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INTRODUCTION

Tereza Walsbergerová

THE present double-issue of Theory and Practice in English Studies is concerned with two topics: "Secrets, codes, and puzzles" and "Isolation, solitude, distance and communication in times of epidemic." Incredibly, the former topic had been selected prior to all of the events that unfolded in 2020. Nevertheless, given how many conspiracy theories about COVID-19 have emerged globally, it can be said that secrets, codes, and puzzles have become an important aspect of the year. The latter topic is, therefore, organically tied to the former, mainly through the tropes of isolation and communication. As such, the present double-issue contains a collection of articles, reports, and other contributions that all share these common denominators. Although compiling this collection was admittedly a herculean task due to the issues associated with the pandemic, we are happy to present the following content to the wider academic public.

1. Secrets, codes, and puzzles

As people all over the world became confined to their homes due to the coronavirus pandemic and all communication suddenly shifted to cyberspace, we have become dependent on technology more than ever before. Every dependency comes attached with its issues and fears, however. On the one hand, existing predominantly in cyberspace has its advantages; not only is it safer to stay at home and thus prevent the virus from spreading faster amongst the population, but many actions – such as voting in elections – can be performed faster and cheaper. On the other hand, however, all of these advantages are automatically accompanied by fears and paranoias, including the fears concerning the potential loss of one's privacy, one's identity, and one's agency.

Conspiracy theories and hoaxes have always been a part of the society – particularly in the United States. Yet, the advent of new technology and media – spearheaded by the internet – in the new millennium made it much easier for disinformation to spread and negatively affect the society. Moreover, the technology and the media itself have often become the object of paranoia – specifically

also known as cyber-paranoia. The first article of this issue by Klára Feikusová looks at the intersection of media, technology and fear. In "There's a demon in the internet: Haunted media, globalization, and televisual horror," Feikusová focuses on the demonization of media and new technologies and their portrayal in television horror shows. She argues that new media have a tendency to be demonized within a society in that they become objects of phobia. Even as technology keeps advancing and every such medium is replaced by a new version, this fear remains attached – one way or another – to all of them. As Feikusová discusses in her article, the horror genre depicts these lingering phobias by essentially personifying them – by putting actual demons into the media. Exploring the haunted media in shows like Supernatural (2005–2020) and Evil (2019-), Feikusová demonstrates how they are depicted as the ultimate threat in the era of globalization.

The following article by Tereza Walsbergerová then takes us back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when conspiracy theories did not necessarily need the help of new technology and new media to be disseminated and spread around the world, especially not if they pertained to international celebrities. In "'Another clue for you all': The hysterical realism of the 'Paul is dead' conspiracy in the golden age of paranoia," Walsbergerová focuses on celebrity death conspiracy theories and their role within our society. In particular, this article explores the conspiracy theory known as 'Paul is dead' according to which the Beatle Paul McCartney had died in 1969 and been replaced by a perfect double. Building on several theories from the paranoia studies discourse and maintaining the notion of the late 1960s and early 1970s as an era of the condition of postmodernity, Walsbergerová ultimately argues that our tendency to bury celebrities and create alternate (paranoid) narratives about them stems not only from our rejection of consensus reality but also from our simultaneous desire to mythologize our idols to seek comfort in eras of social uncertainty.

Moving into the present, Miroslav Vrzal's overview titled "QAnon as a variation of a satanic conspiracy theory" explores the far-right conspiracy theory known as 'QAnon.' This theory has lately received a lot of attention in the media, especially in connection with Donald Trump and some of the conspiracy theories involving the spread of COVID-19, and so this text is extremely timely. Vrzal draws significant parallels between the QAnon conspiracy theory and the Satanic Panic of the 1980s and 1990s in his text, highlighting their common tropes – and especially the trope of a fight against the forces of evil. As Vrzal points out, these notions have always been an inherent part of American society and are thus likely to emerge over and over in times of social unrest. As such, it makes sense that they have also re-emerged in 2020 in connection with the pandemic and the Presidential Election.

