational turn-taking such that when Jero makes a statement Chume re-echoes it, performs it or responds to it in the most appropriate way. Thus in Utterance 7, which contains only two clauses, Jero reminisces about the premonition he had had before his encounter with the “sinful woman”, in Utterance 1 Clause 4, who is subsequently presupposed as one of the “Daughters of Discord” in Utterance 7 Clause 2. Little wonder, he must say a personal prayer for her. From this, it becomes clear to the audience that Jero is oblivious of the fact that the woman he had an encounter with is Chume’s wife. Thus Jero’s ignorance is presupposed in that light. Paradoxically, Chume, Jero’s Assistant, himself is unaware that the “sinful woman” and one of the ‘Daughters of Discord’ is his own wife.

However, Jero’s ignorance soon vanishes in Chume’s response in Utterance 8. This utterance, which contains nine clauses, narrates Chume’s irritating experience because how he was coerced to carry her and her luggage on his bicycle to lodge in front of one of her debtors’ house without any gratitude or appreciation. Thus, in this utterance, Chume’s ignorance of the wife’s debtor as Jero is presupposed. It implicitly expresses the presupposition that Chume’s wife is a trader who is owed by some of her customers. It also expresses the presupposition that Chume’s wife is a troublesome woman. Clause 8 of the utterance presupposes that she is not only worrisome but also warlike.

Disappointingly, this account of his sad experience with his wife is dismissed and termed as a “trial” by Jero in Utterance 9 Clause 1. The audience is most likely to interpret this response to mean that Jero is a true prophet who follows the biblical injunction of forgiveness and seeing sad experiences as trials that must be patiently endured. Clause 2 is an unfinished statement which may be seen as an ellipsis that can be filled as “...patiently endured.” This seems to lead to a pause as a result of Jero’s sudden realization of the fact that the woman whom Chume refers may actually be the sinful woman whom he owes and who had earlier assaulted him in his house. Thus clause 1 presupposes that Jero is a true prophet while clause 2 presupposes his suspicion of who Chume’s wife is. As a result of this suspicion, Jero asks Chume a direct question in clauses 3 to 6. Chume’s affirmative response in Utterance 10 clearly confirms Jero’s suspicion to be true which presupposes that Jero is not the man of God that Chume regards him to be. The presuppositions of shock and surprise are expressed in the following Utterance 11 in which Jero deduces correctly that that woman is Chume’s wife in the first clause and asks a question in the second to confirm his initial

suspicion that she is a trader to whom he owes money. This is the “someone”, Chume is not sure of in Utterance 9 clause 6, “who owes her”.

Socially and contextually, Chume’s ignorance is presupposed in two ways. One, he is ignorant of the identity of the man who owes his wife money; two, he is ignorant of the fact the man is Brother Jero. But Jero, through his subtle interrogation of Chume in Utterance 9 Clause 6 and Utterance 11 Clause 2, is able to deduce and confirm that the woman is Chume’s wife and a trader. In spite of this deduction and confirmation, Jero wants to be doubly sure. So he asks further probing questions in utterance 13 to ascertain the exact location of the debtor’s house. Chume’s answer in Utterance 14 makes Jero certain that that woman is actually brother Chume’s wife. This knowledge, in a way, seems to give Jero leeway because, earlier, Chume had complained about his ungracious, ungrateful and combative wife to him. This is perhaps why he mutters the clause, “So that is your wife...” in Utterance 15 to himself but loud enough for Chume to notice. Thus this utterance presupposes that Jero is now aware that the “sinful woman” is Chume’s wife. Naturally, it is impossible for him, as a self-acclaimed prophet, to suggest that a man should seek revenge for an evil done to him whether justly or unjustly. Little wonder, before now, he had counselled Chume to accept his predicament as “a trial” which presupposes that both Jero and Chume belong to the Christian faith. And, perhaps, this is why when Chume then asks in Utterance 16, “Did you speak, prophet?” he quickly, in the first three clauses of Utterance 17, denies speaking claiming that he, Jero, “... was only thinking of how little women have changed since Eve, since Delilah...” But the audience and Jero, himself, know that he has told a lie. Thus, to the audience, Utterance 16 presupposes that Jero is not the true Christian he claims.

