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ON SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

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Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy

Special Edition: Conferences

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EDITORIAL

Guest-Editor: Ljubica Matek

Our first message from the stars, "And the stars look very different today"

We are very excited to present the first issue of *Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy*, a literary journal dedicated to publishing blindly peer-reviewed academic papers on science-fiction and fantasy literature which, we hope, will contribute positively to the area of literary, cultural, visual and/or film studies and, as such, to a better understanding and appreciation of fantasy and science fiction. Continuously on the border between being marginal (as a literary genre) and mainstream (as a genre with ample audience and fan base), science-fiction and fantasy are often the subjects of informal discourse. It is our desire as editors to provide another platform for literary, scholarly discourse on the two genres. It may be a somewhat bold assumption (and an enthusiastic expectation), but it seems that in our post-postmodernist, some would say transmodernist (Epstein et al. 1999), hypermodernist (Lipovetsky 2005), automodernist (Samuels 2008), or digimodernist (Kirby 2009) times marked by a strong turn toward posthumanism, transhumanism, and biopolitics, fantasy and science-fiction may turn out to be more and more relevant as literary modes of representation of human experience.

The first issue brings you five papers covering a wide spectrum of topics. Nuno Marques' paper on poetry and science fiction seems a very timely, although completely accidental, reaction to the recent unexpected and globally mourned death of one of the most original musicians of the (predominantly) twentieth century, David

Bowie, well-known for his verses on space travel and the isolation of the individual. Nuno Marques' reading of Richard Brautigan's poem "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" reveals it to be a dystopian ecotopia, a critique of the eco-utopias of the 1960s and a witness to the necessity of machines and of technological solutions for environmental problems.

Milan Jovanović's paper situates Serbia as the most probable place of origin of the vampire legends and points to written records of the word "vampire" dating back to the thirteenth century – centuries before the Western literature adopted the motif of the bloodsucker. Jovanović provides insight into Serbian folklore and beliefs related to vampires and suggests the possibility that the term "vampire" actually is of Serbian origin, although the etymology of the term that denotes these fantastical creatures is still – very appropriately – shrouded in mystery.

Diana Marques focuses on the sword as the object of power, honour, status and authority in George R. R. Martin's *The Song of Ice and Fire* and in the Middle Ages, a historical period which enlightens and inspires Martin's novels and fantasy in general. Marques suggests that the rich symbolism of swords informs the owner's identity, the sword becoming a constituent part of the person who owns it.

Alexandra Cheira's paper provides a reading of A. S. Byatt's "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" which centres on Gillian Perholt as a female Aladdin and suggests that the story explores both the limitations in women's lives and the way to overcome them by insisting on female autonomy, on the one hand, and learning through storytelling, on the other.

Finally, Jorge Martins Trindade focuses on fantasy's quality of representing life through its refusal of a mimetic representation of reality. He reads Jorge de Sena's *O Físico Prodigioso* as a fantasy novel, which represents the "diabolical mirror" reflecting an image that is in fact a synthesis of humanity.

Our journal also encourages creative writers to send us their (shorter) contributions with which we hope to promote not only scholarly but also literary and art production. The first issue features Luís Filipe Silva's "Falstaff (Variations of the *libretto* by Arrigo Boito)", whose grim (post)colonial and ecocritical rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* conveniently serves to mark the 400th anniversary of the great Bard's death.

So, feel free to glance towards the stars and enjoy their messages as we bring them to you.

MONOGRAPH SECTION

Poetry and Science Fiction – Richard Brautigan's poem "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" as an ecological dystopia

Nuno Marques
Mid Sweden University

Abstract | In this paper I argue that Richard Brautigan's poem "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" is an ecological dystopia in the science fiction genre. Brautigan's poem creates a post-pastoral image of a cybernetic ecology monitored and controlled by machines. The poem's internal structure and tone provide an ironic commentary to its theme of a utopian project, highlighting its internal conflicts and showing its impossibility. I argue, therefore, that the poem is a critique of the ecological utopias of the 60s and can be read accordingly.
Keywords | Brautigan; Cybernetic Ecology; Ecocriticism; Ecotopia; Science-Fiction.

Resumo | Neste ensaio apresento uma leitura do poema "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" de Richard Brautigan enquanto distopia de ordem ecológica do género de ficção científica. O poema de Brautigan cria uma imagem pós-pastoral de uma ecologia cibernética monitorizada e controlada por máquinas. A estrutura e o tom do poema oferecem um comentário irónico ao tema de um projeto utópico, demonstrando a contradição sob a qual assenta e a sua impossibilidade. Dessa forma, leio o poema como uma crítica das utopias de ordem ecológica dos anos 60.
Palavras-Chave | Brautigan; Ecologia, Cibernética; Ecocrítica; Ecotopia; Ficção Científica.

Poetry and Science Fiction

Science fiction is mainly composed by novels and short stories although poetry has historically been the language of philosophy and (natural) sciences, either using scientific models or themes in the poetic structure or even in poetic devices. Amidst the blurred lines of the science fiction genre, one can remember poems found in novels, but not so easily science fiction poems, a definition of which is still to be devised. Frank Herbert's *Dune* offers many examples of poems in the main narrative, such as the Zensunni song Leto sings in *Children of Dune* ("Nature's beauteous form / Contains a lovely essence / Called by some -- decay" (29))[1]. Herbert also wrote poetry published after his death by his son in an anthology entitled *Songs of Muad'Dib: The Poetry of Frank Herbert* (1992). Joe Haldeman has published a book of poems entitled *Saul's Death and Other Poems* (1997), which includes "Machines of Loving Grace", in a clear reference to Brautigan's poem from 1968 discussed in this paper. Other prose authors as Ray Bradbury, Ursula K. Le Guin, Philip Joseph Farmer, Isaac Asimov have written science fiction poetry, and even an anthology of Sun Ra's poems entitled *The Planet is Doomed: The Science Fiction Poetry of Sun Ra* (2011) explicitly addresses this particular type of poetry. In fact, such as the poetic imagination reflects upon the scientific questions of its time, nineteenth century poetry dealt with the theory of evolution as the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries had dealt with Kepler, Galileo and Newton's theories; twentieth century poetry in the Western world was concerned with relativity theory, cybernetics and ecology. Science and poetry can interchange models, systems, metaphors, or worldviews as Coleridge's organicism and Pound's vorticism show. In the history of North-American literature, this relation has largely followed Emerson's model with which later poets entered in dialogue, and where Brautigan has a distinctive stance.

In the United States in particular, poets of the Beat Generation and the San Francisco Renaissance have shaped a poetic response to science, promoting an early environmentalism and exerting a strong influence in the first environmental movements of the 60s. Poets as Allen Ginsberg (*Plutonium Ode*), Gregory Corso (*Bomb*) and others have directly addressed the consequences of nuclear energy, in the form of elegies or satires, in their critique of the Post-War Western society. Gary

[1] The full poem may be read in Herbert, Frank, *Children of Dune*, Ace Books, New York, 2008, 29

Snyder, another influential figure in the countercultural movement and in the Deep Ecology Platform, proposed alternatives to environmental disastrous uses of technology, not only in his poetry, but also in the 1970 essay "Four Changes", grounded in an Ecotopian model of "a new ecologically-sensitive harmony-oriented wild-minded scientific-spiritual culture" (99). This integration between science and spirituality, and an awareness of the interdependent relation between human and non-human beings and the world, is one of the tenants of the counterculture environmental consciousness. Collaborating with Snyder in the aforementioned essay, and adopting some of the defining literary characteristics of the countercultural movement, such has the open form and environmental activism, Richard Brautigan's work is also a critique both of the counterculture's environmental concern and the project of a technological utopia.

In North-American literature, scientific and poetic knowledge are gathered in the figure of the poet since Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "The Poet"[2]. Emerson's poet knows "astronomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation" (222) because he is attuned with the Universal being, and "in every word he speaks he rides on them as the horses of thought" (222). For Emerson there is no rigid separation of knowledge. Because language is a source and a medium for knowledge, poetic cognition is also scientific knowledge. Emerson departs from Coleridge's theory of organic form, which can be considered as a biological theory of form. Emerson also stresses the dynamic character of the poetic process itself in the relation between the poet and the world, which would later find echo in Olson's "Projective Verse", and its fundamental postulate of the importance of "the process of the thing, how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished" (Allen 388). The concept of process as dynamic is also present in A.R. Ammons 1993 poem "Garbage" that deals with "the scientific and materialistic notion of the / spindle of energy" (24). Reclaiming "Garbage" as a scientific poem, Ammons follows Emerson's focus on the process, which in this case is interfered by the material nature of garbage and of the poet's body, affecting language. Ammons, therefore, combines both Emerson's organicism and poem as process with Olson's material implication of

[2] In the essay "The Poet" Emerson states that "the poet alone knows astronomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation, (…) He knows why the plain, or meadow of space, was strewn with these flowers we call suns, and moons, and stars; why the great deep is adorned with animals, with men, and gods; for, in every word he speaks he rides on them as the horses of thought" Richardson Jr., Robert D, *Ralph Waldo Emerson Selected Essays, Lectures, And Poems*, s.l. Bantam Books, 1990 (222).

poem and body in the physical world. On the contrary, Richard Brautigan's *faux naïve* poetry is not concerned with scientific language, but rather with discussing the consequences of science. Taking science as theme rather than model, his poetry critiques science, narrating its social and moral consequences. In the dawn of cybernetics, complex systems theory, and ecology, Brautigan was the poet-in-residence at the California Institute of Technology, in Pasadena, California. From this experience he also wrote the short poem entitled "At the California Institute of Technology" included in the 1968 work *The Pill versus The Springhill Mine Disaster*. It reads: "I don't care how God-damn smart / these guys are: I'm bored / It's been raining like hell all day long and there is nothing to do" (23). This poem is a comment to Emerson: poetic and scientific languages have different social functions. In that time in January 1967, Brautigan wrote "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" as a direct result of the time he spent with scholars and students of the Institute, in which the critical function of poetry is assumed.

The most relevant examples of Brautigan's engagement with science can be found on the *The Pill versus The Springhill Mine Disaster*, particularly on the poem here discussed that is concerned with the scientific utopias of the 60s in the United States, which created cybernetics, ecology, Silicon Valley, and the Internet. This poem is an elegy to scientific optimism: the balanced relation between humans and non-humans and nature in an environment created by technology. However, because each of its three stanzas is introduced by an ironic commentary, that project is made frail and laughable, devoid of its verisimilitude and pungency. The poem, in fact, offers a dystopian vision in a critique of a relation with nature mediated by technology, a common theme in science fiction.

Dystopian Ecotopia

The three strophes of "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" have different intensities in tone and the entire poem presents an upward movement that portrays the relation with nature, mediated by machines and by a communicating network, to the final moment of bliss, careless and joyful integration with nature. This progression represents the literary motif of retreat into nature, common in North-American literature that Brautigan also addresses in other poems of the same work, as

"Let's Voyage into the New American House" (78)*,* in which a house dissolves into nature, walls running into mountains, doors flying with clouds.

This thematic line is portrayed in the image of the meadow in the first strophe, which is substituted by the image of a forest in the second strophe and finally by ecology, which functions as a metaphor for the integrated relation between humans, non-humans and the world in the last strophe. In growing circles, the poem moves from the meadow, a figure of the cultural landscape, geographically close to rural areas, to the forest, a figure of a wild place, to ecology, meaning the entire (eco) system composed by the previous ones. It not only moves away from society into wilderness, as, for instance, Thoreau's *Walden*, but also it moves closer to a holistic conscience. In this sense, it rereads the escapist pastoral idealization of retreat into wilderness and offers what Terry Gifford characterizes as "a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension" (10). In fact, Brautigan also rereads the pastoral literary device itself, transforming nature into environment as the term 'ecology' shows. Accordingly, 'ecology' in this poem is a metaphor for a blissful relation with nature, an aesthetic and spiritual landscape without conflict. The final strophe of the poem not only rewrites the motif of Arcadia as the place of communion with nature, it also relocates it to an environment built by machines, a replica of the outside environment. Inherent to this project, a critique of the technology that might enable it and its environmental commitment bring Brautigan's poem into the lines of ecopoetry.

Ecopoetry is defined by Scott Bryson, editor of the 2002 collection *Ecopoetry: a Critical Introduction*, as having "an ecological and biocentric perspective that reflects the interdependent nature of the world; a deep humility that sustains the positioning before the relations with human and non-human nature, in the poem" (2). These aspects reflect in higher and lower degrees other definitions of nature writing or environmental writing. Ecopoems can or should exhibit "an intense skepticism, as seen in the condemnation of overtechonologized world" (2). It is precisely this condemnation that defines Brautigan's poem as a dystopian vision of cybernetics and the possible relation between human and non-human beings and the world mediated by technology that enable it to be considered a dystopian Ecotopia. In this sense it also enacts a passage from pastoral poetry, or nature poetry, and a post-pastoral version, or ecopoetry. Within its environmental concern it rereads the pastoral tropes

and questions the existence of wild nature, taking the pastoral model and applying it to an artificial replica of a supposedly wild nature.

What would otherwise be a laudatory poem is made frail by the second line of each strophe, which functions as a comment to the utopian project announced in the following lines. Read between brackets at the beginning of each strophe, these commentaries are the only instances in the poem with exclamation marks, creating tension and anxiety in obvious conflict with the rest of the lines. They are a second voice within the poem, stressing the urgency of this utopian project. One cannot help to read in these exclamations – "and the sooner the better!" (l.2); "right now, please!" (l.10) and "it has to be!" (l.18) – an underlying disturbance which, although apparently praising the benefits of a closer relation to nature mediated by technology, echoes an escapist desire and at the same time offers an ironic comment to the utopian project enounced in the poem. In this sense, and because it highlights the internal contradiction of such project while also ironically commenting it, Brautigan's poem might be read as a dystopian Ecotopia in the poetic form.

Ecotopias of the 60s

"All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" also critiques the ecological utopianism of its time. It contaminates the desire for a spiritual communion with nature fundamental to the environmental movements of the Deep Ecology Platform, by postulating mediation by technology as its necessary condition. By doing so it also exposes the paradox of this mediated relation: nothing more than simulacra, it reconfigures the original model to match the copy. This ecological utopianism is, in fact, present in both the environmental movements, which postulated a non-intrusive technology, and in the technological solutions of Silicon Valley, with less polluting technologies, connecting networks between objects and beings. The poem focuses particularly on the role played by the concepts of ecosystem, communication and network in this utopian vision of the future to show that it presupposes an eschatology of the scientific progress, whose final result is the communion between human and non-human beings and the world. Focusing on these concepts turned metaphors and images in this poem, Brautigan also brings a lack of belief and a disillusion with the environmental project itself. If that mediated relation is dependent on a technological fix, what are its conditions of possibility? Brautigan's poem mainly shows the

contradiction of this scientific utopia that aims to replicate the models and forms of nature through cybernetics and to connect human beings with nature through technique, without considering that technique also constructs knowledge and social and political structures. The third strophe of the poem illustrates the ideal of this utopia, according to which although human beings would become cybernetic beings and a part of a communication network; they would not become cognitive agents of that network through which information is processed and transmitted, but rather they would have their biological nature reinforced. In fact, this is an internal contradiction: in order to return "to our mammal / brothers and sisters" (1), human beings have to transcend the human gender; they have to become machines. In Brautigan's model of cybernetic ecology, machines preside over the balance of the system, they communicate "mutually / programming harmony" (1). Machines are both mammals and computers and pine trees, they are electronic devices, because they communicate in a network of which they are a part of and in which they are "joined back to nature" (1).

The contradiction of this scientific utopia lies in the impossibility of a non-mediated relation between human and non-human beings with nature because this ideal network would in itself be a closed environment, a replica of nature created and enacted by communicating machines. Not only would this scientific project postulate another type of human, different from the idealized human of the pastoral trope found in the poem, it would also fail to connect human and non-human beings and nature, since it would in effect create an artificial environment where both would live. Therefore, this imagined joyful life in a Garden of Eden is rendered impossible or at least unsubstantial by its own nature.

Furthering the ironic post-pastoral vision created by technology and particularly by information networks offered by Brautigan, Haldeman's poem "Machines of Loving Grace" gives a more straightforward image of the end of joy "while machines hum (…) / while cursors blink with mindless patience, / while screens fill up with easy blather" (l.9-11)[3]. However, Haldeman's epitaph for the last typewriter ever to be produced falls short of the narrative possibilities of Brautigan's critique of a utopian vision, precisely because Brautigan addresses the environmental concern that lies behind the scientific utopia critically portrayed in the poem. "All

[3] The full poem is available at: http://machinesoflovinggrace.com/molg.htm

Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" is, therefore, directly engaged with this major theme of the science fiction of the 60s. However, contrary to other works of this genre that might be considered *positive*, such as Ernst Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) or Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), because they offer and discuss technological possibilities for an environmentally committed organization of society, Brautigan's poem only imagines "sophisticated new technologies" (Robinson 11) in order to highlight their consequences and the inherent contradiction of their use towards a more balanced relation with nature.

Other Dystopian elements

Within its dystopian line the poem raises other questions, such as the radical transformation of nature according to human purposes, a pressing question particularly in our present time, in which the environmental crisis has reached a peak of no return. The consequences of the interaction of the human species with the planet can now be seen at the geological level, described by the concept of the Anthropocene, which as Crutzen argues is, "in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia" (23). The Anthropocene concept fosters optimism and a general confidence in science that has the task to, as the Nobel winner puts it, "guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene" (23). In the same article the Nobel Laureate also proposes that to achieve this sustainable state there might be the need for "internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to 'optimize' climate" (23). These arguments by themselves resemble a science fiction narrative much in line with fictional works such Arthur C. Clark's *The Sands of Mars* (1951), Henry Kuttner's *Fury* (1950), or Poul Anderson's *The Big Rain* (1954), in which terraforming and geoengineering are discussed. In fact, at the heart of the concept of the Anthropocene is a narrative on the consequences of human action on the planet, with variable beginnings, according to the higher or lower impacts of specific technological events. Some authors point out the agricultural revolution (Gowdy and Krall, 2013), the industrial revolution (Foley, 2013), or the first nuclear explosion (Zalasiewicz, 2014). A common perspective to these authors is that the Anthropocene concept is a narrative of the human presence on the planet, told by a historiography of science and

its consequences. This narrative situates the present time within a progression of technological events (Crutzen, 2002 and Foley, 2013). Malm and Hornborg (2014), in particular, have argued that the Anthropocene concept is based on, or supports, a progressive narrative of the human species in which, for instance, the creation of the fossil economy was already present, potentially, in the creation of fire; and that it was only a matter of time or conditions until human beings and technology evolved to that point. According to this line of thought, fossil economy is something natural, disregarding its cultural and social implications. These are also ultimately considered as natural, independently of what they are, because they were predicted by the potency present in technology itself. Opposing this naturalization of the unjust distribution of the environmental and social consequences of industrialization and capitalism, Malm and Hornborg argue that social inequality is, for instance, at the basis of certain aspects of the creation of the fossil economy. They stress that the exploitation of nature as well as of non-human and human beings by other human beings is not the consequence of the seeds of technology or science, but that it may be the ground that sustained the technological milestones of the narrative of human technological development. "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" does not explicitly address questions of social justice or of environmental justice. However, Brautigan's dystopian vision is an insightful commentary on the use of technology in the relation between human beings and nature, in a certain way foreseeing the inevitability of large-scale transformations of the planet.