Vrzal's text is followed by Anna Mikyšková's report on the 11th Brno International Conference of English, American and Canadian Studies, "Breaking the Boundaries," which took place on 12–14 February 2020 in Brno, Czech Republic. Unbeknownst to us, this was to be the last in-person conference to be organized by the Department of English and American Studies for a long time to come, as the doors of the university were closed soon thereafter.

Finally, the issue is concluded with Jiří Lukl's tribute to the late American linguist Wallace Chafe (1927–2019), titled "Wallace Chafe – a visionary pariah among linguists." Although Chafe did not originally set out to be a linguist, as Lukl mentions, he undoubtedly left his mark on the discipline. The text describes Chafe's contributions to science – including the field of cognitive linguistics and the study of indigenous languages of North America, and outlines his publications and the positions he held during his long and impressive career.

2. Isolation, solitude, distance and communication in times of epidemic

If there is anything that has spread faster around the globe than conspiracy theories – including the "Paul Is Dead" conspiracy theory and QAnon – it is the coronavirus itself. And with the pandemic came many problems. The latter topic of this double-issue focuses on the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and the issues and discussions attached to this crisis, including isolation, solitude, distance, and communication. Our lives have dramatically changed. From the way we conduct ourselves in the privacy of our homes to the way we run businesses or perform our work duties, we have had to adapt to new modes of communication to bridge the physical distance we have become forced to maintain. Similar crises litter history; be they natural or man-made. Regardless of the origin or era, it can be said that these kinds of crises force people into noteworthy modes of communication. These modes often find their way into literary and other cultural representations. This issue particularly reflects this by exploring how we can make sense of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic through literary expression.

The first article of this issue by Ivana Plevíková is titled "Reflections of Margaret Atwood's dystopias in the pandemic of 2020" and draws intriguing parallels between Atwood's dystopian worlds and the present COVID-19 pandemic. Plevíková specifically looks into two novels by Atwood – *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. While the former novel addresses the issues of power, exploitation, and the God complex; The Year of the Flood, with its two female characters, investigates dealing with the pandemic via the lens of ecofeminism, ecology, nature, and sustainability.

Plevíková's article considers these two opposing viewpoints and points out their defamiliarized versions reflected in today's world. In addition, it highlights significant correlations between fictional and real-life dichotomies of masculine and feminine perspectives on handling the pandemic.

The second article of this issue focuses on the American cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead. In "The relevance of Margaret Mead's concepts in health and illness to the Era of COVID-19," Tagrid Morad aims to highlight Mead's contribution to illness behavior, and demonstrate how her legacy helps us understand the impact of the pandemic. Morad closely explores Mead's autobiography Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years and her other works within the framework of COVID-19, emphasizing the importance of documentary literature by medical anthropologists to the overall scientific debate concerning the epidemic.

Morad's article is followed by another conference report, this time on a conference that took place online in accordance with the spirit of the pandemic. In "Opportunities in the eyes of a storm," Denisa Krásná, Tereza Šmilauerová, and Lenka Žárská reflect on the most recent edition of the "New pathways in anglophone literary and culture studies." This international conference was also organized by the Department of English and American Studies and took place on 20–21 November 2020. As the authors note at the end of their contribution, "several participants suggested in their presentations, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened doors to many new pathways in Anglophone studies." Though perhaps surprising, this statement perfectly underlines the double-edged nature of technology as it has also been explored in this double-issue – as both a friend and a foe.

Finally, this issue brings you a special feature reflecting last year's edition of the project "FILOVER." In "FILOVER: Public Lectures at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno," Jiří Lukl, Ivona Vrzalová and Miroslav Vrzal explain the aims and goals of the project and briefly outline the lectures, including – amongst others – Jan Beneš's "USA Behind Bars," Aleš Chalupa's "How Christianity Came to Europe: A New View on the Circumstances of the Christianization of the Roman Empire," Filip Krajník's "William Shakespeare as a Film and TV Character," Dominika Kováčová's "#influencer: Social Media Celebrities and Their Linguistic Expression," and Marek Vlha's "'Bohemians' or Czechs, Gypsies, Bohemians. The Story of One Name and the Birth of the Image of the Czech Ethnic Group in USA."