The presuppositions of insincerity, lust and charlatanism become visible as Jero, in Utterance 17 Clause 9, begins to narrate his encounter, “This morning alone I have been thrice in conflict with the Daughters of Discord.” Socially, we can interpret his utterance as mumbo jumbo, a deliberate attempt to deceive Chume. This is because he lumps a trader who makes legitimate efforts to collect the money he owes her with two other young women who are passersby after whom he lusts. He wants Chume to believe that these are trials and crosses and that is why, in Utterance 18, Chume says he will be glad to exchange crosses with the prophet. This might presuppose that Chume had other things in mind. This, as contextually expected, is promptly denied when Jero questions him in Utterance 19. Chume’s response in utterance 20, “I was only praying”, is not surprising. Both the prophet and his assistant are now confirmed as liars and charlatans because, earlier, Jero had attempted to deceive Chume and, now, Chume attempts to deceive Jero.

The presupposition of insincerity is further heightened and buttressed by subsequent utterances of Brother Jero. For instance, in the first two clauses of Utterance 21, Jero concurs with Chume that the only solution to their trials and crosses is “...praying.” But from the third clause of the same utterance, he is no longer sure or certain what the will of God would be. This perhaps prepares the leeway for him awkward, who initial adverb needed, initially preaches tolerance, endurance, forgiveness and prayerfulness, to now advocate punishment for the “sinful woman” who has now become a “willful sinner”. Thus insincerity and hypocrisy are both presupposed here because Jero

simply demonstrates here that he does not want to pay the money he owes Chume's wife but also wants her punished, though indirectly, for daring to ask for her money. This is why he counsels Chume, in the last clause of Utterance 29, to "Take her home and beat her." His reason for suggesting that is "Never show the discord within you family to the world." This is because he wants to cover up his indebtedness to Chume's wife. Up to this point, Chume is unaware of the relationship between Brother Jero and his wife. His assumption is that Jero has given a sincere instruction as a prophet of God. Chume's simplicity and idiocy are presupposed in his own utterances that describes Jero as the "Holy one..." (Utterance 24) and "Prophet" (Utterance 28). This is the height of callousness demonstrated by many so-called prophets in our society.

## Conclusion

Our examination of presuppositions in the 29 utterances of the extract from Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* points to the fact that it is possible to explicate literary/dramatic discourses from a linguistic perspective. Just as in real life, presuppositions abound in the dramatic text that we examined. The initial utterances of the interlocutors trigger in the reader or audience positive presuppositions that are appropriate in light of their religious setting. Thus the social background of the characters helps in our understanding and interpretations of the presuppositions inherent in their utterances. For instance, the presuppositions of appreciation, meekness and prayerfulness are initially portrayed. But gradually, the presupposition that women are evil is expressed. Chume's ignorance of the true relationship between Jero and his wife is offered to the audience for them to construct a presupposition. Jero's ignorance that the woman he had had an encounter with earlier that is Chume's wife is also presupposed. In the end, after his knowledge of the fact that the "sinful woman" is Chume's wife, Jero's callousness is presupposed. All in all, an insightful interpretation of the dramatic text is provided, by this linguistic analysis of the excerpt of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, showing a subtle interface between linguistic and literary methods.

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## Appendix

(*Brother Jero has just come in view. They all rush to help him back into the circle. He is a much altered man, his clothes torn and his face bleeding.*)

JERO (slowly and painfully): Thank you, brothers, sisters. Brother Chume, kindly tell these friends to leave me. I must pray for the soul of that sinful woman. I must say a personal prayer for her. (*Chume ushers them off. They go reluctantly, chattering excited.*) Prayers this evening, as usual. Late afternoon.

CHUME (*shouting after*): Prayers late afternoon as always. Brother Jeroboam says God keep you till then. Are you alright, Brother Jero?

JERO Who would have thought that she would dare lift her hands against a prophet of God!

CHUME Women are a plague, brother.

JERO I had the premonition this morning that a woman would be my downfall today. But I thought of it only in the spiritual sense.

CHUME Now you see how it is, brother Jero.

JERO From the moment I looked out of my window this morning, I have been tormented one way or another by the Daughters of Discord.