In this particular aspect it is possible to read in "Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" the echoes of James Lovelock *Gaia* hypothesis, which postulates that the planet Earth is a self-regulatory system, maintaining homeostasis, adjusting itself according to variations within its composing elements. Although adopted by New-Age thinkers and environmental movements, the *Gaia* hypothesis is inherently anthropocentric since it naturalizes and justifies human intervention within the biosphere in order to, predating the argument that the proponents of geoengineering under the Anthropocene concept would bring forth 60 years later, 'optimize' the planet to regulate the biosphere. In fact, the Gaia hypothesis has been dubbed as "the cybernetic dream" (Sessions 300-1) since it assumed that cybernetics and ecology, working together, could understand and manipulate the biological mechanisms of life and of the planet. The same way, the contemporary Anthropocene concept expresses faith in science and somehow naturalizes human action and its disruptive action in the

environment, while at the same time providing it with a softened ontology, of which spirituality is cleansed and stewardship of the planet is secured. Taken to the limit, as Brautigan's poem shows, human manipulation of the planet would create an entirely artificial environment, which would replace its model. Within this cybernetic ecology, human and non-human beings would be nothing more that similes to their originals, which were probably lost in a nuclear winter or in a toxic landscape that was generated out of the creation of the artificial electronically-monitored paradise. Within this manufactured planet, whose artificiality is stated in the poem by portraying this ecology as cybernetic, or self-regulatory, the blissful relation between its constituents, animals and machines alike, also raises the problem of free will, like the one found in Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1950), or dramatically enacted when the computer Hall takes over the starship in the movie *2001 Space Odyssey* (1968), for instance. In fact, the cybernetic ecology where the inhabitants of this dystopia live, controlled by machines which they have also become, is not the model of nature which it intends to replicate, but a system much as the domed city of the 1971 movie *Logan's Run*, in which perfect balance is maintained by a computer, and the optimal level of population through the forced death of those who reach the age of 30. In this 'optimized' nature, the return to an idealized natural state of being is impossible because machines always mediated it.

Dystopian elements in Brautigan's poem are conveyed by its tone, in the interference of the second line of each strophe that ironically frames it, and by its theme of a post-pastoral vision of a non-mediated relation with nature made impossible because it exists within a closed circuit created by the instruments of mediation. Commenting on the ideal of a technological solution to environmental problems and to an integrated relation between human and non-human beings and the world, adopted both by the first environmental movements of the 60s and by scientific research in the post-war Western world, particularly in the U.S., the poem frames its dystopian vision within the environmental concern thus becoming an ecological dystopia, or a critique of ecological utopias.

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Who's Afraid of Vampire/Werewolf?: Unearthing the Serbian Blood-sucking, Shape-shifting Creatures

Milan Jovanović
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Abstract | This paper wishes to excavate the long-forgotten and dormant vampires that once used to frighten the living daylights out of people from Eastern and Central Serbia, so as to explain who they were/are as well as how they operated within their respective societies. Marija Šarović, a contemporary Serbian scholar on the subject of vampires, observes that in Serbian literature, the vampire appears only in realistic prose during the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century, although there were earlier traces of the same. Moreover, the oldest existing document where the term *vampire* is mentioned in Serbia, she adds, dates back to the second half of the thirteenth century. The terms *werewolf* and *vampire* were identical in Serbia, as defined by the entry "vukodlak" (werewolf) in the first Serbian dictionary written by the father of modern Serbian language, Vuk Stefanović-Karadžić, in 1818.

Vampire slaying is a practice that goes far back in the past. Even though the belief in vampires can be found in many cultures throughout the world, the most detailed and the most famous accounts of vampire epidemics came from the eighteenth-century Serbia, thus perhaps introducing the term *vampire* to the western world.
Keywords | Vampire, Serbia, Folklore, Literature, Supernatural

Resumo | Este artigo pretende desenterrar os muito esquecidos e adormecidos vampiros que outrora aterrorizavam os vivos da zona leste e central da Sérvia, no

intuito de explicar quem eles eram/são e ainda como estes atuavam dentro das suas comunidades. Marija Šarović, uma das académicas contemporâneas sérvias que se debruçou sobre o tema vampiros, observou que, na literatura sérvia, os vampiros aparecem apenas na prosa realística durante as últimas décadas do século XIX, embora existam vestígios anteriores. Além disso, o registo documental mais antigo onde o termo *vampiro* é mencionado na Sérvia, acrescenta Marija Šarović, data da segunda parte do século XIII. Os termos *lobisomem* e *vampiro* eram idênticos na Sérvia, definidos pela palavra "vukodlak" (lobisomem) no primeiro dicionário sérvio, escrito por Vuk Stefanović-Karadžić, pai da língua sérvia moderna, em 1818.

A caça aos vampiros é uma prática que remonta aos tempos mais antigos. Embora a crença em vampiros possa ser encontrada em muitas culturas do mundo, os registos mais famosos de epidemias vampíricas são da Sérvia do século XVIII, o que talvez explique a introdução do termo *vampiro* no mundo ocidental.
Palavras-chave | Vampiro, Sérvia, Folclore, Literatura, Sobrenatural

> All sorts of old superstitions die very hard in this delightful mediaeval country. All except a few lawyers and bagmen believe in vampires, who may be charmed with an amulet of garlic; and in the *vile* or spirits of the mountains, rivers, earth, and air. (Herbert Vivian 188)

Art and literature are increasingly exploiting the vampire theme nowadays. Even in the past, many literatures were tackling the subject. Some of the first literary attempts were H.A. Ossenfelder's *The Vampire* (1748), the first poem featuring a vampire, S. T. Coleridge's unfinished poem *Christabel* (written in 1800), J. W. Polidori's novella *The Vampyre* (1819), S. Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* (1872), and perhaps the most famous one, B. Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Readers' interest in vampires was responsible for the introduction of the theme into major European literatures at the end of the eighteenth century. The vampires in today's popular works of art and literature have evolved and, therefore, have distanced themselves so much from their centuries-old ancestors that the original idea behind the vampire concept has begun to fade.

This paper wishes to excavate the long-forgotten and dormant vampires that once used to frighten the living daylights out of people from Eastern and Central Serbia, so as to explain who they were/are as well as how they operated within their respective societies. The most logical way to do so was to return to the very source – Serbia, in search of the first cases of vampirism reported under the name *vampire*.

The material I gathered while doing my research in Serbia proved to be helpful in understanding vampires' powers over people. It also opened the possibility for establishing the links between Serbian and European vampires, not only connecting them in historical terms but also in modern ones.

In Serbian literature, even though there are earlier traces as general/typological occurrences, the vampire, as a relatively independent and complete motive, appears only in realistic prose, more precisely during the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century. However, the oldest existing document where the term *vampire* is mentioned in Serbia dates back to the second half of the thirteenth century, where in a nomocanon dated from 1262 a priest denounces peasants' superstitious belief that the eclipses of the sun and the moon happen when they get eaten by a werewolf/vampire (Šarović 15). These two terms were identical in Serbia, as defined by the entry "vukodlak" (werewolf) in the first Serbian dictionary written by the father of modern Serbian language, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, in 1818:

> Werewolf is the name for a man who, within 40 days upon his death, gets possessed by some devil's spirit, and thus revived (vampired). Then the werewolf leaves his grave at night and suffocates people in their homes and drinks their blood. An honest man cannot become a vampire, except if a bird flies over his dead body or if some other animal passes over it. Werewolves most often appear in winter (between Christmas and Ascension Day). As the number of deaths increases in a village, people start saying that a werewolf is at the graveyard (some even report seeing him with a shroud over his shoulder at night) and begin guessing who it may be. Sometimes they take a young and spotless black horse to the graveyard and lead him over the suspected werewolf's grave: for they say that such a horse neither will, nor could dare cross over a werewolf. Should they decide to dig one up, then all the villagers gather with hawthorn stakes (for he is only afraid of the hawthorn stake: that is why, upon mentioning his name in the house, they say: "Let madder and hawthorn thorns be on his path"), open the grave, and if they find a man not decomposed therein, they stab him with the stake and throw him into the fire to burn. They say that such a werewolf is bloated and reddened in his grave due to the human blood he consumed ("as red as a vampire"). Werewolf sometimes even visits his wife (especially if she is young and attractive) and sleeps with her; and it is also said that a child fathered by a werewolf has no bones. Moreover, in times of famine, he is frequently seen around watermills, barns, blockhouses and baskets of maize. He is said to roam with his shroud thrown over his shoulder. He can pass through the smallest crack; therefore, there is no use closing doors as a defence from neither him nor witches. (Karadžić XI, 132, *our translation*)

As shown above, Karadžić uses the terms *werewolf* and *vampire* interchangeably in Serbian, offering an in-depth description of the instructions for the proper killing of vampires. However, the practice of killing the revenants had been a part of Serbian folklore even before Karadžić's nineteenth century description. Dr Radovan N. Kazimirović observed in his 1941 publication, *Тајанствене појаве у нашем народу/Tajanstvene pojave u našem narodu (Mysterious Phenomena in our Folk)*, that as early as the fourteenth century, Serbs were prone to the said practice. He quotes the famous article 20 from the Prizren transcript of Serbia's Tsar Stephen Uroš IV Dušan's Code (1349), which states the following: *"Када се деси да се мађионством људи из гробова ваде те сажижу, оно село које би то учинило, платиће вражду, а распопиће се поп који је дошао на то"* (Kada se desi da se mađionstvom ljudi iz grobova vade te sažižu, ono selo koje bi to učinilo, platiće vraždu, a raspopiće se pop koji je došao na to/*When people are taken out of the graves by sorcery and burnt, any village that does this shall pay a fine, and if any priest shall come to it, let his priesthood be taken from him*) (70). As it can be seen from the above quote, vampire slaying is a practice that goes far back in the past, centuries before the appearance of Bram Stoker's famous 1897 example, and before Herbert Vivian's account of the same year, quoted at the beginning of this essay.

Another clue that serves as evidence for the extended presence of vampires in Serbian folklore, which complements the prohibitions against the belief in and killing of vampires mentioned above, involves other repeated official bans throughout the history of Serbs. Tihomir R. Đorđević elaborated on them in his 1952 publication entitled, *Вампир и друга бића у нашем народном веровању и предању/Vampir i druga bića u našem narodnom verovanju i predanju (Vampire and Other Beings in our Folklore and Myth)*. After acknowledging that all practices involving vampires had been banned and/or sanctioned both by secular and ecclesiastical authorities, the author continued with an extended list of recorded historical cases of the same. Thus, he mentioned the years 1666, 1730, 1820, 1833, 1838, 1844, as the ones in which individuals who participated in the ritualistic exhumation and desecration of the purported vampires were either imprisoned or fined. Those were also the cases in which the people were continuously warned to abstain from performing such rites (216-19).

Even though the belief in vampires can be found in many cultures throughout the world, the first, most detailed, and most famous accounts of massive vampire

epidemics around the world came precisely from the eighteenth-century Serbia, thus perhaps introducing the term *vampire* to the western world. I say *perhaps*, simply because the precise etymology of the word is hard to determine due to its similarity in many Slavic languages. One of the few literary texts, however, which defines the *vampire* as a Serbian term is a short story *Four Wooden Stakes* by Victor Rowan, published for the first time in "Weird Tales", vol. 5, issue 2, in February 1925. In it, the main character (the narrator) reads the entry from an old encyclopaedia, "*Vampire*. A term apparently of Serbian origin originally applied in Eastern Europe to blood-sucking ghosts" (248).

Professor Katharina M. Wilson identifies "four schools of thought on the etymology of *vampire*" (3): Turkish, Greek, Slavic, and Hungarian. The first one was defended by a nineteenth-century Austrian linguist, Franz Miklosich, and his supporters. They argued that the term itself, as well as all the other Slavic cognates, *vampir*, *upir*, *upior*, *upyr*, *uper*, etc., all stemmed from the Turkish *uber*, meaning witch. The second supports the idea that the term *vampire* comes from the Greek verb πι (to drink) (4). Curiously, however, the Serbian verb *piti* (to drink) has the form *pij* as the second person singular imperative. It is worth noting that upon my investigation into the Turkish origin Professor Wilson mentioned, I failed to identify any existence of such a term – *uber*. There is a possibility, though, that the school supporting the Turkish origin had in mind the proto-Turkish origins of the word, but this would then be too far-fetched an explanation. Petar Skok, one of the most famous Croatian linguists and onomastics experts, says that the term *ubyr* comes from Northern-Turkish (basing this on Miklosich's supposition). The third school, the one whose theory has been generally recognised as the most probable nowadays, claims the term is of Slavic origin, its root being the Serbian word *вампир/vampir*. Among those who supported this theory were Kluge, Falk and Torp, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (London, 1903), and the Spanish *Encyclopedia Universal Illustrada* (Madrid, 1930-33), to name but a few. Others, however, are more inclined to say that the term originated from Bulgarian or Polish. Finally, the fourth school, consisting particularly of American and English writers, somehow keeps insisting on the Hungarian origin, even though, as Professor Wilson points out, the term in Hungarian occurred more than a century after it had been adopted by the vast majority of western languages (5). One of the reasons for this insistence, perhaps, is the fact that the

famous reports came from eighteenth-century Serbia, which was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time – hence, the Hungarian origin hypothesis.

Furthermore, the etymology of the noun *vampire* is not the only concept wrapped up in mystery. The history of the introduction of the term into the vocabularies and literatures of the major western languages is also controversial. The general position[1] is that the earliest records point to Poland, Russia and Macedonia, prior to the vampire-craze of the third decade of the eighteenth-century Serbia. Nevertheless, the later stage of the introduction of the word into German, French and English, from the reports of the vampire epidemics of 1725-1732 in Serbia, proved to be the most influential for the widest recognition of the term *vampire* as a Serbian word, used as such in the Serbian language to this day.

What is perhaps the most important observation regarding the connection between Serbia and modern European literary vampirism is the fact that vampires, at their prime in the first half of the nineteenth-century European literary productions, originated in Serbian folkloric tradition. As part of my investigation, I have visited Kisiljevo and Medveđa (among other places where the belief in vampires is still very strong), and spoken to the authorities there. The following accounts on the vampirisms of Petar Blagojević and Arnaut Pavle were confirmed then as part of the folklore of their respective villages, which have kept the stories alive to this day. It is worth mentioning that, even though we live in a highly modern and intellectually advanced society, I encountered people in both Kisiljevo and Medveđa, respectively, who refused to talk about their famous blood-sucking villagers out of sheer dread.

It all started at the beginning of the eighteenth century with the Treaty of Požarevac in 1718. It was a peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Republic of Venice. A part of the Serbian territory, which had been under the Ottomans, was now handed over to Austria that, naturally, replaced the Turkish officials for its own. It was during this brief interval under the Austrian rule (between 1718 and 1739) that the rumours of alleged cases of vampirism in Serbia reached the court of Charles VI. The authorities decided to send the two physicians and officers, Glaser and Johann Flückinger, to the newly-gained territories to investigate the cases. Their report presents a remarkable document for anyone interested in the subject. By confirming the existence of vampires, after having

[1] As stated by Katharina M. Wilson, 9.

investigated the cases of vampire epidemics on the territories where the Serbian plain folk lived, this document directly influenced the Western European population, thus "spreading the virus" of truthfulness of vampire existence into the West. Clearly, from our point of view, the advancement of medical science easily deconstructs this myth, attributing the symptoms the corpses exhibited to the natural process of decomposition. However, due to the lack of the knowledge in the field, nineteenth-century Europe was swept over by the bone-chilling discoveries from the southeastern corner of the continent.

One of the first cases of vampirism and certainly the most thoroughly-documented one can be attributed to one Petar Blagojević, a Serbian peasant, who officially died in 1725. He lived in Kisiljevo, a village in eastern Serbia, and was believed to have turned into a vampire upon his death. Consequently, after having died, he supposedly returned as a vampire, causing nine deaths in his village. This case was documented in the report signed by the Imperial Provisor Frombald, who was an official of the Austrian administration, present at the staking of Petar Blagojević. The sensationalism of his testimony was beyond anyone's expectations.

The hysterical finger-pointing commenced when the nine mentioned deaths in Kisiljevo were all attributed to Petar Blagojević. The people had claimed (while still alive) that he was visiting them at night trying to strangle them. Dr Radovan N. Kazimirović also mentions the case, noting that even Petar Blagojević's wife had to flee from the village after having reported the strange occurrences involving her late husband who had supposedly visited her at night (71). After the ninth supposed victim had passed away[2], the villagers decided to perform the exhumation of Blagojević's body to see if he had turned into a vampire. According to the popular belief, one would definitely be deemed a vampire if exhibiting the following symptoms: bloated body, traces of blood seeping through the orifices (eyes, nose, mouth), long hair/beard/nails, and the overall absence of decay. Therefore, the Provisor and the Orthodox priest were summoned to witness the exhumation. In spite of the Provisor's advice that the permission be sought from higher officials, the villagers decided not to wait any longer. The reason for this, as they said, was in the fact that prolonging the onset of the proceedings would create new deaths, as it had happened before. Thus, so as not to flee the village due to the imminent danger, accompanied by the Provisor

[2] No medical records exist to explain these occurrences, leaving the nine deaths under the veil of mystery.

and the priest, the alleged vampire's body was dug up, and the villagers' fears were confirmed. Petar Blagojević's body *did* exhibit all the conventional signs of vampirism. They then continued with the staking ritual – driving a hawthorn stake through the vampire's heart, upon which Blagojević's blood oozed through his ears and mouth. After having performed this, they moved on to the next stage, i.e. burning the corpse. In his concluding remarks, the Provisor distanced himself from this ritual (should it turn out to be erroneous), as he was not completely convinced in the veridicality of the whole spectacle he was witnessing. His report was consequently published in *Wienerisches Diarium*, a Viennese newspaper, which is known as the modern-day *Die Wiener Zeitung*. The authorities in Kisiljevo, however, pointed out that the existing members of the only Blagojević family in Kisiljevo nowadays, when asked, did not recall of any relations to the (in)famous Petar.

A year or so after Petar Blagojević's death, another case of vampire epidemics happened. This time a man called Arnaut Pavle died not that far away from Kisiljevo, most probably in 1726[3]. He was a Serbian hajduk[4], in those days quite a normal profession to have. His death preceded the deaths of over sixteen of his fellow-villagers in Medveđa, a village near the town of Paraćin (present-day Central Serbia). One of the reasons he was believed to have become a vampire was the fact that he had spent a part of his life in the Turkish part of Serbia (Kosovo), where he had supposedly came in contact with vampires. After returning to Medveđa, he had an accident and died suddenly. His grave was dug up after ten days because of the growing complaints from the people who claimed that he had been visiting them, after which they rapidly died. Similarly to the previous case of vampirism, upon excavation, Pavle's corpse exhibited the same symptoms as Blagojević's. As customary, his corpse was staked and burnt. Curiously, the witnesses reported a strange groaning sound emitted from Pavle's corpse after having been perforated through the heart by the stake. Lest the ones who had died from Pavle's attacks should turn as well, the villagers disinterred them and performed the same ritual on them.

However, the story of Pavle's vampirism did not end there. It was roughly 1931, about five to six years after the original case, when people suddenly started

[3] The year of his actual death is not known. Some authors suggest 1725 as well. See Dickens 2011, 314.