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SECRETS, CODES, AND PUZZLES

RESEARCH AND OVERVIEW ARTICLES

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"THERE'S A DEMON IN THE INTERNET": HAUNTED MEDIA, GLOBALIZATION AND TELEVISUAL HORROR

Klára Feikusová

Abstract

This paper is focused on the portrayal of media, more precisely television and new media, in television horror shows in the context of globalization and the implications of this portrayal. The media and their technologies have always been demonized in one way or another. Every new invention, every new means of communication is viewed with a mix of awe and suspicion. New technology and new media become objects of phobia. Once a new medium is introduced, it usually takes the position of a phobic object, relieving the old one from this burden. However, a certain level of anxiety remains with the old medium. No genre shows this quite as well as horror. In the horror genre, the media and their physical forms are often shown either as a threat itself or bringer of thereof. The internet and social media are just as monstrous. But how are these monsters, material or not, portrayed in the media itself?

In this paper I will analyze how television horror shows mediate the anxiety about threats linked to new media, social media, and television itself. In the first half of the paper, I focus on haunted media as a travelling concept in the television landscape. In the second half, I use the TV show *Evil* (2019-) as a case study, analyzing how it portrays new media as an ultimate threat in the era of globalization.

Keywords

Haunted media, television, television studies, horror, globalization, new media, social media

* * *

1. Introduction

THE titular quote comes from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode *I, Robot...You, Jane* (s01e08, 1997). In this episode, one of the main characters, Willow (Alyson Hannigan) accidentally puts a demon on the internet while scanning a book in which it is trapped. The demon uses the web and its chat rooms to find followers that it

manipulates. Even Willow is contacted by it and for a while believes she has found a boyfriend. But her friends, Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) and Xander (Nicholas Brendon), warn her that she should not trust a stranger she met online. Although the demon does not turn out to be an axe wielding circus freak with murderous intentions as they first assume, they are ultimately right to consider him a threat; it is the demon Moloch himself.

The episode stands as a metaphor, in true *Buffy* fashion, for the dangers of meeting people online. Curiously, the internet is not only a way for the demon to gather followers but also provides the means for its demise. In the episode's finale, techno-pagan computer teacher Mrs. Calendar (Robia Scott) and other techno-pagans across the globe unite to exorcise him from the internet, using the internet. So, the web not only represents danger but also offers a solution to deal with its own threats.

But the internet and computers are not the first media or technologies to be vilified. Technology and the supernatural have always been linked (Sconce 2000, 24–5). Photography has been used to 'capture' invisible and paranormal forces, be it ghosts or fairies (Abbott and Jowett 2013, 180). A telegraph, in its power to send quick messages across long distances, seemed impossible and miraculous, and for the people of the 19th century was comparable to a séance (Sconce 2000, 28). New technologies are always viewed with suspicion and thus related to the supernatural. As Stacey Abbot and Lorna Jowett point out, they are "inherently uncanny because they challenge our established understanding of the natural world" (2013, 180).

It is not just technologies that are uncanny. It applies to the media too. Consider the radio as a box containing or producing mysterious voices that belong to no one present in the room; or take the images of distant things projected on an otherwise plain screen in the cinema. One only has to remember the anecdote about people running away from the incoming train during the screening of one of first films to fully appreciate the frightening nature of new media.[1] The new and unknown is always scary.

Nonetheless, once they became automatized, in the terminology of Viktor Shklovsky, the unfamiliar becomes familiar (Berlina 2017, 59). Yet, it can become unfamiliar (de-automatized) once again when conventions are further broken. A famous, or rather infamous, example of this would be the broadcast of adaptation

1 This refers to the myth surrounded by a screening of early short film made by Auguste and Louis Lumière, *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*. The film consists of simple shot of a train approaching the camera. The myth says that people started to run in fear from the cinema as they believed the train was real. There is no real evidence that this happened, and most scholars consider it an urban legend (Loiperdinger 2004).

of the science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds* (1938) that used a news format which led some listeners to believe that the presented events were real.[2]

In horror studies, this de-automatization is called 'the uncanny.' It derives from the writings of Sigmund Freud, who used the term to describe objects that seem familiar but are unfamiliar at the same time, e.g., automatons, dolls, wax figurines (Cherry 2009, 125–28). For Freud, the uncanny represents the "return of [the] repressed" because we are reminded of something from our past that we pushed away in our mind (ibid., 104). The uncanny is used in horror studies to describe a feeling of dread created by something that is supposed to be familiar, but it is not – e.g., an animated corpse, doppelgangers, shapeshifters, possessed people etc (ibid., 104–6).