CHUME (*eagerly*): That is how it is with me, Brother. Every day. Every morning and night. Only this morning my wife made take her to the house of some poor man, who she says owes her morning. She loaded enough on my bicycle to lay a siege for a week, and all the thanks I got was abuse.

JERO Indeed it must be a trial, Brother Chume...and it requires... (*He becomes suspicious.*) Brother Chume, did you say that your wife went to make camp only this morning at the house of a ...of someone who owes her money?

CHUME Yes, I took her there myself.

JERO Er...indeed. (*Coughs.*) Is ...your wife a trader?

CHUME Yes. Petty trading, you know. Wool, silk, cloth and all that stuff.

JERO Indeed. Quite an enterprising woman. (*Hems.*) Er...where was the house of this man...I mean, this man who owes her money?

CHUME Not very far from here. Ajete settlement, a mile or so from here. I did not even know the place existed until today.

JERO (*to himself*): So that is your wife....

CHUME Did you speak, prophet?

JERO No. no. I was only thinking of how little women have changed since Eve, since Delilah, since Jezebel. But we must be strong at heart. I have my own cross too, Brother Chume. This morning alone I have been thrice in conflict with the Daughters of Discord. First there was ... no, never mind that. There is another who crosses my path every day. Goes to swim just over there and then waits for me to be in the midst of my meditation before my eyes....

CHUME (*to himself, with deep feeling*): I'd willingly change crosses with you.

JERO What, Brother Chume?

CHUME I was only praying.

JERO Ah. That is the only way. But er ...I wonder really what the will of God would be in this matter. After all, Christ himself was not averse to using the whip when occasion demanded it.

CHUME (*eagerly*): No, he did not hesitate.

JERO In that case, since, Brother Chume, your wife seems such a wicked, willful sinner, I think....

CHUME Yes, Holy one...?

JERO You must take her home tonight....

CHUME Yes....

JERO And beat her.

CHUME (*kneeling, clasps Jero's hand in his*): Prophet!

JERO Remember, it must be done in your own house. Never show the discord within you family to the world. Take her home

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# Steinbeck, Guthrie and Zanuck: a Dust Bowl Triptych. The Intertextual Life of *The Grapes of Wrath* on Paper, Celluloid and Vinyl

**Abstract.** In a world where the arts have become one more target for multimedia corporations it is worth remembering the more authentic intertextuality of works which appeared around 1940, i.e. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Darryl F. Zanuck and John Ford's film of the same name, and the songs of Woody Guthrie. Never before had literature, cinema and song been so intimately and powerfully linked, and nothing since has come near to replicating this unique symbiosis.

**Keywords:** Dust Bowl, Great Depression, intertextuality.

Along with blatant product placement in films Hollywood accountants today build into their projects spin-offs and tie-ins, such as board games, school accessories, books of the film, clothing, and anything else that can capture the imaginations and money of the audience. In a less cynical age the process was more organic. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (published 75 years ago this April) inspired Darryl F. Zanuck and John Ford to make their great film of the same name, and Woody Guthrie to write songs celebrating its characters. As the journalist Alan Yuhas recently pointed out, "[Steinbeck] inspired Cesar Chavez and John Kennedy; Bruce Springsteen and Woody Guthrie (and by extension Rage Against the Machine); John Ford and South Park." Yunas goes on to say that *The Grapes of Wrath* "means just as much to the US now as it did in 1939, when the Dust Bowl destroyed the American west, the economy lay in tatters, a minority held the keys to the bank, and a vast migrant population wandered without homes or rights." ([www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)). The relevance of the book, the film and the songs is today undisputed, and the harmony of the intertextuality involved has never been equalled, let alone bettered.

## Historical background

In the 1930s a great tragedy befell the southern plains of the United States, with Kansas, Oklahoma, Northwest Texas, New Mexico and Colorado worst affected. Vast tracts of land, exhausted by bad farming practice, simply blew away into the air, choking homesteads, farms and communities, and the people who inhabited them; thousands died of 'Dust Pneumonia' or because of the hardships suffered on the road as they escaped. The result became known as the Dust Bowl, or the Dirty Thirties, and it forced the largest peacetime migration in U.S. History; by 1940 2.5m people had left the Plains States.