[4] There is a variety of different spelling possibilities for the term *hajduk*, including this one, which is the original spelling in Serbian, therefore kept here as such. The term itself denotes an outlaw, or a bandit, who fought on the side of the plain folk against the Ottoman oppressors.

dying in the village. The red herring was the fact that they all died not far apart from each other in a short period of time. After more than ten people had died under curious circumstances (no apparent signs of illness were discovered), an infectious disease specialist was called for, who did not detect anything related to infectious diseases, although he did state that the deaths could probably be attributed to the Orthodox fasting customs resulting in malnutrition. Be as it may, the people refused to accept the specialist's findings and demanded the ritualistic killing of the vampires. What followed was almost the same as in all the previous cases. The majority of the exhumed bodies showed very few or no signs of decomposition at all. There was fresh blood present on both the shrouds and the bloated bodies, new skin was formed, nails and hair were longer than usual, etc. The final stage of the ritual was performed as usual and the official report deeming the corpses as being in the vampiric state was signed on 26 January, 1732.

Figure 1: Medveđa, Serbia. Old, abandoned graveyard where vampire Arnaut Pavle was purportedly buried (c. 1726).
Author: Milan Jovanović, July 2011.

Perhaps the most famous of all is the vampirism of Sava Savanović who died in 1724. The legend tells he used to live in an old watermill on the Rogačica, in the

village of Zarožje in Western Serbia. The mill in question was operational until the end of 1950s. After that, it became a tourist attraction, which it has remained ever since, especially in modern-day Serbia due to the expansion of the global vampire-craze. Sava Savanović appears in the story *Posle devedeset godina* (*After Ninety Years*, 1880) – published 17 years before Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) – written by the Serbian writer Milovan Glišić (1847–1908), as well as in the horror film *Leptirica* (*The She-Butterfly*, 1973), inspired by Glišić's story. He also appears in the novel *Strah i njegov sluga* (*Fear and Servant*, 2000), written by Mirjana Novaković (1966).

Friedrich S. Krauss (1859-1938), Freud's correspondent and a pioneer figure in the history of folkloristics, wrote two short texts on vampires: one a collection of vampire sightings, and the other dealing with the measures one needs to take so as to assure protection against vampires. I found it rather interesting to learn that some of the rituals he reported were actually depicted in the above mentioned story and film, namely, while staking a vampire, one should be careful not to let the butterfly, which comes out of the grave upon opening the coffin, escape. It should be burnt afterwards along with the body because it is only then that a vampire can truly be destroyed. If not, the vampire's vengeance should be expected upon the villagers for the next seven years. The butterfly detail was the one that provided the title for the film, shot at the original location of Sava's watermill. Unfortunately, as I was preparing this essay, I learned that the famous watermill had collapsed only three days before after centuries of defiance against the odds. Curiously enough, the news was first published in Britain, and only then in Serbia.

As it can be seen from all the above, vampire belief was quite widespread in Serbia, especially in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The mentioned documents are but a few which show how not only illiterate peasants, but also the clergy believed in vampires. Thus, the issue was not about whether or not vampires were real, but actually about how to deal with them. Interestingly enough, such beliefs still permeate modern day Serbia. Old people in rural areas still recount vampire stories, whereas the life and times of the most famous of all the vampires in Serbia – Sava Savanović, immortalised by Glišić, was dealt with in a film called *The She-Butterfly* (1973), which spread the fear even farther from the epicentre. Moreover, the present echoes of the vampire lore in Serbia are at times so powerful that many people feel ill at ease

when asked to talk about the subject, a reaction I came across on numerous occasions while conducting interviews with people in Kisiljevo, Medveđa, and Zarožje.

While I was conducting the field research in Serbia, I interviewed people about the subject of vampires, and one of them, in the Eastern Serbian village of Štubik, not far from my hometown, provided me with a very useful and insightful material he himself had gathered and published in 1998. It involves his fellow villagers' testimonies and stories, which illustrate some of the universally accepted beliefs regarding vampires. The people he interviewed were almost exclusively over seventy/eighty-year-olds, and the majority of their accounts happened in their youth, which points to the first half of the twentieth century. Their stories (some passed on from generation to generation, others first-hand accounts) included the following: to quiet a vampire one should identify the grave using a horse, walk around the coffin thrice, straddle it and drive a stake/a metal nail through the vampire's heart, pour mulled wine, garlic and frankincense in its mouth, drive a knife into the household door and flip the broom upside down; if encountered with a vampire, the possible victim should swear and curse aloud; the places usually visited by vampires include open, desolate roads and crossroads, woods, bridges, houses, attics, stables, watermills; typically, vampires visit their family members entering the house through the windows, keyholes, down chimneys trying to hurt them in different ways and frequently making sexual advances on their victims, pulling the sheets off them, making noise in the kitchen and in the attic, generally frightening people and domestic animals. These vampiric activities would generally stop with the cockcrowing at dawn.

Judging from the cases presented, vampires came into the Western European public eye during the first half of the eighteenth century. There, they quickly became increasingly popular especially in English, German, and French literatures. Afterwards, in the nineteenth-century Serbia, on the brink of the liberation from the Ottomans, adorned by the newly-created national characteristic – its own standard, official, and internationally praised idiom, Serbian literature (influenced by European tastes) imports that which had belonged to it in the first place – the vampire. Serbian literature had to turn to already enlightened Europe so as to recognise the treasures of its own culture. Thus, leading European literatures "returned" vampires to their ancestral origins.

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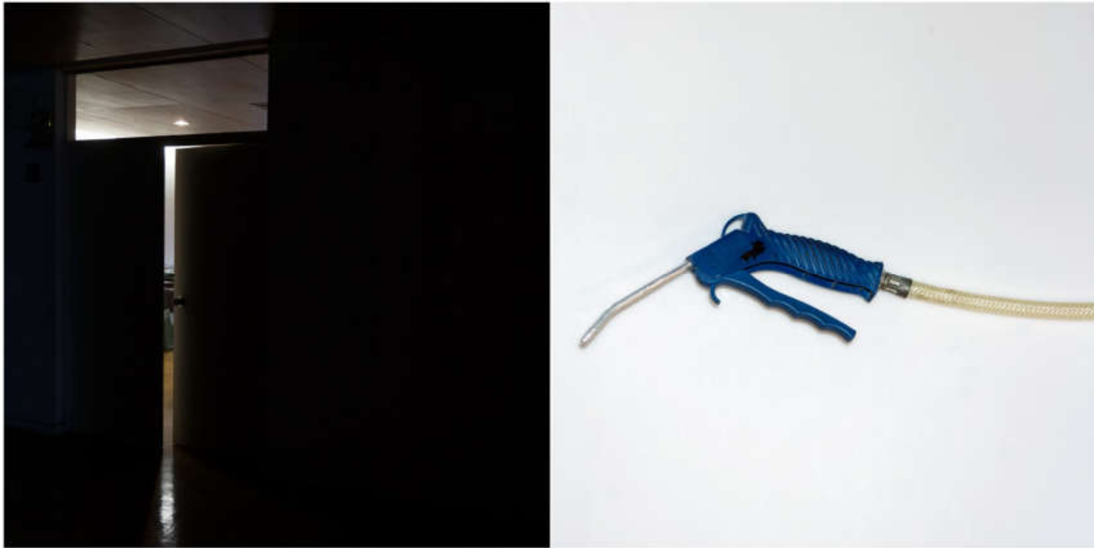

Swords of Westeros: Swords as Symbols of Identity in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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Abstract | Swords have been regarded as emblems of power and honour, symbols of status and authority belonging to several gods and heroes of many mythologies and cultures, but also as the main weapons of knights. Oaths were made upon swords and they were the companions of the most fearsome warriors and heroes. They were, sometimes, magical and had wills of their own, but above all swords were personal objects intimately connected to their owners.

This article will first clarify the connection between fantasy literature and the Middle Ages in the creation of George R. R. Martin's world in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since that historical period influences the way that swords are portrayed in his work. It will then focus on exploring how swords are connected to their owner's identity, an aspect that is present in the following swords: Eddard Stark's *Ice*, Jon Snow's *Longclaw,* Stannis Baratheon's *Lightbringer*, and Arya Stark's *Needle.*

Keywords | Swords; Middle Ages; Celtic Myth; *A Song of Ice and Fire*; Fantasy

Resumo | As espadas têm sido vistas como emblemas de poder e honra, símbolos de estatuto e autoridade, pertencentes a vários deuses e heróis de várias mitologias e culturas, mas também como as armas principais dos cavaleiros. É sobre elas que se faziam juramentos e eram elas as companheiras dos guerreiros e heróis mais destemidos. Por vezes tinham propriedades mágicas e personalidade própria mas, acima de tudo, as espadas eram objectos pessoais intimamente ligadas aos seus donos.

Primeiramente, este artigo irá clarificar a ligação entre a literatura de fantasia e a Idade Média na criação do mundo de fantasia de George R. R. Martin, uma vez que esse período histórico influencia a forma como as espadas são retratadas no seu trabalho. De seguida, o artigo irá focar-se na forma como as espadas estão ligadas à identidade do seu proprietário, um aspecto presente nas seguintes espadas: *Ice* de Eddard Stark, *Longclaw* de Jon Snow, *Lightbringer* de Stannis Baratheon e *Needle* de Arya Stark.
Palavras-chave | Espadas; Idade Média; Mitos Celtas; *A Song of Ice and Fire*; Fantasia

Swords of Westeros: the legacy of medieval swords in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

Both in the world of Westeros and in the world of the Middle Ages there is a tradition of important weapons. In medieval literature, swords belonged to the bravest warriors, knights, kings, gods and heroes of different mythologies and cultures. Swords represented power and honour, status and authority, kingship and sovereignty. In fact, according to Hilda Ellis Davidson, "The reason is largely because the sword was essentially the weapon of the leader, a personal treasure which was also a necessity for the man who would keep his precarious place at the head of others" (211). They were also connected to values such as bravery, loyalty and truth, but also violence and death, being some of the most decorated war items of the Middle Ages.

Since *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a work of fantasy, it is important to clarify the connection between fantasy and the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages have continually been reimagined in contemporary culture. In fact, Umberto Eco states that "it seems people like the Middle Ages", and that popular culture is an important vehicle for this renewed interest in the medieval period (61). This aspect is linked to the concept of medievalism and it is important in order to understand the way that Martin uses the Middle Ages in his work, particularly in the way that swords are portrayed in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Being the weapon of the leader, the sword symbolized the identity of its wielder. This became more prominent during the medieval period especially because of its constant presence in chivalric romances where it became a symbolic object associated with the hero. In *A Song of Ice and Fire,* there are also swords which

reflect the same ideals and characteristics, as well as symbolic charge, of those of the medieval period.

Fantasy and its medieval form

John Clute in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* refers the connection between fantasy and history, especially with the medieval period:

> Fantasy as a genre is almost inextricably bound up with history and ideas of history, reflected and reworked more or less thoroughly according to the needs, ambitions and intentions of individual authors. To many writers and readers, a fantasy novel should be set against a quasi-historical (very often quasi-medieval) background, and the boundaries between historical novels and fantasy can be thin (n. pag.).

In this way, it is possible to acknowledge that Martin also roots the world of Westeros in the Middle Ages. But Martin's medieval Westeros is much closer to the historical Middle Ages than the previous fantasy works of other authors, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, which followed the medieval format of Tolkien, as Martin states: "The success that the Tolkien books had redefined modern fantasy. (...) And that led to a lot more Tolkien imitators" (Poniewozik n. pag). The Middle Ages portrayed in those works perpetuated an idealized view of the period full of misconceptions and clichés that were born in the Victorian period, where the renewed interest for the Middle Ages began. One can say, then, that Martin's work is more realistic in its approach to the medieval period. In relation to that, M. H. Abrams writes that the representation of reality designates a way to represent life and the social world as well as human experience "as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen" (260). In *A Song of Ice and Fire* those realistic elements can be recognized in the social structure, in politics, and in the psychological aspects of the characters which help the reader to immerse him/herself in the fantasy world. The representation of swords, of their shape, meaning and value offer another aspect of realism since they resemble the swords of the Middle Ages.

One may, therefore, say that even though "[f]*antasy is any departure from consensus reality*" and it "includes transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts," fantasy can also borrow elements from reality in order to build its

world (Hume, 21). In Martin's own words, "I like to use history to flavor my fantasy, to add texture and verisimilitude" (*The Citadel: So Spake Martin,* n. pag.). This attempt to root the fantasy world in reality, giving it mimetic characteristics, is also important because both depend on each other, they are not opposites, according to Brian Attebery, "Mimesis without fantasy would be nothing but reporting one's perception of actual events. Fantasy without mimesis would be a purely artificial invention without recognizable objects or actions" (3). In this matter, the world of Westeros is a fantasy world, in which there are elements that offer a break from reality, but there are also aspects that the reader may identify as existing or having existed in reality.

The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a medieval based world and its grounding in the Middle Ages allows the author to interpret that period but also to reflect about our contemporary society. Therefore, the following question arises: why the Middle Ages? Why does fantasy often root its world mainly in the medieval period?

Tison Pugh and Jane Weisl define the concept of medievalism as referring:

> to the art, literature, scholarship, avocational pastimes, and sundry forms of entertainment and culture that turn to the Middle Ages for their subject matter or inspiration, and in doing so, explicitly or implicitly, by comparison or by contrast, comment on the artist's contemporary sociocultural milieu (1).

This interest in the medieval period started in the Victorian period and it showed a nostalgia for a lost past of which little is known and much is imagined. The Middle Ages became a place of mythical and historical interest, although some of the medieval themes are themselves fantasies of the period, meaning that they do not correspond to the real Middle Ages, such as the themes of courtly love and chivalry. Medievalism, therefore, is an interpretation of a period and not its accurate representation (Pugh 3).

The swords depicted in Martin's work are also somewhere between the historical and the mythical swords of the Middle Ages, since they resemble the medieval swords in their shape and making, but also in their symbolism and attributes. The fact that they belong to some of the most important characters of the

books is a reminder of the swords of medieval heroes, kings and gods, bearers of the most important swords of the Middle Ages.

What Martin does in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is to build a recognizable medieval world in order to deconstruct certain themes and literary *topoi,* to comment on the idealization of the Middle Ages and to shed a more realistic light on the period. His world resembles the medieval world and, through swords, Martin allows the reader to recognize their bearers as important characters, as it happened in medieval mythologies and romances.

The Swords of Westeros

Swords are deeply connected to the identity and authority of their owners because they belonged to leaders, important warriors and kings. One of the main characteristics of the most important medieval swords is that they had names, a feature that would bestow an additional power to the sword. This aspect has its origins in animism, a belief system in which objects, like humans and animals, have souls, a belief shared by the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic peoples. Therefore, a sword with a name had great power and this practice of naming swords continued throughout the medieval period (Oakeshott, 106). Names were also important because they reinforced the status of the sword as a personal weapon of great value and imbued with its own personality (Loades, 1788).

In medieval literature there are several swords with names. In *Beowulf*, the hero with the same name has *Hrunting*, with which he fights against Grendel's mother. In Norse myth, Sigurd kills the dragon Fafnir with his reforged sword *Gram*, in *The Volsung Saga*. Roland, Charlemagne's paladin in the *Chanson de Roland*, also had a special sword, *Durandal*, which was given to him by an angel. King Arthur, in the Arthurian texts, has *Excalibur*, a magical sword given to him by the Lady of the Lake. In Martin's work the most important swords also have names; they have an identity which is deeply connected to the identity of its owner.

Eddard Stark, head of the House Stark, Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, fought with Robert Baratheon helping him win the Iron Throne. He is known as a man of courage in the battlefield and has an unwavering sense of honour and justice. He is a noble lord, a man of power and Hand of the King, making him the second most important person of Westeros. He has a sword, an heirloom of his family

that was passed through generations: *Ice*. The name *Ice* refers to the cold territory of the North, the land of the House Stark, but also to the impartial and objective justice applied with a cutting edge by Ned, since he uses the sword to execute condemned prisoners. *Ice* was passed on through generations of the Stark family as it was acquired by the Starks, four hundred years before the events narrated in *A Song of Ice and Fire*:

> It had been forged in Valyria (…), when the ironsmiths had worked their metal with spells as well as hammers. Four hundred years old it was, and as sharp as the day it was forged. The name it bore was older still, a legacy from the age of heroes, when the Starks were Kings in the North (Martin, *Thrones* 24).

Therefore, *Ice* represents the legacy of the Starks and it is the symbol of Eddard's identity as a Stark and of his authority as Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North. This passing of the sword through generations also has its roots in the Middle Ages, when important weapons such as swords were considered family treasures, usually given to a youth when he attained manhood (Davidson 212). This is also present in medieval literature, for example, when Sigurd receives the fragments of his father's shattered sword, which he reforges and becomes the sword *Gram.* The sword perpetuated the name and the accomplishments of the family, being associated with what was most important in a man's life: "family ties, loyalty to his lord, the duties of a king, the excitement of battle, the attainment of manhood, and the last funeral rites" (Davidson 214). In fact, there are also swords in the tombs of each of the Lords of Winterfell, resting on their knees, in the Winterfell crypts, proving the importance of the sword as a symbol of identity in the Stark family (Martin, *Thrones* 42).

Moreover, *Ice* is a "legacy from the age of heroes" in a work that seems to have no heroes. The concept of the hero is a difficult one to grasp, but one of the main ideas is that the heroic narratives, especially the mythical ones, tell the same story repeatedly throughout time, and the hero is a timeless figure that assumes various faces and names, although his conception and function is always the same.[1] The

[1] This is Joseph Campbell's theory in his famous work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), although he was not the first one to study the structure of the heroic narratives. The first one was Otto Rank, in *The Myth and Birth of the Hero* (1909) in which he relies on Sigmund Freud's theory of Dreams, and compares myths to dreams. Another important author is the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp and his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) in

medieval hero in the imagination of the contemporary reader is, perhaps, the hero of the chivalric romances, the brave knight that inhabits King Arthur's court. He is honourable, brave, with high moral standards and fights for a greater good. In this sense, Eddard Stark starts as the embodiment of this medieval hero that will fight against the injustices of Westeros and save it from corruption. He is a vestige of King Arthur's knights. But the figure of the hero is a mythic and literary one, an archetype through which ideals and values are conveyed.

Therefore, *Ice* is also an heirloom of the swords of these mythical heroes that are not real. Eddard Stark dies, in fact, by his own blade, being decapitated by Ser Ilyn Payne (Martin, *Thrones* 727). His death is the death of the hero by his own ideals. It is also the death of the idealized view of the Middle Ages perpetuated since Victorian times, by a medievalism that searched for a chivalric order of society that came from medieval romances and not from reality. In this way, Martin puts in perspective an apparently heroic Middle Ages by killing one of the main characters with his own sword *Ice*. A sword that was a symbol of his identity as a Stark, but also a symbol of the heroic ideal which is not real.

Another important sword is the sword of Jon Snow: *Longclaw*. Jon Snow is the illegitimate son of Eddard Stark and he has no right of bearing his father's name. His last name Snow is the same last name that all bastard sons have in the North. In a sense, Jon Snow has to forge his own identity, stepping out of the shadow of the Starks since he will never be one. The way he acquires his sword is a proof of his bravery and courage, a step in becoming his own person.

When Jon Snow is sent to the Wall to join the Night's Watch he saves Jeor Mormont, Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, from death when he is attacked by a wight. As a token of gratitude, Mormont gives him a sword that is described in great detail:

> The pommel was a hunk of pale stone weighted with lead to balance the long blade. It had been carved into the likeness of a snarling wolf's head, with chips of garnet set into the eyes. The grip was virgin leather, soft and black, as yet unstained by sweat or blood. The blade itself was a good half foot longer than those Jon was used to, tapered to thrust as well as slash, with three fullers deeply incised in the metal. Where Ice was a true two-handed great-sword, this was a hand-and-a-halfer, sometimes named a

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which he demonstrates that the heroes of Russian folktales also follow the same path from their birth to their deaths.