Haunted media works in the same way. A radio or television set is something that has a steady place in our home, it is a source of information (we often presume reliable) and entertainment. So, when these objects and the media they embody start behaving as if they have taken on a life of their own or seem to be a mediator of some malevolent force, they quickly become strange and frightening. They are "bringing this spectral world" into our daily lives (Sconce 2000, 4). With that in mind, it is not only the technology that becomes unfamiliar; it is our own homes along with it.

In this paper, I will focus on the representation of television and new media as monstrous on television itself. This representation is viewed in the context of globalization, which is an important notion for television. It is, as Jérome Bourdon puts it: "a global medium par excellence" (2004, 93). As television may be divided into linear and non-linear,[3] it becomes tightly linked to the internet. I will focus on the monstrous media that also shifts from linear to non-linear. In this sense, haunted media can exemplify a travelling concept as described by Mieke Bal. According to her, the concepts are not fixed but rather flexible as they change when they move across academic fields, geographical locations, historical periods, or as they are treated differently by different scholars (Bal 2002, 24). The concept of haunted media also travels; it evolves and changes with every invention, in different times

2 *The War of the Worlds* (1938) was an episode of drama anthology The Mercury Theatre on the Air broadcasted by CBS Radio. The episode was an adaptation of H. G. Wells's novel of the same name. Howard Koch adapted the novel for radio and the episode was directed and narrated by Orson Welles who is regarded as the author of this episode. *The War of the Worlds* was broadcasted on 30th October as a part of Halloween week programming (Schwartz 2015).

3 A linear television and non-linear television are terms from television studies. Linear television refers to older model of television where it was the medium itself that dictated how it needs to be watched (by television scheduling and programming). Non-linear television is newer model where the viewers decide for themselves when and how to watch television (using TiVo, video on demand etc.).

and places. Haunted media is not "timeless expressions of some undying superstition," but rather a permeable language that expresses the society's (or societies') changing attitude to the given technology (Sconce 2000, 10). In that way, it is accurate to call haunted media a travelling concept because it is always on the move.

I want to explore the concept of haunted media, namely television, and track how it has moved, and continues to move from analogue to digital, just as television itself has gone, and continues to go from linear to non-linear. I am not suggesting that non-linear television is replacing linear television because that is not the case. Non-linear television exists alongside linear television, it just became one of the ways how to distribute and watch television. My aim is to demonstrate that the concept of haunted media reflects the changes in television technology, production and distribution. In my analysis I use examples from television horror shows from period TVIII (1990s–present),[4] that deal with television and new media as monstrous. The haunted media narrative precedes this era – e.g., it is portrayed in the movie *Murder by Television* (1935), or the episodes *A Thing About Machines* (s02e04, 1960) and *What's in the Box* (s05e24, 1964) from the anthology *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964). I focus on television shows from this era because it was when television underwent a lot of changes in production, technology, distribution and modes of reception. The expansion of the internet and later rise of social media, digitalization, streaming services or the possibility to watch television on other technology than just the TV set, all influenced how television as a medium is produced, distributed and received as well as how it is talked about. The growth of streaming services – especially those that do not stem from linear TV stations, like Netflix – poses a question what television is today.[5] The aim of the present paper is not to answer that question, I am just pointing out the changes of the medium in era TVIII. All these changes influence how the concept of haunted media is represented in the horror shows, how this concept shifts and *travels* in the era.

2. The Ghosts in the Machines

Before I start analyzing how haunted media is represented as monstrous in television horror, I need to consider what 'monstrous' is. There are numerous ways

4 I am using a periodization of television history used by Michael M. Epstein, Jimmie L. Reeves and Mark C. Rogers that categorizes the medium's history into three eras – TVI (1950-1975), TVII (1975-1990s) and TVIII (1990s-present) (Epstein, Reeves, and Rogers 2002).