Coming so soon after the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 it is perhaps too easy to blame the seemingly heartless actions of banks which foreclosed on impoverished farmers on the unregulated, *laissez faire* economic climate which had prevailed in the twenties. The fact is that a combination of events, both natural and man-made, caused the disaster. Two hundred thousand or so headed west, through New Mexico or Colorado and Arizona, to what they thought might be a better life in California. The historically unique plight of the migrants was of course witnessed and documented by news media at the time, best illustrated by the haunting photographs of Dorothea Lange, but the fact that this disaster was forever burned into the collective psyche of Americans is because John Steinbeck, Woody Guthrie and Darryl F. Zanuck produced works of art that searingly told the heartbreaking story of the Dust

Bowl refugees. In literature, cinema and song their Dust Bowl triptych stands as testimony to what artists can do to raise consciousness and to change society.

## The seeds of disaster

After the Civil War, the new railroad, along with the wartime *Homestead Act* of 1863, encouraged migrants to head west to the Great Plains, an area which was unsuitable for intensive agriculture because it suffered prolonged periods of drought between deceptively promising periods of good rains. At first cattle were raised, but after several harsh winters in the 1890s the settlers turned to arable farming. A period of wet years, along with increased prices for crops during WWI, further encouraged farmers to intensify production, and real estate companies coined the ludicrous slogan, "Rain follows the plow". Land was overploughed, crop rotation was not used and stubble was burned, and these abuses, coupled with more droughts, led to the atrocious conditions of the Dust Bowl.

By 1931 the over-ploughed land had lost its layer of native grasses, and was unable to resist yet another water shortage. The dust storms began: fourteen that year and nearly forty in 1932. In November 1933 a storm removed the topsoil from South Dakota farmland, and in one of the worst storms, in May, 1934, the dust blew for two days and blew away the topsoil over vast areas of the Great Plains. Worse was yet to come. On "Black Sunday", April 14, 1935, as many as twenty dust storms raged across the plains. Woody Guthrie remembered that day in an interview with Alan Lomax for the U.S. Library of Congress archive in 1940:

It got so black when that thing hit we all run into the house, and all the neighbors had congregated... We sat there in a little old room and it got so dark you couldn't see your hand before your face. You couldn't see anybody in the room. You could turn on... a good strong electric lightbulb in a little room... and that electric lightbulb hanging in the room looked just about like a cigarette a'burning. (Lomax, Library of Congress interview.)

The Dust Bowl left homes and farms uninhabitable, and the suffering was appalling, with already impoverished people, many heavily in debt, having to fight an unequal battle with the relentless and merciless dust. It was hopeless, and at last they faced up to the inevitable and hit the road. It should be noted that not all the migrants were farmers. As farms became unworkable and uninhabitable, so did towns, and about a third of those that left the Dust Bowl area were white collar workers, although the majority who chose to head west to California were, naturally enough, farming folk.

On their way west these migrants, perhaps understandably, met with hostility in the areas they passed through. These were hard times for everybody, and the Great Depression hardened hearts which might otherwise have been welcoming. There was simply not enough work for everyone. The conditions on the road were miserable. People stopped where they were allowed to and set up squalid makeshift camps. The sanitary conditions and the hardship can only be imagined. The misery, degradation and exploitation would continue, to greater or lesser degrees, throughout the thirties, only partly alleviated by Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives (most farm relief went to farmers; those who hit the road had lost their land).

Hindsight is, of course, always 20/20, and we now know that the Dust Bowl was the result of greed and folly, but it seems that the lessons of the past are inconvenient to the powerful of the present. There is so much money to be made that it seems foolish to some not to reap the short term benefits. As Alan Yunas argues: "Today, megafarms and meat companies carve out sections of the market, divide and conquer farmers with debt, and control the food industry; the culprits include Cargill for corn, Tyson for meat, and Monsanto for its infamously creative genetics." ([www.guardian.com](http://www.guardian.com))

## The artists

**Woody Guthrie** was born in Okemah, Oklahoma in 1912. Raised in a fairly prosperous family whose fortunes swiftly declined amid great personal suffering and tragedy, Guthrie left school early and began making a living by signwriting and with his guitar, playing traditional American folk songs, as well as English and Scottish tunes. Guthrie describes Okemah in his semi-autobiographical novel *Bound for glory*:

Okemah was an Oklahoma farming town since the early days, and it had about an equal number of Indians, Negroes, and whites doing their trading there. [...] Ours was just another of those little towns, I guess, about a thousand or so people, where everybody knows everybody else; and on your way to the

post office, you'd nod and speak to so many friends that your neck would be rubbed raw when you went in to get your mail if there was any. (Guthrie, *Bound For Glory*. p.37)

Married at 19, Guthrie moved with others from the Plains States when the dust came. His music was earthy, accessible, and immediately resonated with the people whose lives he shared. One of Guthrie's many 'Dust Bowl Ballads' is '*Dust Can't Kill Me*':

That old dust storm killed my baby but it can't kill me, Lord  
 And it can't kill me  
 That old dust storm killed my family but it can't kill me, Lord  
 And it can't kill me  
 That old landlord and he got my homestead but he can't get me, Lord  
 And he can't get me  
 That old dry spell killed my crop, boys, but it can't kill me, Lord  
 And it can't kill me (Guthrie, *Dust Bowl Ballads*.)

**John Steinbeck**, ten years Guthrie's senior, was brought up in a rural Californian town, and although his family was established and well-off he was well aware of the hardships of migrant workers. It was these hardships, along with Steinbeck's increasingly radical politics, that inspired him to expand on seven articles he had written for the San Francisco News in 1936 on migrant workers. Their suffering angered him, and he took the opportunity to vent his considerable spleen in '*The Grapes of Wrath*', which, as well as winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1940, was banned from libraries and schools, and ritually burned in California. The following quote shows the depth of Steinbeck's feelings, and where he thought the blame should lie:

I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this. [the Great Depression and its effects]. (Steinbeck, in Benson 1990: 371)

In a later interview for Albany University, New York, Steinbeck seems more understanding of the residents of California and the towns along the way, whose often unfriendly reception of the migrants saddened and angered many of those on the road:

When I wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* I was filled, naturally, with certain angers at people who were doing injustices to other people, so I thought. I realise now that everyone was caught in the same trap. If you remember, we had had a depression at that time. The depression caught us without the ability to take care of it. It took a long time for us to develop the agencies to take care of such economic difficulties. When the dust came people were starving and they had no place to go, and naturally they went in a direction in which they would not suffer from cold; they went toward California. They came in their thousands to California. And what did they meet? They met a people who were terrified of depression, and were horrified at the idea that great numbers of indigent people were being poured on them to be taken care of. They could only be taken care of by taxation. Taxes were already high and there wasn't much money about. They reacted perfectly normally: they became angry. And when you become angry

you fight what you are angry at. They were angry at the newcomers. (Albany University interview.)

John Steinbeck was aware of Guthrie's work, and recognised that the plain words Guthrie used were in keeping with the lives of plain people with extraordinary problems:

Harsh voiced and nasal . . . there is nothing sweet about Woody, and there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings. But there is something more important for those who will listen. There is the will of the people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit. (Klein 1981: 160)

In *The Grapes of Wrath* the Joad family, made homeless by the effects of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, head out to California along with thousands of others in search of work. On their travels they encounter the highly politicized hostility prevalent among farmers and farm owners, as well as their henchmen, the police and their often hastily sworn-in deputies, often little more than thugs who acted as strike-breakers and *agents-provocateurs*. Politically aware people in the thirties would have recent memories of violence against workers. In 1914 a tent colony of striking miners in Ludlow, Colorado was brutally attacked by the Colorado National Guard. Two women and eleven children were burned to death in a tent set on fire by National Guardsmen. This incident became known as *The Ludlow Massacre* (commemorated in a song by Guthrie). The strike saw perhaps two hundred dead in total. This incident, along with many others, politicized some and terrified more American working people.