> "bastard sword". (…) When Jon turned it sideways, he could see the ripples in the dark steel where the metal had been folded back on itself again and again (Martin, *Thrones* 655).

This sword had been in the Mormont family for five centuries and it was wielded by Jeor until he joined the Night's Watch. Afterwards it was passed on to his son Jorah, but he brought dishonour to the House Mormont and left the sword behind. The pommel of the sword was a bear's head, the totem of House Mormont but was replaced by the white head of a direwolf when it was given to Jon Snow (Martin, *Thrones* 655). The sword went through several changes and was reshaped in order to embody his new owner's identity: the pommel was changed and it was given a new name: *Longclaw*.

The peculiar attribute of this sword is that its pommel is in the shape of an animal's head. This zoomorphic shape symbolizes the direwolf Ghost, Jon's companion, but it is also a reference to the totem of House Stark, which is a grey direwolf. This kind of detail can also be seen in the ceremonial swords of the Celts: "These swords often had anthropoid hilts, a small figure on the pommel which represented the spirit within it, or gave the sword its name" (Barker 19). The presence of anthropoid figures can also be seen in Anglo-Saxon objects. Among the objects discovered at the Sutton Hoo ship burial there was a sceptre that had a small bronze stag on one of its ends. This was the totemic emblem of the Wuffings, the family of Raedwald, a ruler of East Anglia in the seventh century, to whom this tribute may have been addressed (Barker 28).[2] In the case of *Longclaw* the pommel was first a bear, symbol of the House Mormont, and then a direwolf, alluding to Jon Snow's animal companion. Its name also refers to the claws of both the bear and the direwolf (Martin, *Thrones* 657).

In Jon's case he receives the sword as an act of gratitude and a reward for his courageous act of saving Mormont's life. In the Middle Ages this was also a common practice. For example, the Anglo-Saxon tribal chiefs could pass their most valuable

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[2] It is still uncertain to whom the ship burial belonged to, but it is safe to say that it belonged to an Anglo-Saxon king, or "Bretwalda", because of the royal regalia that was discovered: a heavily decorated sword, helmet and shield, and a sceptre. It may be assumed that Raedwald was buried there because of the presence of the stag in the sceptre and of several Merovingian coins dated from around the year 620, which atest to the wealth and power that Raedwald had. Besides, there is the question of the pagan burial. The conversion of England to Christianity had begun when St. Augustine arrived in 596, and Bede writes that Raedwald had converted in Kent. But when he returned home, he returned to his former faith (Bede 132-133). Therefore, Brian Barker says: "Raedwald was given a Christian burial while his pagan followers had launched his spirit on its journey to the other world of the old heathen gods of his ancestors in the burial ship" (29).

weapons to the greatest warriors of the tribe (Davidson 212). This can also be confirmed in *Beowulf*, when the hero receives a sword from Hrothgar because of his heroic deeds in the court of the Danes (verses 1020-1024).

Moreover, the sword is called a "bastard sword" and this may be understood as having a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to a particular type of sword used in the fourteenth century, the "bastard swords". They had long blades and hilts similar to the two-handed swords but not as long. Nowadays they are also referred to as "hand-and-a-half swords," and they had hilts long enough to be wielded by both hands, although they could also be brandished by one (Oakeshott 308). On the other hand, by being called a "bastard sword", *Longclaw* alludes not only to the fact that Jon is the illegitimate son of Eddard Stark, but also that Jon is given a sword that is not his by right, since it belonged to the legitimate son of Jeor Mormont. In this way, *Longclaw* is a symbol and extension of Jon's identity because of its name, its pommel and its sword type.

Arya Stark also has a sword that symbolizes her identity, and she is the only girl in the Stark family to have a sword. She is the youngest daughter of Eddard and Catelyn Stark and her sword is called *Needle*. Its name is peculiar and ironic because Arya is a tomboy more interested in learning about how to fight, how to ride a horse, and less concerned with more feminine tasks such as singing and embroidery. This sword is given to her by her half-brother Jon Snow when he leaves to join the Night's Watch:

> "I almost forgot", he told her. "All the best swords have names."
> "Like Ice", she said. She looked at the blade in her hand. "Does this have a name? Oh tell me."
> "Can't you guess?" Jon teased. "Your very favourite thing."
> (…)
> "*Needle*!" (Martin, *Thrones* 98)

Arya's sword seems to be an extension of herself since she has no talent for needlework but she can use this *Needle* to learn how to wield a sword, like the boys do. This sword has a thin and short blade and these types of swords are used in the Free Cities, according to Jon Snow (Martin, *Thrones* 97). In this way, the sword seems to assimilate its owner's characteristics, because Arya is also a thin and small girl, suiting her slight build.

Ultimately, Arya's sword comes to represent her life at Winterfell, her happy childhood and her family:

> Needle was Robb and Bran and Rickon, her mother and her father, even Sansa. Needle was Winterfell's grey walls, and the laughter of its people. Needle was the summer snows, Old Nan's stories, the heart tree with its red leaves and scary face, the warm earthly smell of the glass gardens, the sound of the north wind rattling the shutters of her room Needle was Jon Snow's smile. (Martin, *Crows* 455)

Needle becomes a symbol of Arya's true identity throughout her travels, since she is forced to assume several disguises to hide who she really is. First, she disguises herself as Arry, a boy, then Salty, when she travels to Braavos, and she finally has to discard her true identity as well as all her belongings in order to enter and serve in the House of Black and White. She has to give up *Needle* too but she instead chooses to hide it in a safe place. Walking away she says: "One day" (Martin, *Crows* 456). Her sword remains, therefore, as a promise that one day she will be Arya Stark again. Therefore, it is possible to say that *Needle* establishes a connection between Arya and her family because it reminds her of her life before she left Winterfell. It is a symbol of her family and of her identity, just like medieval swords were to their owners.

One of the most symbolic and complex swords is the one that belongs to Stannis Baratheon: *Lightbringer*. After Robert Baratheon's death in *A Game of Thrones*, his older brother Stannis claims the Iron Throne for himself. He is always accompanied by Melisandre, a priestess of R'hllor who believes Stannis is Azor Ahai reborn, a hero destined to defeat the Others, and it is she who gives him his sword, *Lightbringer*. This sword is obtained through a ritual where the images of the Seven are burned in an enormous bonfire and Melisandre proclaims:

> In this dread hour a warrior shall draw from the fire a burning sword. And that sword shall be Lightbringer, the Red Sword of Heroes, and he who clasps it shall be Azor Ahai come again, and the darkness shall flee before him. […] *Azor Ahai, beloved of R'hllor! The Warrior of Light, the Son of Fire! Come forth, your sword awaits you!* […]. (Martin, *Kings* 148)

Stannis walks up to the bonfire and withdraws the sword from the burning image of the Mother (Martin, *Kings* 149). This seems to be the sword with the most

symbolism because it might be a symbol of Stannis' identity not as king but as a legendary hero prophesied to fight the Others.

The association between swords and light or fire is also a common feature in medieval literature especially if a sword belongs to a god or to a hero. Light, in Celtic tradition, also represented the intervention of celestial gods, so whoever had a shinning or flaming sword was a divine being or someone blessed by the gods (Chevalier, 586).

Lightbringer is, therefore, a sword of light, with a blade that has a constant glow bearing the same colour as of a flame, that was once the property of the legendary hero Azor Ahai and which will be the salvation of Westeros when the time comes to fight the Others. In fact, Melisandre keeps saying "The night is dark and full of terrors" (Martin, *Kings* 24), alluding to the fact that the time they are living in is a time of Darkness, of danger. Consequently, the wielder of *Lightbringer*, being Azor Ahai reborn, will free Westeros from the Darkness, represented by the Others, and establish a new age of Light and hope. Being thus, this sword also evokes the flaming swords of the solar gods such as Lugh[3], from Irish Celtic myth, with which he casts out the Fomoire[4] from Ireland, inaugurating the golden age of the Tuatha Dé Danann[5], as it is described in the *Second Battle of Moytura.* It is also reminiscent of the battle in which archangel Michael defeats Lucifer in the Book of Revelation, a battle between Light and Darkness (Rev. 12: 7-9).

Stannis' *Lighbringer* is proof that he is the chosen one to fight the powers of Darkness. It is a symbol of Stannis Baratheon's identity as a hero and a saviour, more than a proof of his sovereignty as the rightful king of Westeros. It gives him a spitirual authority as if he were Azor Ahai reborn, and the people were in the presence of a true hero of bygone times. He is, as the name of the sword indicates, the bringer of Light in a time of Darkness.

[3] The name Lug means "light" or "shining". He is known as Lug Lamfhota, referring to his long arm and his ability to throw his spear, and Samildanach because he masters several arts and crafts.

[4] The Fomoire were a race of demons which threatened the inhabitants of Ireland. They were defeated by the Tuatha Dé Danann in the *Cath Maige Tuired (The Second Battle of Moytura)*.

[5] The Tuatha Dé Dannan were the Celtic gods of Ireland, the tribe of the Goddess Danu or Dana. According to the *Lebor Gábala Erenn (The Book of the Taking of Ireland)*, a twelfth century manuscript, they were the fifth race to inhabit Ireland and they defeated the Fir Bolg, the previous race.

Conclusion

George R. R. Martin manages to build a recognizable medieval world in *A Song of Ice and Fire* by presenting the readers with images that they associate with the Middle Ages, whether through the presence of a feudal society, through the political intrigue that echoes the War of the Roses, or even through the presence of knights and chivalric ideals which are, inevitably, destroyed.

This association between fantasy and history, namely medieval history, to give a more realistic flavour to his narrative is assumed by Martin, "That's the general process for doing fantasy, is you have to root it in reality. Then you play with it a little; then you add the imaginative element, then you make it largely bigger" (Hodgman n. pag.). And it is through this allegation of historical realism that the author establishes his authority when it comes to his depiction of the Middle Ages. His medieval Westeros is far from the clichés and stereotypes perpetuated in other works of fantasy and he aims at a more realistic approach, leaving the idealized Middle Ages of the Victorians behind:

> the fantasy novels that I was reading by Tolkien imitators and other fantasists, yet they were getting it all wrong. It was a sort of Disneyland middle ages, where they had castles and princesses and all that. The trappings of a class system, but they didn't seem to understand what a class system actually meant (Hodgman n. pag.).

He tries to depict a medieval world much closer to what it really might have been, destroying some preconceived notions of the contemporary reader about a past that he/she does not really know. But he also presents the reader with elements that are between the historical and the mythical past of the Middle Ages, and one of these elements is the sword.

Swords were associated with gods, kings, brave warriors and knights. The sword was the main weapon of the knight and it was a symbol of his identity, as well as the embodiment of chivalric ideals. Swords had names, were the extensions of their owners, were objects of great beauty and had, sometimes, magical properties. In this way, it is possible to say that George R. R. Martin resorted to factual as well as symbolical characteristics of medieval swords, real and legendary, to forge those that belong to some of the most remarkable characters of his world.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, swords represent the identity of their owners and they also have an identity themselves, names and characteristics that make them unique. For Arya Stark and Jon Snow the swords represent their true selves, for Eddard Stark it is an heirloom of his family and of heroic ideals which do not have a place in reality. Stannis Baratheon's sword is a mythological sword, the sword of heroes of bygone times.

In the words of Michael Loades:

> Swords are icons. They are symbols of rank, status and authority; the weapons upon which oaths were sworn, with which allegiances were pledged and by which honours were conferred. Swords represent cultural ideas and personal attributes. They stand for justice, courage and honour. Above all, swords are personal objects. Swords tell stories. (Loades 140-145)

And so do the swords of Westeros in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

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One Thousand and One Nights Revisited: the female Aladdin in A. S. Byatt's "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye"

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Abstract | A. S. Byatt's story is about a female narratologist who is going through a midlife crisis sparked by the fact that her husband has left her for a much younger woman. However, from storyteller in a conference in Turkey she will become the heroine of an Arabian wonder tale of her own, complete with a djinn (genie) in a nightingale's eye (a Venetian glass bottle) that will grant her three wishes. Narratologist Gillian Perholt is thus a female Aladdin who rewrites her male predecessor's story by asking for quite different things and partly Scheherazade as she tells and explains tales, but she is also a real woman. Both ancient and modern, spiced with references from *A Thousand and One Nights,* "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" captures the texture of the Arabian story while creating a whole new world in which a woman rewrites her own life by reinterpreting the literary models that predate her. In this paper, I argue this wonder tale explores both the limitations in women's lives and the way to overcome them by insisting on female autonomy, on the one hand, and learning through storytelling, on the other.
Keywords | *The One Thousand and One Nights*; Aladdin; realism; wonder tale; Patient Griselda

Resumo | O conto de A. S. Byatt foca-se numa narratologista que atravessa uma crise de meia-idade despoletada pelo facto de o marido a ter trocado por uma mulher muito

mais jovem. Contudo, de contadora de histórias numa conferência na Turquia, Gillian Perholt tornar-se-á a heroína da sua própria história d'*As Mil e Uma Noites,* a que não falta um génio encarcerado numa garrafa de vidro de Murano que lhe concederá três desejos. Gillian Perholt é, deste modo, um Aladino feminino que reescreve a história do seu antecessor masculino ao pedir desejos marcadamente diferentes e, em parte, uma Scheherazade que conta e explica histórias, mas é também uma mulher real. Antigo e moderno, salpicado de referências a *As Mil e Uma Noites*, o conto de Byatt captura a textura dos contos árabes enquanto cria todo um mundo novo no qual uma mulher reescreve a sua própria vida ao reinterpretar os modelos literários que a antecedem. Neste artigo, discuto o modo como este conto explora quer as limitações na vida das mulheres quer o modo de ultrapassá-las, insistindo na autonomia feminina, por um lado, e na aprendizagem por meio do contar de histórias, por outro.
Palavras-chave | *As Mil e Uma Noites*; Aladino; realismo; conto maravilhoso; Griselda

A. S. Byatt has acknowledged that her impulse to write came "from years of reading myths and fairy tales under the bedclothes, from the delights and freedoms and terrors of worlds and creatures that never existed" (Byatt, "Fairy Stories" n. pag.). Unsurprisingly, Byatt's lifelong fascination with the enchanted realm of wonder tales[1] is embedded in her work. To provide some examples, in her critical capacity she has devoted three out of the seven chapters, which comprise her essay collection *On Histories and Stories*, to chartering the lands of wonder from *The Thousand and One Nights* (which, incidentally, occupies a whole chapter) and Boccacio's *Decameron* to the Grimms and Andersen, Italo Calvino and Karen Blixen. Byatt has also authored the introduction to Maria Tatar's *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* as well as the introduction to *The Arabian Nights*, a collection of tales taken from Richard Burton's translation of *The Thousand and One Nights.*

"A thoughtful and articulate critic of her own work" (Franken xi), Byatt has written the essay "Fairy Stories: 'The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye'" on her personal wanderings in Wonderland. While acknowledging that her wonder tales are written primarily for the pleasure of entering an imaginary world in which apples are greener and forest paths are darker than any encountered in real life, Byatt also

[1] I will use the term "wonder tale" to signify that the wonder element is always present in this type of tales even if the fairies are not. As Marina Warner argues, "The French *conte de fées* is usually translated as fairy tale, but the word *Wundermärchen* was adopted by the Romantics in Germany and the Russian folklorists to characterise the folk tale or fairy tale. It's a useful term, it frees this kind of story from the miniaturised whimsy of fairyland to breathe the wilder air of the marvellous" (5).

emphasises the fact that, being modern literary stories, they self-consciously play with a postmodern (re)creation of old forms in what she terms "telling a story in a new-old form" ("Fairy Stories" n. pag.). In her chapter "Realism and its Discontents: *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*", Alexa Alfer argues that "telling a story in a new-old form" is a curious symbiosis of tradition and change, (old) realism and (new) experiment, storytelling and critical thought, which unfold its full potential within Byatt's fiction, since these productive relationships have accounted for the continuation as well as the challenge to the traditions Byatt's work engages in (Alfer 48). In the wider context of the contemporary literary wonder tale, Byatt belongs in what the editor of *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale* has christened as "the Angela Carter generation, in that Carter's extensive work on the tradition of the fairy tale – as author, editor and critic – was pre-eminently influential in establishing a late-twentieth-century conception of the tales, the influence of which has continued into the new millennium" (Benson 3). Carter's "modernized fairy tales", which play with "the appropriation, recycling and combining of often antithetical literary forms" (Gamble 20), have paved the way for the contemporary, often feminist and/or postmodern[2], revision of the genre. Its most distinctive staple has been the critique of the gendered (male) power/(female) powerlessness politics that pervade traditional wonder tales via the construction of female characters who challenge and even evade these dynamics.

Nevertheless, both Carter and Byatt refuse the simplistic formulation of feminist wonder tale as a mere reversal of roles in which the heroine changes from passive to active agent, becoming the rescuer rather than the one who is rescued. They use different narrative strategies, though: Carter's transgressive heroines radically deconstruct politically correct visions of female propriety while they also "consistently refuse to occupy the moral high ground and behave as 'politically correct' feminist role models should" (Gamble 25). Therefore, Carter's fiction is peopled by lascivious female vampires and libertines, girls who barter their bodies for money, and not-so-pure newly-weds who prefigure sexual liberty at its most (politically incorrect) excessive. By contrast, Byatt's female characters are rather sedate: the fairies, princesses, lamias and mélusines who roam her fiction are less

[2] In her reading of Angela Carter's collection *The Bloody Chamber*, Sarah Gamble explains that "the rewriting of traditional tales with a feminist slant was becoming a fashionable endeavour during the 1970s and the 1980s, and, viewed in retrospect, *The Bloody Chamber* appeared to anticipate work published by writers such as Anne Sexton, Robin McKinley, Jane Yolen, and Tanith Lee" (25).

aggressively sexualised and eroticised since Byatt does not regard female sexual agency (transgressive or otherwise) as the main locus of female power. For her, true female power comes from the ability to remain a separate, autonomous being who will dedicate herself to her life's passion (which in Byatt usually entails a woman artist) even – especially – when falling in love. As Elizabeth Wanning Harries argues in "Myth, Fairy Tale, and Narrative in A.S. Byatt's Fiction", "in Byatt's story ["The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye"] Gillian Perholt has moved beyond that [gendered] 'imprisonment', privileged not only because of her culture and class but also because of her prominence in her profession. Through the djinn's magical intervention she is even able to escape the confines of her aging body" (84).