5 While this question requires more space to be properly analysed, for the purposes of this paper I work with the notion that non-linear television and streaming services are just another form – or extension – of linear television (Johnson 2015).

monsters and monstrous can be defined. For Noël Carroll, a monster is something that cannot be explained by current science and it should be threatening and impure (Carroll 1990, 27–8). Daniel J. Russell defines monster as fantastical and unreal, having a conflicted relationship with normality (Russell 1998, 252). However, haunted media are based in reality – there is nothing fantastical about the TV set or computer. It is known to science. Carroll mentions the objects (e.g., haunted houses) as being monstrous when they conflate the animate and the inanimate (1990, 32). Since haunted media appear to have a mind of their own, this condition is fulfilled. Carroll does not develop this idea further, he only mentions that it is problematic (ibid., 45). According to Bruce Kawin, the monster and monstrous are a representation of tension of the known and unknown (quoted in Jancovich 2002, 8). As I stated above, technologies and media are often viewed as threatening because they challenge our knowledge of the natural world (Abbott and Jowett 2013, 180). New media is especially suspicious to people because they are unknown and not understood. Such feelings also relate to the uncanny characteristic of 'machines' and the concept of automatization and de-automatization, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, I consider this fear of unknown to be a key to the monstrosity of haunted media.

3. Analogue Television

The television is often depicted as a portal to another world and/or a network that allows the supernatural to travel through it (Abbott and Jowett 2013, 179–89). This is related to the fact that the television set is a common object not only in our homes (not to mention these days it is often more than one set *and* you can watch TV on the computer or mobile phone as well), but also in public places – bars, doctor's offices and even streets (ibid., 182–3). We are surrounded by screens. On top of that, television sometimes blurs the lines between the real world and fictional worlds, take any reality TV show, for instance. It is also the premise of films like *The Truman Show* (1998) or *Pleasantville* (1998), where the main characters find themselves either unwittingly being a protagonist of reality show or they are sucked into a diegetic world of television show. Vilifying television in the cinema is a strategy to demean the medium that started in the 1950s when the film industry became threatened by the competition of television (Stokes 1999, 58). At the same time, television became a phobic object, which was cinema's status before it.[6] Since tel-

6 The term 'phobic object' describes the fear that a medium could impact people negatively (by showing and so inviting violent, sexual or destructive behaviour). At first, film represented this phobic object but as soon as television became a mainstream commodity, it took on this label (Attalah 2013, 86).

evision was easily accessible and domestic, people were concerned about its influence on children. That is why television has been heavily regulated since its inception (Attalah 2013, 86). Its status as the phobic object still lingers and is supported by the representation of television as threatening (or at least 'dumb' and numbing).

However, it is not only the cinema that, sometimes literally, demonizes television. Paradoxically, it is also the medium itself. Horror television shows sometimes depict television as the monster. For example, in the episode *Smile Time* (s05e14, 2004) from *Angel* (1999–2004), the puppets from a popular kid TV show compel children to touch the TV screen, so they can absorb their life force. In the episode *Wetwired* (s03e23, 1996) from *The X-Files* (1993–2002, 2016–2018), main characters, FBI agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) are, as they often do, investigating a case in a small town where people are turning paranoid and then violent. The source of this paranoia is later found to be a cable TV that was hacked using a device that emits a signal prompting the violent behavior.

The cases of *Smile Time* and *Wetwired* show a televisual threat that is physical (at both ends). In the first case, it is a TV set and production (puppets) that has a monstrous quality to it, in the latter case it is a device hooked to a cable system. The form of both threats is rather analogue than digital which reflects the era in which the shows were made. Although digitalization of television was underway in 2004, it was not until 2009 that digital television officially replaced analogue (Hart 2011, 7). Furthermore, in *The-X Files* example, point of view shots show that the people influenced by the signal have impacted vision and they see the world around them with lines and blurs as if they were watching it through an analogue television screen as the point of view shots indicate. Moreover, while the threat in these episodes is not focused on a single person, it is rather localized - by the target audience in *Smile Time*, and by the place in *Wetwired*.