Just a year after the book's publication the film producer **Darryl F. Zanuck** put it on the screen, with **John Ford** directing and **Henry Fonda** playing the main character, Tom Joad. Before production started, the politically conservative Zanuck sent people out to California to see whether Steinbeck had exaggerated the migrants' conditions. They reported back that he hadn't. In fact, Eleanor Roosevelt, no less, defended Steinbeck's accuracy. (Shillinglaw). Steinbeck himself said that, if anything, he had underplayed the suffering so as not to demand too much of his readers' credibility. The result was a film of great honesty and power, with John Ford's masterful direction and **Gregg Toland's** inspired cinematography doing justice to a superb cast lead by Fonda.

In the film we see an agricultural labour agent challenged by migrants who have become aware of the underhand tricks of the big landowners. The edited text below is from screenwriter **Nunnally Johnson's** screenplay:

AGENT: You men want to work?

PA: Sure we wanta work. Where's it at?

AGENT: Tulare County. Fruit's opening up. Need a lot of pickers.

FIRST MAN: What you payin'?

AGENT: Well, can't tell exactly, yet. 'Bout thirty cents, I guess.

FLOYD (quietly): All right, mister. I'll go. You just show your license to contrack, an' then you make out a order, where an' when an' how much you gonna pay, an' you sign it an' we'll go.

AGENT (ominously): You trying to tell me how to run my own business?

FLOYD: 'F we're workin' for you, it's our business too.

AGENT (tough): Listen, Smart Guy. I'll run my business my own way

(The squatting men have risen one by one.)

FLOYD: Twicet now I've fell for that line. Maybe he needs a thousan' men. So he get's five thousan' there, an' he'll pay fifteen cents a hour. An' you guys'll have to take it 'cause you'll be hungry.

AGENT (turning): Joe!

(The other man gets out of the coupe. He wears riding breeches and laced boots, carries a pistol and cartridge belt, and there is a deputy sheriff's star on his brown shirt)

DEPUTY (entering): What's the trouble?

AGENT (pointing at Floyd): Ever see this guy before?

DEPUTY: What'd he do?

AGENT: He's agitatin'.

DEPUTY: Hmmm. (Giving Floyd a looking over) Seems like I have. Seems like I seen him hangin' around that used car lot that was busted into. (Sharply) Get in that car.

TOM: You got nothin' on him.

DEPUTY: Open your trap again and you'll go too.

AGENT (to the men): You fellas don't wanta lissen to troublemakers.

DEPUTY: Might be a good idea to do what he says. Too many of you Okies aroun' here already. Folks beginnin' to figger it ain't maybe "safe". Might start a epidemic or sump'n. (After a pause) Wouldn't like a bunch a guys down here with pick handles tonight, would you? ([www.dailyscript.com](http://www.dailyscript.com))

Local people, scared for their own jobs, were easily convinced that the migrant workers were communists. The following passage from the book is a report of a landowner's take on the politico-economic nuances of the situation:

...Well, he's all a time talkin' about "them goddamn reds". "Goddamn reds is drivin' the country to ruin," he says, an' "We got to drive these here red bastards out". Well, there were a young fella jus' come out west here, an' he's listenin' one day. He kinda scratched his head an' he says: "Mr Hines, I ain't been here long. What is these goddamn reds?" Well, sir, Hines says: "A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're payin' twenty-five! (Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 349)

Despite what some have said, including Guthrie's great admirer Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie was not a communist. He wrote for communist papers and sang at communist meetings, but he was never cut out to be a doctrinaire political animal. He was a true man of the people, and a faithful chronicler of the Dust Bowl in song. Not apolitical, just too independent to take part in the labrynthine machinations of communist politics; anyway the intelligentsia bored him. But Guthrie knew all about the sherrifs and their thuggish deputies who enforced the landowners' interpretation of the law. Guthrie's song, *Vigilante Man*, asks why poor people are willing to oppress other poor people in order to support their common oppressor. The song mentions perhaps the most important character from *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jim Casy, a former preacher who has lost his faith in the God of his fathers, but seems to have found a new, somewhat mystical faith in man:

Preacher Casy was just a workin' man,

And he said, "Unite all you working men."  
 Killed him in the river some strange man.  
 Was that a vigilante man?  
 Oh, why does a vigilante man,  
 Why does a vigilante man  
 Carry that sawed-off shot-gun in his hand?  
 Would he shoot his brother and sister down? (Guthrie, *Dust Bowl Ballads*)

In a broadcast on WNYC radio in 1940 Guthrie talked about being inspired by the film to write *The Ballad of Tom Joad*:

Here's a song that has to do with a book and a motion picture that come out here a while back by the name of *The Grapes of Wrath*, wrote down by a man, John Steinbeck, that throwed a pack on his back and went right out among the people to see just what is going on in the United States, and it just so happened that he hit a jackpot because he knew where he was going, he knew what he was writing about. So, I didn't read the book but then I seen the picture three times, and I come home, I sat down, I wrote up a little piece about it. The name of this is *The Ballad of Tom Joad*. (Yurchenco.)