In a 1990 interview with Nicholas Tredell, Byatt is quite incisive on the importance female autonomy assumes in her fiction when talking about Christabel LaMotte, *Possession*'s Victorian heroine:

> Christabel gives a cry which I think is my cry throughout the book: you [R. H. Ash] are taking away my autonomy, you're giving me something wonderful that I regard as secondary, my work is what matters: and nevertheless she falls heavily in love because she's a very powerful and passionate woman. (Tredell 60)

One of her most unforgettable princesses, Fiammarosa in "Cold", echoes the same sentiment after she has made love to her desert-prince husband Sasan. After having discovered her true nature as an ice maiden and literally embracing her second skin of ice, at the height of passion she recoils from what she feels is melting, the dissolution of her identity:

> Ordinary women melt, or believe themselves to be melting, to be running away like avalanches or rivers at the height of passion, and this, too, Fiammarosa experienced with a difference, as though her whole being was becoming liquid except for some central icicle, which was running with waterdrops that threatened to melt that too, to nothing. And at the height of bliss she desired to take the last step, to nothing, to nowhere, and the next moment cried out in fear of annihilation. (Byatt, "Cold" 156)

Unlike Carter, whose strongest heroines belong definitively to the realm of fantasy, Byatt's most remarkable wonder tale female characters border the crossroads of realism and fantasy and often even meet at what, in Byatt's fiction, constitute the

blurry boundaries between these narrative formats. As Byatt points out, her metafictional wonder tales do indeed "reflect on the nature of narrative, and of their own narrative in particular [because] narration is seen as the goal as well as the medium – the heroines tend to be narrators" (Byatt "Fairy Stories" n. pag.). Thus, like *Possession: A Romance*, Byatt's "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" is set within the real(istic) realm of academia and is peopled both by literary critics who concern themselves with the analysis of traditional tales and authors whose main narrative interest is rewriting old motifs and myths. Like *Morpho Eugenia*, its narrator rewrites herself as a new fairy by using narrative as a way to avoid becoming invisible, especially to the male gaze, as she is "floating redundant" in the modern sense of being unwanted. Unlike *Possession* and *Morpho Eugenia*, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" does not have a wonder tale narrative embedded within the wider realist frame tale that it clarifies.

In fact, this is a departure from these two modes of telling a story that I would call a hybrid – the realist wonder tale, a tale which, in Jane Campbell's words, smoothly blends realistic and fairy-tale elements in such a way that "the lines between real and unreal simply disappear; wonder becomes naturalized, and language moves easily and often comically between the two realms" (*The Heliotropic Imagination*, 185). Both ancient and modern, spiced with references from *A Thousand and One Nights* and flavoured with Byatt's own recurrent metafictional storytelling, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" captures the texture of the Arabian story while creating a whole new world – since, according to Jack Zipes:

> We do not simply inherit major works of art and treat them as models that we want to emulate. Rather, we periodically select works of art from the past and preserve them in new ways (sometimes critically, sometimes uncritically) because we believe that they continue to speak to our present habits, customs, needs, wishes and hopes. (*The Brothers Grimm* 51).

Part realist story, part wonder tale, this is indeed a tale that escapes categorization since Byatt rewrites an old tale in a new style by skilfully intertwining realism and fantasy. The opening line, which starts with the wonder tale formula "once upon a time", is a perfect example of the way realism and wonder tale are blended in this story, which belongs "simultaneously to realism and fantasy by evoking the wonders of the familiar" (Campbell, "Forever Possibilities" 139):

> Once upon a time, when men and women hurtled through the air on metal wings, when they wore webbed feet and walked on the bottom of the sea, learning the speech of whales and the songs of the dolphins, when pearly-fleshed and jewelled apparitions of Texan herdsmen and houris shimmered in the dusk of Nicaraguan hillsides, when folk in Norway and Tasmania in dead of winter could dream of fresh strawberries, dates, guavas and passion fruits and find them spread next morning on their tables, there was a woman who was largely irrelevant, and therefore happy. (Byatt, "Djinn" 95)

The magic carpet of the wonder tale universe blends in its realist equivalent the plane and technological advances, such as learning the language of sea mammals in their habitat or providing certain types of fruits at any given time to countries which do not grow them (by definition, relevant); these are juxtaposed to a woman who was irrelevant probably because she was not a scientist. The second paragraph introduces her in more detail: "Her business was storytelling, but she was no ingenious queen in fear of the shroud brought in with the dawn" (Byatt, "Djinn" 95). The unequivocal reference to Scheherazade[3], the legendary queen of *The Thousand and One Nights* who is one of the strongest and cleverest heroines of all times in world fiction because she is able to delay her doom by putting herself between the king and his madness through storytelling, is enhanced a few lines afterwards through the allusion to gathering knowledge: "She was merely a narratologist, a being of secondary order, whose days were spent hunched in great libraries scrying, interpreting, decoding the fairy tales of childhood" (Byatt, "Djinn" 96). A true daughter of the times, Scheherazade was a remarkably learned scholar who excelled in the time-honoured pre-Islamic tradition of fighting with words rather than actions (Sallis 94), words she was quite familiar with because she had thoroughly studied them as *The Nights* detail:

> [She] had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples and instances of by-gone men and things; indeed, it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antique races and departed rulers. She had perused the works of the poets

[3] For further reading on the role of Scheherazade within *The Thousand and One Nights*, see A. S. Byatt, "The Greatest Story Ever Told" (*On Histories and Stories*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2000, 165-171); A. S. Byatt, "Introduction" (*The Thousand and One Nights*, trans. Richard Burton, New York, The Modern Library, 2004, xiii-xxii); Alexandra Cheira, "Madness and psychotherapy through the looking glass: Scheherazade's talking cure", *Rethinking Madness: Interdisciplinary & Multicultural Reflection*, eds. Gonzalo Araoz, Fátima Alves and Katrina Jaworski, Oxford, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012, 131-151); Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London, Tauris Paperbacks, 2010)

> and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred. (Burton 16)

However, whereas Scheherazade is a powerful storyteller, by implication a being of primary order, the narratologist in "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" is branded a mere being of secondary order (Byatt, "Djinn" 96). The reader is not quite convinced, though, when (s)he learns this particular narratologist is called Gillian Perholt, a woman in her fifties whose family name "suggests the name of Charles Perrault, whose *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* (…) contains some of the best-known European fairy tales" (Maack 124). How could someone who is likened to Scheherazade and named after Perrault possibly be a mere narratologist? It is because she is not:

> Although she was now redundant as a woman, being neither wife [because her husband left her for a woman half her age], mother nor mistress she was by no means redundant as a narratologist but on the contrary, in demand everywhere. For this a time when women were privileged, when female narratologists had skills greatly revered, when there were pythonesses, abbesses and Sybils in the world of narratology, who revealed mysteries and kept watch at the boundaries of correctness. (Byatt, "Djinn" 103)

Power is thus restored to Gillian Perholt through her skills as a narratologist, which the allusion to a powerful female tradition of storytelling makes clear: the prophetess Sybil, for instance, is both a storyteller who derives her authority as a god's medium, becoming a learning tool for her hearers, and the protagonist of the countless legends she has inspired. A Christian fantasy on a pagan presence of the past, the Sybil plays a decisive role in the thought over forbidden, forgotten or secret matters ever present in wonder tales. This seductive figuration stands in sharp contrast to the negative representation of women's voice later embodied in the old wife, Charles Perrault's Mother Goose or the wise Crone certain female narratologists in Gillian Perholt's circle talked about with pleasurable awe (Byatt, "Djinn"104). However, the figure of the wise old woman, who authenticated folk wisdom in the stories she told while being synonymous with the unreliable crone who imparted false counsel, is adamantly rejected on the grounds of age and powerlessness by Gillian Perholt in quite unambiguous terms:

> [S]he was no crone, she was an unprecedented being, a woman with porcelain-crowned teeth, laser-corrected vision, her own store of money, her own life and field of power, who flew, who slept in luxurious sheets around the world, who gazed out at the white fields under the sun by day and the brightly turning stars by night as she floated redundant. (Byatt, "Djinn" 104-105)

It is thus that this unprecedented being finds herself flying in a modern-day flying carpet – whose female flight attendant infuriatingly lets her out of with a condescending "Bye-bye, dear" after she has bowed to the businessmen aboard on their way out, signalling that her gender and age render her inferior to the younger, male businessmen – en route to a narratology conference in Ankara. The conference's bustling proceedings are brought to life in all their academic splendour, including the paper delivered by Gillian Perholt's Turkish friend Orhan Rifat, suggestively entitled "Powers and powerlessness: djinns and women in *The Arabian Nights*". In that paper, Professor Rifat speaks of Scheherazade as:

> a woman of infinite resource and sagacity …who is nevertheless using cunning and manipulation from a position of total powerlessness with the sword of her fate hanging like the sword of Damocles by a metaphorical thread, the thread of her narrative, with her shroud daily prepared for her the next morning. (Byatt, "Djinn"124)

It is thus quite significant on several counts that Gillian Perholt should choose to narrate and comment on the tale of Patient Griselda, a story told by Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* which is also the name of one of Charles Perrault's wonder tales, to cover the conference's topic "Stories of Women's Lives". In fact, this lengthy tale, narrated over no less than thirteen pages, embodies for Gillian Perholt the whole condition of women's lives as depicted in fiction in stark contrast to seemingly powerless Scheherazade, "whose art is an endless beginning and delaying and ending and beginning and delaying and ending" (Byatt, "Djinn" 124) in her own terms.

According to Chaucer's Clerk, Griselda's tribulations are a moral lesson on bearing patiently what comes one's way: Griselda submits to her husband's sadistic idea of testing without a single word of reproach after she has uncomplainingly found herself torn from her children (who have furthermore, quite inexplicably, been put to death by their own father), has returned to her father with literally almost no stitch on and has been replaced by a younger woman. In fact, this single heroine could account

for the pervasive figuration of women as the angel in the house when it came to being portrayed in Victorian life and literature. However, not even the angel in the house was purposefully bereft of everything she held dear so that she could prove herself a worthy angel. Contemporary response to Griselda's tale would nevertheless certainly argue that the eponymous heroine's husband is really playing an elaborate sadomasochist game to which his wife is a willing victim, or has she not promised him that she would "obey him in everything, to do whatever he desired, without hesitating or repining, at every moment of the day or night" (Byatt, "Djinn" 110) on pain of death, in exchange for him marrying her? This promise in itself begged testing – and yet, it is a promise many women still make out of love, in their heart, every day, even in the Western world. As Gillian Perholt acknowledges,

> our own response is surely outrage – at what was taken from [Griselda], the best part of her life, what could not be restored – at the energy stopped off. For the stories of women's lives in fiction are the stories of stopped energies – the stories of Fanny Price, Lucy Snowe, even Gwendolen Harleth, are the stories of Griselda. (Byatt, "Djinn" 121)

The story of Gillian Perholt has also so far been the story of Griselda to the extent she has let a man, her husband on the run, slow down her energy by behaving like a spoilt brat who wants to be caught red-handed. No more of the patient waiting game for Gillian Perholt though: when her husband finally leaves her, she unexpectedly braces herself with relief, as her own energy is now free to flow unhindered. As she puts it,

> [she] imagined herself grieving over betrayal, the loss of love, the loss of companionship perhaps, of respect in the world, maybe, as an ageing woman rejected for one more youthful… She felt, she poetically put it to herself, like a prisoner bursting chains and coming blinking out of a dungeon. She felt like a bird confined in a box, like a gas confined in a bottle, that found an opening, and rushed out. She felt herself expand in the space of her own life. No more waiting for meals. No more grumbling, and jousting, no more exhausted anticipation of alien feelings, no more snoring, no more farts, no more trace of stubble in the washbasin. (Byatt, "Djinn" 103-104)

In short, there are no more impediments to her self-fulfilment as those depicted in this quite chilling portrait of marriage. The caged bird is more than ready to fly out, and fly out it will at the same time the narrative mode changes from realism

to fantasy: after she has toured Ankara, Ephesus and Istanbul in what is really her introduction to Eastern culture and prepares her for a magical encounter with a figure taken out of *The Thousand and One Nights* (Maack 127), Gillian visits the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, where she "felt well again, full of life and singing with joy (…) hidden away in an Aladdin's cave made of magic carpets with small delightful human artefacts" (Byatt, "Djinn" 180). Afterwards, Gillian enters a little shop in the central square of the market-maze that is owned by one of Rifat's students and finds "a very dusty bottle amongst an apparently unsorted pile of new/old things, (…) a flask with a high neck, that fitted comfortably into the palms of her hands, and had a glass stopper like a miniature dome" (Byatt, "Djinn" 182). The shop owner explains the flask might be nightingale's eye, a famous Turkish glass with a spiral pattern of opaque blue and white stripes, and Gillian takes the flask with her to the hotel, where she washes it in the bathtub and rubs it clean. And now, lo and behold: just like it happened to Aladdin when he inadvertently rubbed his lamp, a huge djinn pops out of the bottle and gravely informs Gillian, in French, that he had been imprisoned since 1850. Given that she was the one to release him, she is entitled to three wishes.

The conversation which ensues is a delightful blend of realism and fantasy: while holding the hotel TV set in his gigantic hand, the djinn puzzles over the diminutive size of the tennis players whose match is being broadcast and decides to shrink accordingly so he is only one and a half times as large as she is. He then adds that the atmosphere is filled with presences he cannot understand, "electrical emanations of living beings" (Byatt, "Djinn" 196) only to ask as an afterthought if those men are magicians, or Gillian a witch, since they are enclosed in a box. She explains what a television is while the djinn catches an amazed Boris Becker mid-tennis match and puts him, twice the size of his television image, on the chest of drawers. The djinn puts him back on the match though when Gillian tells him she does not want the tennis player, who is moreover unaware of his surroundings as neither Gillian nor the djinn are manifest to him. Afterwards, the djinn tells Gillian she must wish for her heart's desire, and she therefore wishes for her body to be as it was when she had last really liked it in an attempt to defeat temporal decay, although the djinn warns her that he will not be able to delay her fate: granting her immortality is not a wish he can comply with as death must also be faced in wonder tales. She may live more happily after, but she will die nonetheless as, unlike the djinn who is a being of fire and does not decay, she is made of dust and will return to it some day.

The last time she really liked her body turns out to be when she was thirty-five, so that is the body she will be presented with. Interestingly enough, before he grants her this wish, the djinn compliments Gillian on the body she has now, adding that amplitude is desirable and that he is glad she prefers ripe women to green girls although she is a little too thin for his own personal taste. I argue this passing remark has a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, it is Byatt's critique of a contemporary Western society whose ideal of female beauty is an anorexic pubescent girl (who, incidentally, quite resembles nineteenth-century female consumptives) much copied by adolescent would-be models with disastrous results both on their bodies and on their perception of beauty; on the other hand, it mediates the cultural differences between East and West in the conversation which ensues while Gillian ponders over her next wish.

Thus, in truly Arabian Night-esque fashion with regard to the description of sumptuous, sexually-charged surroundings where voluptuous women sensuously move, the djinn tells her about his three incarcerations inside the nightingale's eye, which have always implied strong, powerful women such as the Queen of Sheba, Suleiman the Magnificent's concubine Roxelana and Zefir – who have, nevertheless, lost their independence by falling in love. This marks an interesting gender inversion and a significant gendered shift of power with regard to the *Nights*' frame narrative, which details King Shahryar's betrayal by his wife, her death at his hands and his subsequent revenge on all his one-day wives finally cancelled by Scheherazade: in fact, in the djinn's story it becomes clear that it is the male element who is encapsulated in the nightingale's eye for three very large periods of time (a kind of death) at the hands of the three different women he loved before he is released by this unknown female Aladdin.

Sexual politics regarding infidelity were much the same at the time the *Nights* – a collection of Middle Eastern and South Asian stories and folk tales which were assembled over many centuries by various authors, translators and scholars across the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa – were translated into Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age (which comprised the eighth to the thirteenth century) and Chaucer's Griselda made her appearance in *The Canterbury Tales* (written at the end of the fourteenth century). The Middle Ages were indeed a dark period for women as they were totally dominated by the male members of their family and were expected to unquestioningly obey their father, their brothers or, for that matter, any other male

members of the family. Moreover, there was severe punishment for rebellious girls, who were beaten into submission since disobedience was seen as a crime against religion. During the same period of time, Eastern men – but not women – could be polygamous, so a polygamous wife was branded as an adulteress and punished accordingly. Quoting Sallis, “conceivably, in the world of the Nights, death is the worst thing a man can inflict upon a woman, while sexual betrayal is the worst thing a woman can inflict upon a man” (92-93).

In *Harun al-Rashid and the World of the Thousand and One Nights,* André Clot comments on the Islamic sexual politics that allows for male polygamy:

> Islam is a polygamous society that encourages lovemaking: ‘O ye who believe! Interdict not the healthful viands which God hath allowed you’ (Koran, Sura V). ‘When you perform the act of love, you are giving alms’ (Hadith). ‘Sensual pleasure and desire are as beautiful as the mountains’ (Hadith, according to Zaid ibn Ali). There is considered nothing wrong, therefore, in a wife’s sending a beautiful woman to her husband’s bed. (45)

However, this double standard did not extend to civil rights such as education, employment or inheritance. According to Valentine Moghadam, the position of women depended much more on socio-political and living conditions such as urbanization, industrialization and political machinations of the state managers than it did on the culture or intrinsic properties of Islam. For him, Islam is neither more nor less patriarchal than other world religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism (Moghadam 5).

The fact is that, quite unlike their Western female counterparts at that time, Scheherazade’s female contemporaries lived in a society that did not curtail their rights with regard to education, employment and owning property on account of their gender. To illustrate how different Islamic society was with regard to their treatment of women at that time, I will provide a few examples. With regard to education, between the ninth and the twelfth century women were foremost in founding many Islamic educational institutions, such as the University of Al Karaouine, founded by Fatima al-Fihri in 859 CE (Lindsay 197). Thus, women could study, earn academic degrees and qualify as scholars or teachers, especially if they belonged to learned and scholarly families, who sought to provide the highest possible education for both their sons and daughters (Lindsay 196-198). As far as employment was concerned, women could be employed in such diverse occupations as farmers, spinners, doctors,

presidents of guilds, investors or scholars (Shatzmiller 350-401). As for money of their own, they were entitled to the right of inheritance as stated in the Quran, Sura 4 (Badawi n. pag.). Moreover, under Islamic law, the woman's consent was an unequivocal requisite before marriage could take place (Esposito & Yazbeck 79) and her dowry, previously regarded as a bride-price paid to the father, became a nuptial gift retained by the wife as part of her personal property (Esposito & Yazbeck 339). With regard to their domestic role, women reigned supreme at home, of which they held the same economic rights as their husbands, with regard to housewifely affairs, slaves and children, who were educated and guided in their religious faith, marriage and profession by their mothers (Zipes, "Splendor of Arabian Nights" 54-55). Finally, as far as women's skills and abilities were concerned, the famous Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd, born in Muslim Spain in the twelfth century and known to the West as Averroes, asserted that women possessed equal capacities to men which could make them stand out both at war and in peace, like the women warriors he presented as examples did among the Greeks, Arabs and Africans. He held such strong belief in this point that he claimed women were the equal of men (Ahmad) – an idea that, incidentally, is supported by the Quran, which in Sura 30 ascertains that men and women are equal but not identical in creation and in the afterlife, that one person is not superior to the other, and that a woman is not created for the purpose of a man, but that women and men are both created for the mutual benefit of each other.

Eastern women rights during the Middle Ages were thus quite unlike Patient Griselda's and her contemporaries'. The fact that these powerful Eastern women's stories are juxtaposed to meek Griselda is but another indication of the wrong assumptions that, in view of the more patriarchal contemporary Arab society, can be made about the powerlessness of Scheherazade's female contemporaries: in the figure of its famous storyteller, the *Nights* indeed depict a significant gendered shift of power to which, at the time of its writing, the Eastern construction of women as equal to men with regard to both mental capacities and their full use in private and public life is decisive.

The djinn then asks Gillian to tell him her story, and this female Aladdin – who will rewrite her male predecessor's story by asking for quite different things – turns into Scheherazade-mode as she tells the djinn contemporary tales of her world, which strike him as bizarre while they also help her sense of her world. That is how she comes to understand at last that she became "so enmeshed in what was realism

and what was reality and what was true [that her] imagination failed" (Byatt, "Djinn" 233). It is thus that the tale that posits Gillian as powerless Griselda is subtly changed into a tale about a powerful female narratologist, whose gifted storytelling is a primary source of strength, which also empowers her as a woman with the agency to change both her story and her own perceptions of the story that have been stopping her energies.