But television can address millions of people simultaneously. So, the threat can become much bigger, national or even global. There are cases of monstrous television where "the true threat is not the television in the living room, but rather the invisible network that binds all televisions together on a national and global level – a theme that is more relevant today than ever before" (Abbott and Jowett 2013, 187). The implication here is of course the rise of globalization. In the context of the television industry, national televisions stations are more open to different markets and buy foreign content as well as sell their own local content. Television formats are being distributed and transformed across the globe regularly (Bourdon 2004, 107–8). The rising popularity of streaming services and their expansion in many countries allows for some shows to premiere at the same time across the globe. So,

not only has haunted media expand, but it is no longer limited by the reach of a broadcasting signal as it now travels around the world online.

Concerns related to globalization in the context of television studies are usually those of the potential loss of national identity and Americanization. However, when it comes to haunted media, the anxiety surrounding globalization is about how easily and quickly data can spread. While this fear is not new, it is growing with the rise of globalization.

4. Abstract Worlds

As streaming services expand and linear television stations invest in non-linear versions to accommodate the market, the internet has become one of the primary sources of television. The internet itself is one of the new phobic objects (Attalah 2013, 90). *Buffy*'s episode mentioned in the introduction is one of early examples of this discourse. This shift is depicted in the episode *Halt and Catch a Fire* (s10e13, originally broadcasted in 2015) from *Supernatural* (2005–2020) where several deaths are caused by machines (a car, computer, hi-fi speakers etc.). The main characters, Dean (Jensen Ackles) and Sam Winchester (Jared Padalecki), who are hunters of all things demonic and monstrous, investigate the case as they suspect ghostly activity. The Winchesters identify the culprit as the ghost of a man who was killed when he was run off the road into an electrical pole. At first the Winchesters suspect the ghost is travelling through electricity. Later they find out he had jumped from the electric cable to a nearby Wi-Fi tower. Then the ghost used the Wi-Fi to find and kill his victims (he hacked into the Siri-like app in the car or InstaChat on the computer). This episode shows the shift from analogue to digital, but also represents a generational conflict when the Winchesters interview the college students haunted by the ghost. When Dean expresses confusion over a navigation app in the car, the interviewed student comments: “Oh, you're gen X.” The Winchesters are used to dealing with more physical threats - demons, vampires, werewolves, even ghosts who are usually linked to their earthly remains, be it their bones or possessions, through which they can be destroyed. They are at first unsure about how to destroy the spirit using virtual space. In the end, it is the human factor – the dead man's widow – that offers a solution.

In this sense, the internet is even more monstrous than analogue media. It is vast, global and not bound by any single object. But television is no longer bound by the TV set either. One can watch television on a computer, phone, or tablet; it can be watched anywhere and anytime. And it is done online more and more often,

as the internet is the home to the on-demand streaming platforms. Then, it seems that the internet fulfilled the notion of fluidity of the haunted media. Jeffrey Sconce writes that "fantastic conceptions of media presence ranging from the telegraph to virtual reality have often evoked a series of interrelated metaphors of 'flow', suggesting analogies between electricity, consciousness, and information that enable fantastic forms of electronic transmutation, substitution, and exchange" (Sconce 2000, 7).

5. Fluidity of Haunted Media

It is no coincidence that Sconce mentions 'the flow'. This term from television studies describes television's capacity to pour one type of content into another. The perfect example in the world of televisual fiction would be the episode *Changing Channels* (s05e08, originally broadcasted in 2009) from *Supernatural*. In a very metafictional fashion, the Winchesters are sucked into the televisual world, or "televisionland", which is a term coined by Sconce for the virtual realm of all the fictional worlds of television (2000, 177). In this "televisionland", the Winchesters jump from one genre show to another (e.g., medical drama, sitcom, game show etc.). The flow is considered one of the defining characteristics of television, *linear* television to be exact, though it can be found in other media as well. The internet is full of flow – YouTube with its video queuing or Netflix with its never-ending autoplayback of episodes of episodes and shows meant for binge-watching. The flow can complement a televisual horror show if well placed amidst other programs, like advertisements and shows of other genres, and can then create an uncanny feeling (Wheatley 2006, 7). This is especially true of uncanny metafiction, exemplified by *Changing Channels*.