Tom Joad's farewell to his mother must have deeply affected the cinema-going Guthrie, as this extract from the song shows:

Tom run back where his mother was asleep  
 He woke her up out of bed  
 And he kissed goodbye to the mother that he loved  
 Said what Preacher Casy said, Tom Joad,  
 He said what Preacher Casy said:  
 Everybody might be just one big soul  
 Well it looks that way to me,  
 Everywhere that you look in the day or night  
 That's where I'm agonna be, Ma  
 That's where I'm agonna be.  
 Where every little children are hungry and cryin'  
 Wherever people ain't free,  
 Wherever men are fightin' for their rights  
 That's where I'm agonna be, Ma  
 That's where I'm agonna be (Yurchenco.)

Ma Joad, according to Susan Shillinglaw of San Jose State University, is "...a feminist — feisty, strong, loving, resilient — and the kind of leader, then and now, who might guide the nation's jalopy through difficult times." Shillinglaw goes on to argue that "America needs a Ma Joad in the White House[...]President Ma Joad wouldn't cut food stamps. She wouldn't deny education to im-

migrant children. She wouldn't trim funds for the homeless. She would remind each American that lending a hand to those at the bottom is a quality of the species, *Homo sapiens*.

Preacher Casy, the Christ-like figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*, played by John Carradine in the movie, is ultimately killed by vigilante men, but leaves behind a spiritual legacy that is deeply human and affecting. His theology is more Sermon on the Mount than Pauline dogma; more Thomas Paine than Karl Marx; more Christian, perhaps, than Christianity. Casy saw God in everyman, and held everyman responsible for his conduct towards everyone else. Tom Joad has to leave his family after killing a deputy, and his last speech to his mother encapsulates this almost pantheistic mysticism. Nunnally Johnson quotes the book almost verbatim in the film version:

Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where – wherever you can look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' – I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build – why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes. (Steinbeck, *GOW*, p.494)

Seventy-five years ago migrant workers were treated abominably, but has much really changed? Alan Yunas states that:

The Obama administration has deported more people (about 2m – nearly four times the documented population of Wyoming) than any other American government, and a congressional mandate to the Border Patrol requires they hold 34,000 undocumented migrants in custody every day. Authorities chase farmers without papers through forests and across deserts, splitting families and deporting lifelong residents. Nor do Steinbeck's stories of police abuse seem out of place in a country where local law enforcement sometimes merits federal inquiry ([www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)).

In 1962 John Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In his acceptance speech Steinbeck seems to say much the same thing his characters had said over twenty years before. In his closing remarks he starts by referring to the detonation of the atom bomb, before subverting a scriptural passage in order to highlight man's own responsibility for his actions:

Less than fifty years after his [Alfred Nobel's] death the door of nature was unlocked, and we were offered a dreadful burden of choice. We have usurped many of the powers we once ascribed to God. Fearful and unprepared, we have assumed leadership over the life or death of the whole world, of all living things. The danger and the glory and the choice rest finally in man. The test of his perfectibility is at hand. Having taken God-like power, we must seek in ourselves for the responsibility and the wisdom we once prayed some deity might have. Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope. So that today St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased:

"In the end is the word, and the word is Man, and the word is with men." (Steinbeck, Nobel Speech.)

Many books have been adapted for the screen, and many famous songs are associated with the films in which they were used, but there has ever been intertextual symbiosis to the extent that we have seen between John Steinbeck's great novel, Woody Guthrie's evocative music, and Zanuck and Ford's heart-rending film. That all of them are highly relevant to today's world is both testimony to their power, and a reason to feel sadness and shame.

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