Maybe it is because her imagination has been vividly stirred by the djinn's conjuration of a world of fiery passions that Gillian makes her second wish, that the djinn would love her. He obliges by making love to her in a scene rendered in the sensuous language of *The Thousand and One Nights,* but not before he tells her that maybe she has wasted her wish, "for it may well be that love would have happened anyway, since [they] are together, and sharing [their] life stories, as lovers do" (Byatt, "Djinn" 250). It really does seem so since the djinn is willing to accompany Gillian back to England so he better understands her world, although this is not her final wish: after a conference in Toronto, where she presented a paper subtitled "Wish-fulfilment and Narrative Fate: some aspects of wish-fulfilment as a narrative device", she realises as she speaks that:

> In fairy tales…those wishes that are granted and are not malign, or twisted towards destruction, tend to lead to a condition of beautiful stasis, more like a work of art than the drama of Fate. It is as though the fortunate had stepped off the hard road into an unchanging landscape where it is always spring and no winds blow. (Byatt, "Djinn" 266)

Falling in love with the djinn was not one of her wishes, but it has happened nonetheless, along with the realisation that it is precisely because she loves him that she has to let him go: unlike Griselda's husband, who kept her in bondage because of the promise he forced her to make, Gillian refuses to become the master of the djinn's fate, although he is similarly enslaved by the laws governing the wonder tale with regard to the granting of three wishes to his liberator. Thus, her final wish, despite her knowledge that the thing the djinn most desires is his freedom from servitude to the owner of the nightingale's eye, is: "I wish… I wish you could have whatever you wish for – that this last wish may be your wish" (Byatt, "Djinn" 270). She knows he will go, although he reminds her that she also wished he would love her and he does, assuring her that he will return to her from time to time. The granting of this final

wish, as she discovers, will paradoxically lead her to that condition of beautiful stasis she has explained in her paper, which is quite the opposite of the stopped energies that result from love traps. In fact, she has vindicated Griselda when she changes her story by choosing a life of “forever possibilities and impossibilities” (Byatt, “Djinn” 272) rather than submitting to another’s choice. Her happy-ever-after is loving her body again, freeing her imagination from the strictures of realism, reality and truth and meeting the djinn some times upon a time.

Many feminist authors have used the wonder tale to explore feminine desires and dreams by rewriting several narratives pertaining to the literary tradition of the wonder tale so as to enable women to gain the power patriarchal society denied them by means of the creation of strong heroines. In some more extreme cases, Byatt argues, this particular mode of rewriting was carried out because it was believed all female protagonists in old tales were fragile victims and passive objects commanded by men; as she points out, this is nevertheless an inaccurate reading of the old narratives as the literary tradition of the wonder tale is also full of powerful princesses and resourceful peasants she will emulate in her own fiction. Byatt thus capitalises on several teachings in her writing, namely the unveiled criticism evinced in women’s tales ever since the seventeenth century as well as the utopian tradition of the English wonder tale in the nineteenth century, which questioned the Victorian *status quo.* In Byatt’s tales, things are not what they seem though: if it can be said that her female Aladdin’s transformation depends mainly on the realization that loving someone does not mean not loving yourself, it is also true that this is a political act which subverts gender in order to subject the genre to feminist revision.

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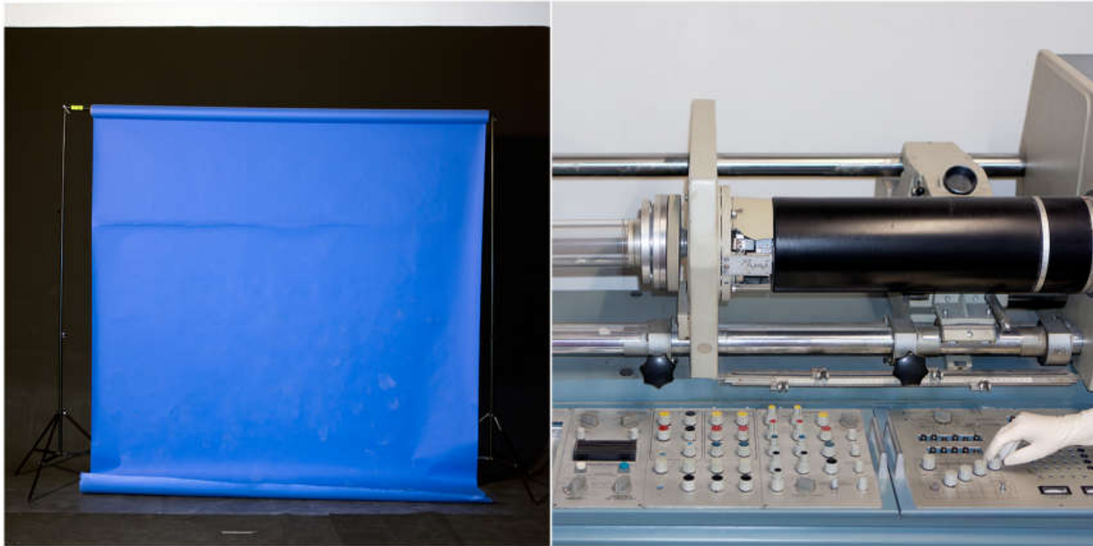

The diabolical mirror: fantasy incidences in Jorge de Sena's *O Físico Prodigioso*.

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Abstract | In an essay published in 1966 – precisely the year of publication of *O Físico Prodigioso* –, Jorge de Sena claims that "any wish of realism is necessarily (…) an intentional distortion of reality." The literary work, Sena believes, will fail its plan to communicate something true if it does not overcome the mere mimicry of the real. In this essay I try to understand the way fantasy, as an extreme refusal of a mimetic representation of reality is, concerning *O Físico Prodigioso*, an instrument that enhances the narrative's scope, placing at the center of its meaning several issues which are transversal to human's nature and condition. Sena rejects the idea that literature can limit itself to be the mirror that reflects a surface; but in *Físico*, he says, "most of what is deeper in human nature (…), most of what is part of the collective unconscious and common to several civilizations", is projected. Sena's allusion to "what is deeper in the human nature" refers to an object that is difficult to define, and to which maybe it is not possible to look directly at. In this short novel, fantasy is the deforming mirror (the diabolical mirror) that has the virtue of returning us an image which is also a synthesis of a blatant humanity.
Keywords | Fantasy; diabolic; ambiguity; eroticism; human condition.

Resumo | Num ensaio publicado em 1966 – precisamente o ano da publicação de *O Físico Prodigioso* –, Jorge de Sena afirma que "qualquer desejo de realismo é necessariamente (…) uma distorção intencional da realidade." A obra literária, crê

Sena, falhará o seu programa de comunicar algo verdadeiro se não conseguir superar a mera mimetização do real. Neste artigo procuro compreender a forma como o fantástico, enquanto recusa extrema de uma representação mimética da realidade, é, em *O Físico Prodigioso*, um instrumento que potencia o alcance da narrativa, colocando no eixo do seu significado uma série de questões que são transversais à natureza e à condição humanas. Sena recusa a ideia de que a literatura se possa limitar a ser o espelho que reflete uma superfície; já no *Físico*, segundo ele, projeta-se "muito do mais profundo da natureza humana (…), muito do que é parte do inconsciente coletivo e comum a várias civilizações." Esse "mais profundo da natureza humana" de que fala Jorge de Sena é um objeto esquivo, para o qual talvez não se possa olhar diretamente. Nesta obra, o fantástico é o espelho deformante (o espelho diabólico) que tem a virtude de nos devolver a imagem-síntese de uma flagrante humanidade.
Palavras-chave | Fantástico; diabólico; ambiguidade; erotismo; condição humana.

No reading of Jorge de Sena's *O Físico Prodigioso* can avoid the manifestations of fantasy that we find through this short novel: a series of events that contradict the laws of the world as we know it – miraculous cures, invisible characters, others that are brought back to life, a very active devil, etc. – undoubtedly ensures the linking of this narrative to fantasy. Ernesto de Melo e Castro even considers *Físico* a "superlative model of the Portuguese fantasy short story" (451), and the prominent place that this work occupies in Portuguese literature is outlined by other authors, such as Jorge Fazenda Lourenço; to him, *O Físico Prodigioso* is "the most extraordinary creation of Jorge de Sena, and one of the few masterpieces of literature in Portuguese" (52). In the same text, but a few pages before, Jorge Fazenda Lourenço makes an observation which may contribute for our understanding of the reason why *Físico* captivates so powerfully a court of admirers. He writes that "in Jorge de Sena, even in the fantasy of *O Físico Prodigioso*, a 'realist imagination' predominates, as opposed to an 'oneiric imagination', though this one is not absent, but rather submitted, so to speak, to that one" (48).

The matter enunciated here is that the fantasy in this work is not dream, not evasion, not exercise, not denial of reality, not even the proposal of an other-reality that will maintain some flow with the one we know: the fantasy in this work is the faithfully imagined expression of reality. Sena refers to the inefficacy of what he calls the "big realistic machines" (*Novas Andanças* 12) to fasten the reality; the "absolute realism" he pursues consists, contrariwise, of "imagining the reality" (J. F. Lourenço

48). Literature will only be able to communicate some truth if it does not fall into the trap of trying to mimic it. "Any wish of realism is, necessarily, in life as in art, an intentional distortion of reality" ("O Romantismo" 89), writes Sena in a famous essay on Romanticism; language, and specifically the literary language, the literary work of art, is not a surface through which one can understand reality as if it was a neutral, crystalline glass (or mirror). The thickness of a literary work inevitably interposes between the reader and the world the text represents, and that thickness is, ultimately, the author's one: a vision, a conscience, a language; all in all, a creation. Besides, this is what brings Eduardo Lourenço to write on the difficulty of reading Jorge de Sena, when he refers to the scarce enthusiasm revealed by the public concerning Jorge de Sena's short stories' volumes *Andanças do Demónio* and *Novas Andanças do Demónio* (we should not forget *O Físico Prodigioso* was firstly published in this last volume). Lourenço writes: "This 'resistance' to Jorge de Sena is, partly, deserved, and, things being what they are, in a certain way, fair. Jorge de Sena is not an easy author. He is an author, and an author is never easy" (E. Lourenço 49).

But although this is not an easy author, and even if this is not an easy work, it is not hard to understand that there is an image in it of something profoundly human, profoundly intimate and universal. In the 1977's edition preface, Jorge de Sena writes the following: "I already once said that little have I ever written as autobiographic as this most fantastic of all my totally imagined creations" (*Físico* 11). Fernando Pessoa wrote, "a statement is all the more true the higher contradiction it involves," since "the essence of the universe is the contradiction" (48)[1]. Maybe in fact it is not possible to talk about *O Físico Prodigioso* without using the oxymoron. One of the most evident features of this short novel is the very strong sign of ambiguity which runs through it, shown in many different ways, as many authors have already pointed out – for example, Maria de Fátima Marinho mentions a "surprising coincidence of opposites" (142); similarly, Horácio Costa notes that "the idea presiding the *Físico*'s conception is the one of ambiguity or, if we prefer, of the *coincidentia oppositorum*" (176). Maria de Fátima Marinho and Horácio Costa, but also, for example, Maria Alzira Seixo, list a series of conceptual oppositions whose terms are reconciled in this work. These series are partially coincident and address aspects as the factual and non-factual

[1] "The supreme truth which can be said of a thing is that it is and it is not at the same time. That is why, therefore, the essence of the universe is the contradiction – the unrealization of the Real, which is the same thing as the realization of the Unreal –, a statement is all the more true the higher contradiction it involves." ("A nova poesia portuguesa no seu aspeto psicológico." *Textos de Crítica e Intervenção*. Lisboa: Ática, 1993, p. 48).

dimensions of certain episodes; the oscillation between the hetero and the homosexuality of some characters; the ambivalence of the knight blood's properties, which heals and saves but is also capable of shrinking bodies; his virginity, of which he is divested by D. Urraca, but which on the other hand he preserves by virtue of his invisibility, etc. "In a few words," writes Horácio Costa, "unlike the usual novelistic characters, nostalgic of the lost unity, who dramatize the *mise-en-abîme* of the I, the physician assumes and enjoys his fragmentariness, which is, itself, his identity. An identity given by the coexistence of multiplier opposite pairs" (177).

It is worth emphasizing this observation made by Horácio Costa: the physician's identity is his fragmentary attribute. Those who remember Jorge de Sena's essay on Romanticism mentioned earlier will notice there are, in this fragmentary identity of *O Físico Prodigioso*, some echoes of that identity which Sena recognized in Romanticism as a result of the coexistence of absolutely contradictory impulses, themes, values, sensibilities… Now what this short novel does is precisely to propose itself as a representation of an essentially unstable reality, and that instability is staged in several aspects of its construction: from the discontinuities of the story's spatio-temporal flows to the deconstruction of the typographical uniformity of the text, and including the episodic impossibility of a linear reading, the violent breaks in syntax (of the sentence and of the narrative composition) or the aforementioned instability of the representation of reality pacts, that oscillate between realism and fantasy – and this enumeration could go on.

Let us dwell, however, on this particular focus of ambiguity that is the fantasy's inscription on the narrative – so to verify that same focus is not only an element of the construction of that ambiguity but is also invested with it. In the short novel's opening, the reader follows a man who is going down a hill horseback, towards a river. In this beginning, over the first two pages, we do not come across anything strange, neither in the narrative elements nor in the descriptive ones: on the contrary, the initial scene even evokes our history of past readings, through which we may recognize, in the very first lines, the description of a *locus amœnus*. So, we recognize the world and we recognize the literature: a model of familiar literary representation of a world which is familiar to us.

The first reference in this text to an object which is not of our world, to a magical object, goes unnoticed. When the knight leans over the rivers' waters to drink, he has to hold "his cap in the nick of time – one of its many narrow escapes. He

had had that cap as a boy and was apt to forget it, though he knew it must never fall into a running stream" (*Wondrous* 4)[2].

Only later will we know that this cap is magical, that it ensures invisibility to the one who wears it, and later, too, the knight himself will find out the powers coming out of it merge with the very omnipotence. The point is that this first magical element appears as doubly diluted: it goes unnoticed to us, as readers, not realizing its importance, and it goes unnoticed to the knight, who, knowing its importance, "always forgot it." Therefore, the fantasy is, in this text, from the beginning, a presence that carries a strong trace of familiarity.

A few lines later, we find the first explicit manifestation of fantasy. When the knight is preparing to bathe in the river, the Devil appears, in the form of an invisible presence and a mocking laughter (his recurrent feature), and tries to consummate a carnal contact with the protagonist. That attempt is endured by the knight with resigned indifference. And this indifference comes from the habit: "The light, protracted caresses, pecking kisses down his back, persistent prodding hands between his thighs, were nothing new. Since he had grown up he couldn't avoid them if he was naked and alone. They failed to excite him; failed, even, to disgust or horrify him" (*Wondrous* 4).[3]

We therefore now understand that the apparently stable, familiar, recognizable universe of the first pages is, in fact, a place usually inhabited by the Devil. And we understand that the knight who quietly goes down the hill has, after all, a pact with the Devil, in exchange for which he received tremendous powers, thus becoming a Faustian character. However, it immediately occurs to us there is a strong difference between the terms of this pact and those that our imagination traditionally established with regard to trade between man and the Devil.

Firstly, as noted already at this point and as we will confirm later, the Devil does not want the knight's soul – he wants his body. Secondly, there seems to be an inversion in the power relationship between Man and Devil. The knight's serenity, the resistance he reveals, refusing to give himself to the Devil as this one would like, shows we are not facing a tormented being or someone effectively controlled by the

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are taken from the *The Wondrous Physician* (translation by Mary Fitton published by Everyman Ltd., 1986); the original excerpt can always be read as a footnote: "E segurou, num gesto repentino, o gorro que ia cair na cristalina correnteza. Sempre isto lhe acontecia. Crescera com ele o gorro, não podia o gorro molhar-se, e sempre se esquecia dele" (*Físico* 16).

[3] "era o costume, desde que primeiro se soubera homem e se despia todo, e se estivesse só. Sofria aquilo como um vexame inapelável que o não excitava, e nem sequer lhe dava horror ou repugnância" (*Físico* 17).

Devil, a being whose will the Devil can bend: on the contrary, what we know is the Devil, as soon as he saw the knight, "a boy with a man's body", "promptly and passionately embraced him" (*Wondrous* 5)[4] – i.e., the Devil fell, in a sense, under the knight's power. So the Devil, source of the physician's powers, does not seem, in his turn, to have any power over the knight; on the contrary, he seems to be, as a devil who is in love (and being, as such, a poor devil), under his power.

A series of issues are raised around the physician's figure, ranging from his status as a fictional character to the symbolical investment concentrated in him, of a human condition (or a human nature) inevitably elusive. Despite his tremendous powers, the protagonist of this short novel is, first of all, a man. Soon after performing D. Urraca's wondrous healing, the physician has the following thought, at a moment when everybody celebrates the sick lady's recovery, and when he understands he was forgotten: "What, in any case, was he? A man who ate and slept as other did, and earned his bread as people must who lacked castle or trade to live by" (*Wondrous* 24).[5] But this man, "who ate and slept as other did", is also "a man as there is none" ("I am a man as there is none,"[6] he says when, a few pages later, he understands that, unlike all the other men who previously entered the castle, he survived the first night). The question, however, is the physician is not only a man like other men, but also a man as there is none. Between the beginning of this story and the moment he is arrested by the Holy Office (a few days, presumably) the experience of the world and the knowledge of himself and the other the physician acquires make him go through a spectrum of conditions whose ends could not be further apart. In his first appearance, the knight has a nearly animal tranquility. Not only there are no concerns to be seen in him, but also he is a being designed mostly in a sensory plan: "The young man rose, slid his hands from waist to hips, and dived into the water. This was his notion of heaven – to trash and splash and scrub his skin and douse his face and feel the water on him" (*Wondrous* 5).[7] This tranquility and this animal happiness will fade as the

[4] "ainda impúbere, mas já com corpo de homem, (...) logo se abraçara a ele apaixonado" (*Físico* 18).
[5] "Afinal era um homem que comia e dormia, como toda a gente, e que ganhava a vida como toda a gente que não tinha castelo ou comércio" (*Físico* 40).
[6] In the Portuguese edition, "Não, eu durei duas noites e um dia… Sou um homem como não há" (*Físico* 60). In the English translation used in this article, this final reflection disappears: «No. Two nights and a day I lasted. Marvelous!» (*Wondrous* 44).
[7] "Levantou-se, então, sacudiu-se, passou as mãos pelo corpo, e atirou-se na água, espadanando-a, em que mergulhou. Era assim que se sentia perfeitamente feliz: pulando, saltando, deitando-se a sentir correr o líquido por si, e esfregando-se violentamente, e atirando água à sua volta" (*Físico* 18).

character discovers things: firstly, of love melancholy is born; later, a deep anguish overlaps the acquired conscience that his powers equate him to an omnipotent god.

Let us remember that, in the beginning of the short novel, it is said of the knight he has "tremendous powers" and that those tremendous powers are what makes him consider that it is worth enduring the erotic endeavors of the Devil. These powers essentially consist of healing sick people through his chaste blood and becoming invisible by wearing the magical cap in his head. But from this moment on the physician is forced to test increasingly extreme limits of those powers, instigated by D. Urraca and her damsels, going so far that he finds omnipotence in them – and that gain of power is combined with a growing feeling of unease.