Furthermore, the uncanny quality of the flow lies in its endless and ever-changing nature. Just as Sam and Dean are threatened to stay in "televisionland" forever, the televisual flow is always there when we turn on our television sets. The flow exists on its own, all the time. As Abbott and Jowett point out "the presence of the supernatural on film means that it is bound by the form of that medium – the monsters, ghosts or witches are trapped on the film and so the audience can watch safely within the cinema" (2013, 189). But the flow creates a notion that "television is not contained by physical boundaries" (ibid., 189). On top of that, television is today defined by globalization and convergence so it can serve as a doorway to other technologies (via internet and digitalization).

After all, we live in an era when all media can share one media storage (be it a computer, mobile phone or tablet). The virtual can also be spread across different technologies. So, media can travel from one piece of hardware to another with ease, just like the demons in them. This danger of convergence is neatly presented in the episode *Rm9sbG93ZXJz* (s11e07, 2018) of *The X-Files*. Mulder and Scully have dinner in a fully automated sushi restaurant but when Mulder refuses to tip, technology seems to conspire against them. This malevolence follows them to their homes where it affects the alarm system and any 'intelligent' technology. The haunting does not stop until Mulder pays the tip on his phone. This episode can be put in the contrast with a much earlier episode, *Ghost in the Machine* (s01e07, 1993), where the agents face an intelligent murderous computer. But while in this earlier episode, taking place in the early 1990s, the threat is contained to one building, in the later episode from 2018, the threat is omnipresent. It is a statement about how technologies spread, how our world became much more technology-dependent and these technologies more interconnected.

There is another aspect of the televisual medium that has an uncanny and potentially frightening quality - its 'liveness'. Liveness refers to the medium's ability to broadcast events as they are happening and is considered one of the most important characteristics of television. Radio is capable of this too, but the same cannot be said about cinema, so liveness is a core quality that defines television as a medium. Of course, not all television is live. However, the power of live broadcasting can be used to create frightening effects. While Sconce comments that liveness may suggest that TV is "alive" (for example *Smile Time* or the film *Poltergeist* support that), there are other ways in which liveness can be scary. One of the famous examples – at least in the UK – would be the broadcast of the mockumentary *Ghostwatch* (1992). The TV film used the investigative journalism format, obviously borrowed from *Crimewatch UK* series (1984–2017), real TV personalities, and audiovisual presentation containing elements related to live broadcasts (e.g., a hand-held camera, a call-in center, cutting between the studio and exterior locations where the investigation was being conducted etc.). On top of it, it was shown on the BBC, which is a public service TV station and is very well respected. Even though *Ghostwatch* was not broadcast live, it seemed like it was, and that immediacy frightened a lot of the viewers. In *Ghostwatch*, a team of reporters investigates a haunting in a suburban house. At the end, the ghost "jumps" on the airwaves and begins to haunt the studio. The movie ends with a shot of an empty studio set where the TV host, none other than Michael Parkinson, is wandering around, obviously possessed by the ghost.

Ghostwatch caused a lot of controversy. Since it seemed quite authentic, some adult viewers, and many children, believed it was real. Making use of real and respected TV presenters like Michael Parkinson, Sarah Greene, Mike Smith and others, as well as techniques typical of live broadcasts, combined with the fact the presentation was shown on a public service TV station, made it all seem rather believable. Also, the flow of televisual content helped to feed this belief. Many felt particularly betrayed by the BBC (Wheatley 2006, 87). A public service channel is supposed to inform its audience, not mystify them. But if we put the controversy aside, *Ghostwatch* is a unique example of how television and its specific characteristics can be used to explore horror. *Ghostwatch* was terrifying exactly because it was on TV. Abbot and Jowett claim that: "What made this film so effective and threatening was the suggestion that this was 'actually happening'… now… and not simply captured on TV but channeled through television" (2013, 189). The mockumentary format and horror hybrids are common in cinema now too (e.g., *The Blair Witch Project*, *Cloverfield*, *Paranormal Activity* etc.). However, cinema cannot use "liveness," but new media can.

There are live streams and social media that are used for immediate communication. This immediacy can become deadly, as exemplified in a *Halt and Catch a Fire* episode, where a ghost contacts his victims on their apps or social media before attacking them.