There is also a parallel here between the fields of love and power, horizons which, for the physician, are torn to plenitude in a very short period of time. But with them comes an existential weight, which is, at bottom, the anguish of having no limits: "Another thing you told me – that I was a god. I am, I think. Or I behave as one. And it's unbearable. (…) Like being on the brink of an abyss (…). And day by day I feel worse. Or better, maybe" (*Wondrous* 64-65)[8]. This is the most poignant moment of the protagonist's existential crisis: a growing dissatisfaction and a nostalgia about an unrecoverable comfort, previous to the experience of love itself. The intensity of the experiences undergone by the physician opens a new world to him but deprives him of an old comfort: a comfort which came of his wandering condition, of existing with no past and no future – a being who is not in the world, and in whom the world is not in. It is precisely at this point that the physician, using his powers, tries to go back in time and return to the previous stage, before knowing love and anguish. But that only leads him to another discovery: we never find the moment from where we left. In other words: some inscriptions cannot be erased.

Now this question is strongly connected to another, which is the one concerning the libertarian condition of this character. The physician has an old bond connecting him to the Devil; then, he falls in love with D. Urraca – and it is precisely before these two entities the assertion of his freedom arises in a more critical way. For instance, when the physician is sexually involved with a group of damsels, all happening under the eyes of D. Urraca, she observes, "his has been the bravery, the boldness, of a

[8] "Disseste-me também que eu era um deus. E eu sinto que sou. Ou sinto que estou sendo. E é uma coisa insuportável. (...) É como estar à beira de um abismo (...). E cada dia me sinto pior, ou me sinto melhor, não sei" (*Físico* 79).

perfectly free man" (*Wondrous* 57)[9]. But the ultimate assertion of the physician's freedom is shown through his relationship with the Devil. The physician's power emanates from the Devil; and, however, what he does is healing people. There is a parallel here already profusely discussed between the physical and Christ: both heal those who are ill, both save through shed blood, both raise the dead, both spread love. The most obvious difference, of course, is that Christ's healings are always a symbol of spiritual salvation, whereas the physician stays within the limits of the body and ignores any fate of those he healed.[10] On the other hand, the love Christ spreads also has a spiritual nature, whilst the physician's one is erotic – and here it is important to remember that this short novel has in its origin two medieval allegories, and that Sena's fiction, among other things, literalizes certain aspects of those allegories. But, if the physician heals through diabolical powers, that seems to suggest the following interpretation: after all, this devil is not that terrible entity who fills our imagination or enlivens our beliefs. This, however, is not true: as the Devil himself admits when conjured by one of the inquisitors, he is, in fact, the "Prince of the Darkness" and the "Lord of Evil" (*Wondrous* 89)[11].

The point explored here is that the physician's freedom is never conditioned by his pact with the Devil. And, if this tells us something about the physician, it also tells us something about the Devil, whose love for the protagonist depends neither on his obedience nor on his subjection to an order of values, nor even on his erotic surrender to the Devil's endeavors. The physician is a character beyond Good and Evil, beyond what is conceivable in the light of a moral order, with no God or Devil to guide him – though he is loved by the devil and inhabits a universe from where God is apparently absent. And this is another of the interesting aspects of this work: the silence of God towards the proliferation of other powers, as if his space had been invaded and only a vague resonance of his presence in the world subsisted, which is the invocation of his name and the multiple attacks against human dignity practiced in the name of that invocation.

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[9] "um gesto de verdadeiro homem livre" (*Físico* 73).

[10] "Old men, young men, widows, wives, unmarried girls, children and adolescents, obtaining life and vigour by bathing in his blood… And how long, we wondered suddenly, did they live when he cured them? What sort of lifes? It was his custom to leave within days, and that was the last he saw or heard of them" (*Wondrous* 24). ("Homens velhos e novos, mulheres casadas, solteiras e viúvas, crianças e adolescentes, haviam-se banhado, no fluido do seu sangue, para recuperarem a vida e a saúde. E, de súbito, perguntou-se: que seria deles: viveriam longamente, como viveriam? Porque ele partia pouco tempo depois, e nunca mais vira nem soubera de nenhuma" (*Físico* 41)).

[11] "Príncipe das Trevas", "Senhor do Mal" (*Físico* 104).

This absence of God naturally contrasts with the presence of the Devil, but what is truly significant is that in this narrative we witness the destruction of an old order and its replacement by a new order, with that old order authentically becoming autophagic the moment the inquisitors, powerless towards the successive interferences of the Devil in their sphere of power, which is the sphere of judgement and punition, mutually accuse themselves of heresy and order one another's arrest.

Finally, let us consider just a detail, almost ancillary, precisely around this episode – the physician's judgement –, which is relevant because it comprehends one lesson: the science of things is on men's side, and not on God's side. When Brother Anthony of Salzburg decides to conjure the Devil, he initially resorts to an erudite formula, in Latin, recited from a book, and to a ritual characterized by the inversion of Christian symbols (the crucifix upside down, the episcopal cross overturned, etc.). And nothing happens. The inquisitor violently closes the book and tries a new invocation, but in common language. The Devil then comes, in the form of a voice and a shadow, but not more than that. New attempt of Brother Anthony – but this time he uses a clearly popular formula[12] – and immediately the Devil materializes in front of him, as if the people knew more about the true nature of transcendent things than the Church and its inquisitors, who devote their life to study those things and whose knowledge about them is absolutely sterile.

For many years *O Físico Prodigioso* suggests and upholds readings that seek to grasp its elusive essence. Almost everything in this work, which is a wondrous example of narrative architecture, seems to be conceived so that, when we observe it from a certain perspective, it looks like it is organized around a given meaning, but underneath the image thus formed we understand there are elements disturbing the consistency of that meaning, and that this meaning will be transformed and redefined as our point of view moves. We have no other choice in this regard but to follow the example of the wisest character of this story, the Devil, who despite all his power and all his science admits there are things his understanding does not reach.

[12] "Satanás, Satanás, Satanás, assim como vens, assim aqui estás!" (*Físico* 103). In the English translation, this popular imprint gives place to a more markedly archaic form: "Satan, come thou before me! Come, Satan, come! Be as thou art wont to be!" (*Wondrous* 89).

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CREATIVE TEXT

Falstaff

(Variações sobre o libreto de Arrigo Boito)

Luís Filipe Silva

Personagens

Sir John Falstaff – Barítono
Ford – baritono
Caio – Tenor
Bardolf – Tenor
Pistol – Baixo
Anna – Soprano
Senhora Page – Mezzo Soprano
Dama Lesta – Mezzo Soprano
Outros personagens ocasionais

Acto I

Sir John Falstaff, o Fanfarrão, senhor e dono do Enclave de Hispaniola do Sul, encontra-se a descansar no Salão Nobre – antes de dar início, no seu grande corpo de lagarta que usa como fábrica química, à produção de uma nova colheita de agentes genéticos destinados à pureza do senhorio –, quando irrompe Caio, administrador local delegado, para se queixar dos lacaios de Falstaff, que lhe estragaram a negociação com os chineses.

John escuta-o com complacência e depois chama os demónios à vez: primeiro Bardolf, o cruel, que nega os feitos, afirmando que se encontrava em órbita entretido com actos de espionagem nessa ocasião, e logo dirige a suspeita para Pistol, o demónio de sangue, que traz miséria e fome às localidades a mando do mestre. Pistol surge, de barriga cheia, e renega também o feito, embora Caio o aponte a dedo («*Certo fu lui! Guardate. Come s'attegia al niego quel ceffo da bugiardo!*»). Divertido, Pistol troca galhardetes com Caio, que, furioso, exige reparações a Falstaff. Este pergunta que negócio foi interrompido com a pretensa intervenção do seu pessoal, e Caio explica que tinha sido o da venda de armas químicas para a guerra com S. Petersburgo.

Falstaff enfuna então o corpo, irado, proclamando em voz alta que Caio agia contra a humanidade por incentivar a guerra, antes de acusá-lo, em surdina, de agir

nas costas do Enclave, que nada sabia desse negócio, senão exigiria mais que a habitual dízima. Conclui, sentenciando Caio a abandonar Hispaniola para sempre. Caio perde a cabeça e começa a enumerar os crimes de Falstaff, para crescente ira do regente, que logo interrompe o discurso, insurgindo-se contra o administrador delegado e cuspindo-lhe no rosto. Caio tenta fugir mas é tarde. Falstaff explica friamente que Caio morrerá em poucos dias, mas não antes de assistir à condenação da própria família; o vírus que agora lhe corre nas veias vai disseminar-se pelo enclave e atacar os traços genéticos próximos do seu, sem possibilidade de remissão. Caio é expulso do local a pontapés pelos lacaios demoníacos.

Falstaff conferencia então com Bardolf e Pistol, dizendo que não se podem dar ao luxo de perder mais homens empreendedores, como Caio, pois urge sanitizar as finanças do senhorio. É arriscado abrir guerra com os enclaves vizinhos, uma vez que partilham os mesmos recursos da ilha e daria motivos aos organismos políticos internacionais para se meterem onde não são chamados; mais inteligente e oportuna será a branda arma da parceria.

Redige assim duas missivas, que grava a fogo nos espíritos de ambos os demónios. Um deles deverá convidar o regente de Martinica; o outro, o das ilhas Virgens Britânicas. Ambos os líderes ambicionam a entrada no território de Hispaniola, e ambos detêm patrimónios genéticos facilmente adaptáveis ao de Falstaff. Com sorte, pensa este, irão degladiar-se mutuamente até à extinção, pelo previlégio de serem escolhidos. Falstaff considera esta ideia particularmente divertida.

Mudança de cena. Entra A. Ford, regente-mor de Martinica, visivelmente agitado pela recente visita do emissário de Hispaniola, e a sua filha e acólita, Anna, que procura acalmá-lo e chamá-lo à razão: Falstaff terá algum truque na manga, e não ofereceria um convite tão generoso para abrir relações entre os dois enclaves se não ficasse a ganhar com isso. Ford quer ser precavido, mas vê aqui a possibilidade de resolver os mais graves problemas do senhorio. Anna sugere então utilizar os seus contactos secretos para investigar a questão, e sai de cena. Ford canta então uma ária pungente, em que abre o coração de líder e revela a desolação a que chegou o senhorio: pestes atrás de pestes, caos climatérico responsável pelo esgotamento dos recursos da ilha, e um total abandono dos aliados continentais para novos financiamentos.

Anna regressa, agitada, portadora de novidades, e estabelece ligação com M. Page, senhora de um enclave obscuro das Virgens Britânicas, que se faz acompanhar da pagem Lesta. Page recebera uma missiva de Falstaff com igual teor, e também ela julgara exclusivo o convite. Ford mostra-se insultado e pretende recusar, mas quer Anna quer Page o aconselham a reflectir: sozinhos pouco poder têm («*Se ordisci una burla, vo' anch'io la mia parte. Conviene condurla con senno, con arte*»), contudo, se se unirem em conluio à revelia de Falstaff, podem tornar-se uma oposição perigosa.

Acto II

Chegada de Ford ao porto sul do Enclave Falstaff. O lorde espera-o com toda a pompa e circunstância, rodeando-se de palmeiras em chamas, todas as espécies animais de grande porte do senhorio, e centenas de súbditos a ostentar víveres. O propósito não é só fazer espectáculo, é também humilhar os convidados com a riqueza ostentada. E tem efeito em Ford, que não consegue tirar os olhos da abundância capaz de salvar o seu povo. É uma espada de dois gumes.

Falstaff condu-lo para terra e começa de imediato a urdir a teia: fala de como os dois enclaves deviam estar unidos, de como seriam mais fortes do que o eram agora. Ford contrapõe, dizendo que, pelas evidências, Falstaff cresce a olhos vistos – o que lhe pode oferecer um pequeno burgo em decadência? Promessas de futuro, contrapõe Falstaff, que é onde o seu olhar se situa. Explica então que Martinica é rica em recursos, mas Ford, limitado pelo património genético, precisará de anos antes que a ecologia do seu enclave se adapte às condições brutais da ilha; Falstaff, pelo contrário, é dono de uma riqueza genética em constante alteração, da qual ele próprio serve de exemplo, e pode acelerar o processo evolutivo – basta para isso uma fusão dos ADN's base e dos respectivos territórios.

Ford responde que requer tempo para pensar, sabendo bem que uma fusão como a proposta eliminaria para sempre os traços únicos da ecologia de Martinica. Falstaff aproveita então para informar que o enclave de Page também se encontra interessado, acabado precisamente de chegar à ilha por espontânea vontade, quem sabe se para apresentar uma contra-oferta?...

É uma mulher forte, comenta Falstaff quase distraidamente, e pela força se controla um senhorio, o que talvez ajudasse aos planos dele. Mas espera chegar a

entendimento com Ford, pois, M Page, na sua opinião, é falsa e dissimulada, aparentando ser um anjo mas revelando-se demónio.

Ford diz que precisa de conferir com a filha.

Anna foi, entretanto, conduzida para os aposentos por Pistol, que esvoaça constantemente em torno dela, elogiando a sua beleza e propondo uma união física rápida a ser consumada sem demoras. Anna sente repulsa, mas considerando que pode retirar informações da criatura, brinca com ela e admite-a no quarto. Insinua que obterá o que pretende se voluntariar informação sobre as verdadeiras intenções do mestre. Pistol responde à brincadeira, e deixa entender que apenas as perguntas bem formuladas terão respostas sinceras.

Começa então uma troca de ditos. Anna formula pergunta atrás de pergunta e Pistol responde o quão anda quente ou fria, até a rapariga entrar no rumo certo:

ANNA
Non si tratta di papà, allora!

PISTOL
Ah, vedo un fuoco ora...

ANNA
È la sua figlia che si vuole?

PISTOL
Calore mi riempie il cuore.

ANNA
Io influenzare la sua decisione.

PISTOL
È il sole o un'illusione?

ANNA
Si spera che lo convinco!

PISTOL

Giocando così non vinco...

ANNA

O sono io che ha bisogno di convincere?

PISTOL

Lei affondare nel ghiaccio con rincrescere.

ANNA

Non capisco. E 'il mio silenzio che ci si aspetta?

PISTOL

Forse siete indietro nella traccia eletta...

ANNA

Loro cercherà di isolare me.

PISTOL

Un po 'a sinistra per piacere me.

ANNA

Mi uccideranno!

E antes que Anna possa reagir, Pistol enfuna as asas e pergunta-lhe se a ignorância não é mais bela que o conhecimento. Lança-se sobre ela, rasgando-lhe a carne e violando-a, numa orgia de sangue que mancha todo o quarto.

No fim, saciado, apronta cuidadosamente os indícios que incriminarão Page, admira «Que ardiloso é o mestre!», e sai de cena.

Falstaff e Ford acabam a volta pelo senhorio. Falstaff informa que no dia seguinte vai reunir-se com Page, mas Ford será bem-vindo se desejar comparecer. Preocupado com a filha que desapareceu, o regente de Martinica não consegue pensar

em mais nada. Falstaff envia Bardolf à procura de Anna enquanto abre o jogo: se Martinica não quiser aceitar, será obrigado a avançar com a proposta de Page, o que não lhe agrada. Ford não sabe o que responder, pois desconfia de todos. Eis que a tragédia se abate, quando Bardolf regressa numa grande agitação, portador de notícias funestas. Correm para o quarto, onde Ford descobre o corpo da filha. Chora a sua perda, e Falstaff tenta consolá-lo, dizendo que não descansará enquanto não encontrar o culpado. Ford depara-se então com um objecto caído, ostentando o distico da casa de Page. Falstaff mostra-se indignado e ordena que expulsem o outro grupo da ilha. Ford pede-lhe que se contenha, pois não quer acusar sem provas irrefutáveis. Falstaff elogia o raciocínio claro num momento de grande dor e oferece-lhe a sua ajuda, que Ford não vê forma de recusar.

É deixado a sós com a filha morta, a quem canta a sua mágoa e a sua angústia em discernir a verdade da mentira. Naquele jogo, já entrou a perder. Mas o dístico da casa de Page na sua mão dá-lhe uma ideia.

Page dormia quando é acordada por Lesta, dizendo que Ford pretende falar com ela. Ford irrompe pelo quarto e narra o sucedido. Page nega veementemente, foi incriminada por Falstaff, que pretende colocá-los um contra o outro. Page pede a Lesta para vasculhar o quarto de Anna com os espias que trouxeram. Na posse de evidências fortes, Ford terá legitimidade em erguer um feudo contra o lorde Fanfarrão, podendo contar com o apoio dos enclaves que Falstaff subjugou. Mas Ford deve ter paciência e ponderar bem no contra-ataque.

Na cena seguinte, Falstaff junta-se a Ford no Salão Nobre, mostrando-se preocupado com o estado de saúde do convidado. Ford mostra-se cordial, mas frio e distante. Entra Page, a quem Falstaff se refere discretamente como a falsa. E diz-lhe: minha senhora, lamento informar que terá ocorrido um grave incidente na noite passada. Page revela que já sabe de tudo e responde furiosamente que não vai admitir ser acusada de algo que não cometeu. Para provar, apresenta Lesta, que inspeccionou o quarto, descobrindo sensores de vigilância e as respectivas gravações. Falstaff não sente necessidade de explicar os instrumentos – qualquer um os teria – mas mostra-se desiludido pela atitude de Ford, que se mostrou um fraco ao colocar-se do lado do inimigo. Afirma que quer ver essas evidências, pois punirá quem do seu pessoal tenha agido contra as suas ordens.

As gravações denunciam o sucedido, e mostram a colocação do objecto incriminador. O pai angustiado chama monstro a Falstaff, ser mais demoníaco que os seus demónios. Este, de postura fria, pergunta-lhe se sabe de onde vem a espécie dos demónios, e perante a ignorância de Ford, Falstaff pede a Pistol que lhe mostre. O lacaio inicia uma ladainha encantatória que coloca Lesta em convulsões. A pele da serva rompe-se, expondo o ser que albergava: uma figura demoníaca, da mesma espécie de Pistol e Baldorf.

Ford berra e diz que começa a enlouquecer. Quem é amigo, quem é inimigo? Afasta-se de Falstaff e de Page e proclama que regressa a Martinica, mas a filha não ficará por vingar.

Acto III

Enquanto limpam uma sala de reuniões, dois acólitos de Ford cometam um ao outro, em surdina e atentos a quem possa ouvir, o que se diz do estado de saúde do regente; parece que vagueia durante a noite e fala com fantasmas, esquecido do senhorio e das gentes que nele minguam. Que pensa demasiado na filha morta.

Eis que entra Ford, acompanhado do conselheiro, e os acólitos fogem, escorraçados. Ford está mais são do que deixa transparecer. É uma manobra dissimulada da sua parte, mostrar-se fraco, criando um engodo para Falstaff poder atacar com facilidade e excesso de confiança. O conselheiro aconselha cautela, que o inimigo é ardiloso e virá preparado. Todas as defesas biológicas e físicas da ilha encontram-se em estado de alerta, mas mesmo estas não serão suficientes ante o poderio de Hispaniola do Sul. Ford diz que é um risco, mas confia na comunidade internacional, que não ficará quieta ante o início de tal conflito.

E de facto recebem um alerta, mas a assinalar uma barcaça de sobreviventes: Page e a sua população, que procuram refúgio temporário na ilha de Ford. Do cimo da amurada, Page explica que Falstaff, ante a recusa final de parceria, atacou pela calada o enclave dela, disseminando pragas que rapidamente danificaram a ecologia da ilha. Ao contemplar a destruição, Page decidira activar o gene da morte lenta, que lhe consumirá o corpo em caso de invasão por patogénios: foi incapaz de deter Falstaff, mas não o deixará apropriar-se do seu património genético. Fogem de um enclave morto à procura de novo albergue, e Page pede a Ford que lhe dê mantimentos para a viagem. Este acede.

Nesse instante, Ford recebe outra mensagem. Falstaff anuncia que se encontra ao largo de Martinica e pede autorização para atracar. Ford conta imediatamente a Page, que percebe ser ela o motivo; vem no seu encalce com o objectivo de terminar o extermínio. Mas porque, pergunta Ford, arrisca ele tanto para esse fim? Page confessa então o seu maior segredo: há no gene da morte lenta a capacidade de afectar e destruir a estrutura biológica do enclave de Falstaff, e este descobriu-o. O ataque não foi inocente; motivos económicos são uma fachada para que não se descubra a fraqueza potencial do lorde Fanfarrão.

Ford não tem outra hipótese. Manda esconder o barco de Page e permite a Falstaff que se aproxime mas não atraque sem dizer ao que vem. Obtém como resposta histórias de incursões bélicas à costa de Hispaniola, perpretadas pela armada das Virgens Britânicas. Falstaff persegue Page para apresentá-la perante um tribunal internacional. Quem a abrigar é, a seus olhos, igualmente criminoso. Ford afirma que não a viu nem recebeu comunicados dela. Falstaff pede para ir a terra mas Ford diz que o assunto do assassinato da filha ainda não se encontra resolvido, e não lhe dá autorização. Falstaff jura, então, que tudo o que de mau aconteceu às Virgens Britânicas poderá acontecer a Martinica, e dá-lhe até à noite para pensar bem.

Ford acorre a Page, e diz que têm ali a grande oportunidade para acabar com Falstaff de uma vez por todas: bastará atraí-lo a um ambiente fechado para ela poder lançar o veneno mortal. Como seduzi-lo a tal sítio? Ford congemina um plano rápido, em que Page se apresentará como sua refugiada oficial, solicitando uma audiência para o cessar de hostilidades. Mas o veneno também é fatal para as gentes de Martinica, alerta ela, será fatal para ti. «Então inocula-me com o antídoto quando infectares Falstaff... se não resultar, é sempre melhor do que viver sob aquele domínio ignóbil». Page concorda.

A reunião tem lugar. Falstaff de um lado, Ford e Page do outro. Falstaff diz a Ford que lhe mentiu, agora conhece finalmente quem são seus inimigos; que Ford se terá aliado a Page e sacrificado a própria filha, para ter uma desculpa perante os vigilantes internacionais e assim legitimar uma *vendetta*.

Page não quer saber disso – exige imunidade a Ford dos ataques de Falstaff, e afirma que isso basta para uma intervenção externa. Falstaff ri-se e diz que nem sequer imunidade biológica terá perante ele, quanto mais politica. Page irrita-se e tenta atacar Falstaff, mas este evita-a e retorque, sem resultados. Após uma luta breve, é Ford quem finalmente agarra Falstaff e deixa que Page espalhe pelo ar o veneno

prometido. Falstaff afasta-se, sentindo-se mal, tomba por terra, e canta a ária da sua morte e do fim de um sonho de império, jamais presenciar o regresso da antiga glória. A voz fraqueja-lhe, subtrai-se, enfraquece, e morre.

Ford pede então a Page que lhe administre antídoto, pois está igualmente fraco, e esta fornece-o. Ford diz então, «Não acredito que tenha demorado tanto tempo». Page não entende, mas ele pega-lhe no braço e morde-o: «Uma prenda da parte de Falstaff». Page cambaleia, agoniada com a reacção dos anticorpos que lhe devoram a carne.

«Estás em conluio com ele!... E a tua filha?»

«Eu não estou em conluio, caríssima, eu *sou ele*. Ou pensas que és a única a ter armas sofisticadas?», e numa breve explicação indica ter conseguido compactar a informação da sua memória e personalidade num protozoário com que infectou Ford na noite anterior. «Só ganha quem faz sacrifícios... mas agora tenho o teu veneno e a cura do teu veneno, e tenho dois enclaves reunidos num só local sem que o mundo saiba, e até uma nova identidade para despistar os inimigos.» E enquanto ela morre, ele encerra a ópera, cantando:

«Tutto nel mondo é burla.
L'uom é nato burlone,
La fede in cor gli ciurla,
Gli ciurla la ragione.
Tutti gabbati! Irride
L'un l'altro ogni mortal.
Ma ride ben chi ride
La risata final.»

Cai o pano.

Falstaff

(Variations of the libretto by Arrigo Boito)

Luís Filipe Silva

Translated by David Klein Martins

The Characters

Sir John Falstaff – Baritone
Ford – Baritone
Caio – Tenor
Bardolf – Tenor
Pistol – Bass
Anna – Soprano
Lady Page – Mezzo Soprano
Dame Lesta – Mezzo Soprano
Other occasional characters

Act I

Sir John Falstaff, Lord Swaggerer, master and owner of the Falstaff Enclave of Southern Hispaniola, is resting himself in the Great Hall – before beginning the production of a new harvest of genetic agents on his great lizard body, which he uses as a chemical plant, all dedicated to the purity of the domain – when Caio, the delegated local administrator, breaks forth to complain about Falstaff's lackeys that ruined his deal with the Chinese.

John listens to him with complacency and then calls one demon at a time: first, Bardolf the cruel, who denies such actions, claiming he was in orbit engaged in acts of espionage at this juncture, and quickly directs suspicion against Pistol, the blood demon, who brings misery and famine to locations as commanded by the master. Pistol saunters in on a full stomach and denies the occurrence, although Caio points his finger at him ('*Certo fu lui! Guardate. Come s'attegia al niego quel ceffo da bugiardo!*'). Amused, Pistol exchanges pleasantries with Caio, who furiously demands compensations from Falstaff. The latter in turn asks which deal has been interrupted by the alleged intervention of his personnel and Caio explains that it was the one related to the selling of chemical weapons for the war against St. Petersburg.

Falstaff then puffs himself up angrily, proclaiming aloud that Caio acted against humanity by encouraging the war, before secretly accusing him of acting behind the Enclave's back, claiming that he did not know anything about such deals, otherwise he would have demanded more than the habitual tithe. He concludes by condemning Caio to abandon Hispaniola forever. Caio loses his temper and begins listing Falstaff's crimes, which only increases the ruler's anger, who immediately

interrupts the discourse, rising against the delegated administrator and spitting in his face. Caio tries to escape but it is too late. Falstaff coldly explains that Caio is going to die within a few days. However, not before witnessing the condemnation of his own family; the virus that now runs inside his veins will spread through the Enclave and attack the genetic traits similar to his own, without any chance of redemption. Caio is kicked out of the premises by the demonic lackeys.

Falstaff thus converses with Bardolf and Pistol, telling them that they cannot afford to lose more valiant men like Caio as there is an urge to sanitize the finances of the domain. It is a risk to declare war against the neighboring enclaves, since they share the same resources as the island and this would give international political organizations a reason for meddling with what is of no concern to them; the gentle weapon of partnership would be smarter and more fitting.

Hence he writes two letters engraved in fire into the spirits of both demons. One of them is to invite the ruler of Martinique; the other is directed to the British Virgins. Both leaders aspire to enter Hispaniola territory and both of them hold genetic heritage easily adaptable to Falstaff's. With some luck, he thinks they will fight each other to the point of extinction over the privilege of being chosen; an idea Falstaff considers particularly enjoyable.

Change of scene. Enter A. Ford, chief conductor of Martinique, who is visibly agitated by the recent visit from the emissary of Hispaniola, and his daughter and acolyte, Anna, who tries to soothe him and bring him back to his senses. Falstaff must have some trick up his sleeve: he would not offer such a generous invitation to establish relations between the two enclaves if he was not to profit from it. Ford wants to be cautious, but he also sees herein a possibility to solve the gravest issues with the domain. Anna suggests using his secret contacts for investigating the matter and exits the scene. Ford sings a heartbreaking aria, in which the leader's heart opens up to reveal the desolation that has overcome the domain: one pest after another, climatic chaos responsible for the resource depletion of the island, and a total abandonment by the continental allies in regard to new financing.

Anna returns, agitated, she bears news and establishes a connection to M. Page, a mistress of an obscure Enclave of the British Virgins, who is accompanied by her page Lesta. Page has received a communication from Falstaff with equal content, and she has deemed the invitation an exclusive one as well. Ford is offended and intends

to refuse, but Anna as well as Page advise him to contemplate that they are relatively powerless by themselves (‘*Se ordisci una burla, vo' anch'io la mia parte. Conviene condurla con senno, con arte*’). However, if they unite in complicity during Falstaff's absence, they might be able to turn into a dangerous opposition.

Act II

Ford's arrival at the Southern harbor of the Falstaff Enclave. The Lord awaits him with great ceremony, surrounding himself by blazing palm trees, all large animal species the domain keeps, and hundreds of subjects displaying victuals. The intent is not only of an entertaining nature, but also to humble the guests by flaunting his wealth. And it indeed has an effect on Ford who is unable to take his eyes off the abundance capable of saving his people. It is a double-edged sword.

Falstaff leads him ashore and immediately begins weaving the web: he explains how the two enclaves should unite, how they would become stronger than they are now. Ford objects saying that evidently Falstaff grows by the day – what can a small, weakening borough offer him? Promises for the future, Falstaff counters, that is where he is looking. He then explains that Martinique is rich in resources, but Ford, limited by his genetic heritage, would need years for the ecology of his enclave to adapt to the brutal conditions of the island; Falstaff, on the contrary, is a holder of genetic abundance in constant change, of which he himself serves as an example, able to accelerate the evolutionary process – all that needs to be done is a fusion of basic DNA and the respective territories.

Ford responds he requires some time to think, knowing very well that a fusion like the one proposed would eliminate the unique traits of Martinique's ecology forever. Falstaff thus seizes the opportunity to inform that Page's enclave is also interested, and that she has just arrived by spontaneous will, who knows if to present a counter offer? ...

She is a forceful woman, Falstaff notes almost absent-mindedly, and by using force it is possible to control a domain, a quality that could help him out with his plans. But he hopes to come to an understanding with Ford, seeing that, in his opinion, M. Page is phony and sly, appearing to be an angel but is in fact a demon in disguise.

Ford tells him that he needs to speak to his daughter.

Meanwhile, Anna is guided to the chambers by Pistol, who is constantly twirling around her, praising her beauty and proposing a quick physical union to be consummated without delay. Anna feels disgusted, but considering that she might obtain information from the creature, she plays with him and allows him into the room. She insinuates he will get what he wants if he discloses information about his master's true intentions. Pistol responds to her game, and explains that only well-formulated questions will get sincere answers.

Thus begins an exchange of phrases. Anna formulates question after question and Pistol tells her whether she is getting further from or closer to the truth until she starts to get it right:

ANNA
Non si tratta di papà, allora!

PISTOL
Ah, vedo un fuoco ora...

ANNA
È la sua figlia che si vuole?

PISTOL
Calore mi riempie il cuore.

ANNA
Io influenzare la sua decisione.

PISTOL
È il sole o un'illusione?

ANNA
Si spera che lo convinco!

PISTOL
Giocando così non vinco...

ANNA

O sono io che ha bisogno di convincere?

PISTOL

Lei affondare nel ghiaccio con rincrescere.

ANNA

Non capisco. E 'il mio silenzio che ci si aspetta?

PISTOL

Forse siete indietro nella traccia eletta...

ANNA

Loro cercherà di isolare me.

PISTOL

Un po 'a sinistra per piacere me.

ANNA

Mi uccideranno!

Before Anna is able to react, Pistol spreads his wings and asks her whether ignorance is not more blissful than awareness. He pounces on her, tearing her flesh and raping her in an orgy of blood that stains the whole room.

In the end, satisfied, he carefully prepares the evidence that will incriminate Page, admiring 'How cunning the master is!', and leaves the scene.

Falstaff and Ford end the tour through the domain. Falstaff informs him that he will meet Page the following day, but that Ford will be welcome to attend the meeting if he wishes to. Worried about his missing daughter, the leader of Martinique cannot think of anything else. Falstaff calls for Bardolf to search for Anna while he comes clean: if Martinique does not want to accept, he will have to proceed with Page's proposal, a thought that is not to his liking. Ford does not know what to

answer since he mistrusts everyone. So, tragedy begins when Bardolf returns greatly agitated, a bearer of fatal news. They run to the room where Ford finds the body of his daughter. He mourns his loss and Falstaff tries to comfort him, explaining that he will not rest until the culprit is found. Ford then finds a left-behind object bearing the label of the house of Page. Filled with indignation Falstaff orders the expulsion of the other group from the island. Ford asks him to hold back as he does not want to accuse someone without compelling evidence. Falstaff praises his clear reasoning in such a moment of great pain and offers him his help, which Ford is unable to decline.

He is left alone with his dead daughter, to whom he sings of his heartbreak and his anguish to discern the truth behind the lie. In this game he has already begun to lose. However, the label of the house of Page in his hand gives him an idea.

Page is sleeping when awoken by Lesta, who tells her that Ford would like to speak to her. Ford bursts into the room and recounts what has happened. Page denies it vehemently; she has been framed by Falstaff who intends to set one against the other. Page asks Lesta to rummage through Anna's room with the help of the spies they brought. If strong evidence is found, Ford will be entitled to stoke up a feud against Lord Swaggerer, counting on the help of the enclaves that Falstaff subjugated. Yet, Ford should be patient and carefully examine the possibility of a counterattack.

In the following scene, Falstaff joins Ford in the great hall showing his concern regarding his guest's health. Ford remains friendly, yet cold and distant. Page enters, whom Falstaff discreetly refers to as the phony one. And he tells her, 'Milady, I regret to inform you that a grave incident seems to have happened last night.' Page reveals she already knows about everything and answers furiously that she will not accept being accused of something she did not do. As proof she brings forward Lesta, who has inspected the room and discovered surveillance sensors and their recordings. Falstaff does not feel obliged to explain the presence of such instruments – anyone would have used them. However, he is disappointed when faced with Ford's attitude, who showed weakness by siding with the enemy. He claims that he wants to see those pieces of evidence and then he will punish the guilty ones who acted against his orders.

The recordings denounce what has happened and show the placing of the incriminating object. The anguished father calls Falstaff a monster even more demonic than his demons. He in turn coldly asks him whether he knows where that

demonic species comes from and, at the sight of Ford's ignorance, Falstaff asks Pistol to show it to him. The lackey begins an enchanting litany that causes Lesta to have convulsions. The maid's skin tears apart, exposing the being it harbored: a demonic figure of the same species as Pistol or Baldorf.

Ford yells and says he is about to go mad. Who is a friend; who is an enemy? He backs away from Falstaff and Page and proclaims that he will return to Martinique, but that his daughter will be revenged.

Act III

While the conference room is being cleaned, silently and mindful of whom might listen, two of Ford's acolytes comment to one another about what is being said in regards to the health of their leader. It seems that he wanders around at night speaking to ghosts, unaware of the domain and its dwindling people. He thinks too much about his deceased daughter.

Ford enters accompanied by his advisor; the acolytes are chased out and flee. Ford is healthier than he pretends to be. It is a disguised scheme of his, feigning to be weak, creating a decoy for Falstaff to attack him with ease and overconfidence. The advisor suggests caution, seeing that the enemy is deceitful and will be prepared. All biological and physical defenses of the island are on alert, but even these will not enough when confronted with the power of Southern Hispaniola. Ford understands that it is a risk, but he trusts in the international community, it will not remain quiet if such conflict begins.

In fact, they receive an alert reporting a barge of survivors: Page and her people are seeking temporary refuge on Ford's island. From the top of the rail, Page explains that when faced with the ultimate refusal of partnership, Falstaff secretly attacked her enclave, spreading plagues that quickly damaged the island's ecology. While contemplating the destruction, Page decided to activate the slow death gene, which will consume her body in the event of an invasion by pathogens. She was unable to stop Falstaff but she will not let him seize her genetic heritage. They escaped from a dead enclave in search of a new shelter and Page asks Ford to provide her with supplies for the voyage. He agrees.

In that very moment Ford receives another message. Falstaff announces that he is at a distance from Martinique and requests authorization to dock. Ford

immediately notifies Page, who realizes that she is the reason for his coming; he is chasing her to stop the extermination. But why, Ford inquires, does he risk so much for this purpose? Page thus reveals her biggest secret: the gene of slow death bears the power of affecting and destroying the biological structure of Falstaff's Enclave and he has found out about it. The attack was not an innocent one. Economic reasons were a facade meant to hide Lord Swaggerer's potential weakness.

Ford has no other choice. He commands Page's ship to be hidden and allows Falstaff to draw nearer, but without docking before informing him of the reasons he came. He is told stories about military incursions at the coast of Hispaniola perpetrated by the armada of the British Virgins. Falstaff is chasing Page in order to present her before an international court. Whoever provides shelter to her, in his opinion, is a criminal just the same. Ford confirms he did not see her nor did he receive any communications from her. Falstaff requests to go ashore but Ford says the matter regarding the murder of his daughter is not yet resolved and does not grant him permission. Falstaff thus swears that everything bad that has happened to the British Virgins might happen to Martinique and gives him until nighttime to reconsider.

Ford returns to Page and tells her that there is a great opportunity to destroy Falstaff once and for all. All that they need to do is to lure him into a closed environment so that she can release the lethal venom. How to persuade him to come to such a place? Ford quickly conjures up a plan in which Page comes forward as his official refugee, requesting a hearing to end hostilities. Yet, the venom is also fatal for the people of Martinique, she warns him, it would be lethal for you. 'So inoculate me with the antidote when you are infecting Falstaff… if it doesn't work, it is still better than living under that despicable reign,' he says. Page agrees.

The meeting takes place. Falstaff on one side, Ford and Page on the other. Falstaff tells Ford that he lied, that he now finally knows who his enemies are; that Ford has allied with Page and sacrificed his own daughter to have an excuse before the international guards to legitimize a *vendetta*.

Page wants nothing to do with it. She requires immunity from Ford against Falstaff's attacks and states that this will be enough for an external intervention. Falstaff laughs and tells her that he will not grant her biological immunity, let alone a political one. Page becomes angry and tries to attack Falstaff, but he wards her off and hits back without any result. After a brief struggle, it is Ford who eventually catches Falstaff and lets Page fill the air with the promised venom. Falstaff backs off, feeling

unwell he falls to the ground and sings an aria about his death and of the end of an empire never to witness the return of its former glory. His voice weakens, diminishes, fades away, and dies.

Ford, feeling equally weak, then asks Page to give him the antidote, which she provides. Ford hence says, ‘I can’t believe this took so long.’ Page does not understand, then he grabs her arm and bites it: ‘A gift from Falstaff.’ Page staggers, agonized by the reaction caused by the antibodies that devour her flesh.

‘You’re in cahoots with him! ... And what about your daughter?’

‘I am in no cahoots, my dear, I *am him*. Do you think you are the only one to have sophisticated weapons?’ and in a brief explanation he reveals he was able to compress the information of his memory and personality into a protozoan with which he infected Ford the previous night. ‘You can only win if you are willing to make sacrifices... now I possess your venom and the cure to your venom, and I have united two enclaves in a single place without anybody knowing; I even have a new identity to outwit my enemies.’ While she dies, he ends the opera, singing:

Tutto nel mondo é burla.
L'uom é nato burlone,
La fede in cor gli ciurla,
Gli ciurla la ragione.
Tutti gabbati! Irride
L'un l'altro ogni mortal.
Ma ride ben chi ride
La risata final.

The curtain falls.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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