6. Demonization of New Media in *Evil*

At this point, I want to focus on the TV horror show *Evil* (2019–) and its representation of haunted media. *Evil*'s story revolves around a team of experts hired by the Catholic Church to investigate alleged supernatural cases of possessions, miracles and such. The group consists of a forensic psychologist called Kristen (Katja Herbers), priest in training David (Mike Colter) and technical expert Ben (Aasif Mandvi). *Evil* constantly balances on the edge between admitting to being a supernatural horror show and undermining the trustworthiness of its characters. In this sense, the show is fulfilling Tzvetan Todorov's notion of fantastic hesitation (1973, 31). According to him, the first condition of the fantastic genre is the reader's hesitation whether the supernatural elements in the text are actually real or not (ibid., 31). While the fantastic does not necessarily have to include horror, this hesitation is very helpful in building an atmosphere of fear and anxiety that is central to horror (Hills 2005, 34–5). *Evil* is an example of 'pure' fantastic because it never actually answers (or at least has not yet) the question of the (non)existence of the supernatural (Todorov 1973, 43–4).

Although the ending of the first season could be interpreted as 'fantastic-marvelous,' i.e., the kind of narrative that ends with the acceptance of the supernatural (ibid., 52), the show may go either way in the next season.

The fantastic hesitation is crucial to *Evil* because this way the events in the series are more uncanny and terrifying. This hesitation is concerned mostly with the existence of demons. While Kristen considers the villains who they meet to be psychopaths, David sees them as either possessed by or embodying demons. However, the truth is the villains are dangerous either way. What is the most interesting notion from the series, for the purposes of this paper, is that the villains often use new media and modern technologies for their crimes. This is especially true for the main villain Leland Townsend (Michael Emerson), who coaches psychopaths and helps them commit murders or other crimes. For example, he finds a young man with misogynistic ideas and connects him to an online incel terrorist group. In the first episode, Leland gives advice to a serial killer over e-mail to help him fake demonic possession so he could be tried as insane. In the episode *7 Swans a Singin'* (s01e10, 2019), the protagonists investigate a case of mass hysteria that makes teenagers hurt themselves. They later trace it to an influencer who used subliminal auditory stimuli affecting youngsters in her videos. At the end of the episode, the influencer's followers – not the main protagonists of the show – learn that it was Leland who told the influencer to put the auditory stimuli in her videos.

Evil also includes storylines about a haunted augmented reality game or haunted virtual assistant, and while there are usually malevolent hackers behind this, the explanation is not that simple – or mundane – every time. For example, in the episode including the haunted virtual assistant, *3 Stars* (s01e03, 2019), Ben learns that two objects have become haunted, the other one being his own father's virtual assistant. But when he finds the hacker and confronts him, the cybercriminal admits to hacking only the first device, but not that of Ben's father. Therefore, it seems that while the first haunted object was just a prank, this haunting quality became real on its own and spread to another object. That implies that technologies are all connected and can be used as a conduit. Such a suggestion brings back the notion of flow and its uncanny character. It is also evidence of growing convergence. The converging media and technology allow for the flow to shift from one technology to another.

The notion that psychopaths and/or demons use the internet to literally spread evil implies the dangers of globalization. In the first episode, this notion is verbalized by the main protagonists. They have the following conversation while watching news on the TV:

> David: "The world is getting worse because evil is no longer isolated. Bad people are talking to each other. They're connected."
> Kristen: "Through social media."

This exchange encompasses, in quite glaring terms, the main theme and message of *Evil*. Later in the series, the main protagonists identify a hierarchy of demons on Earth based on an old codex. So, the threat is not a local one. These demons are all across the globe and they work together through modern technology and new media, as is exemplified through the character of Leland. Therefore, the haunted media in *Evil* are not just part of an isolated incident when a ghost enters a Wi-Fi signal. This haunting is a part of something bigger. This evil is organized, and its goals are worldwide. It is global and converging.

7. Conclusion

The concept of haunted media is as old as the media itself. They were uncanny from the very beginning. And every new medium is set to be demonized. Media create anxieties because they are difficult to understand and because they are all around us. It is not surprising then that they became vilified in horror fiction as well. Haunted media are compelling because they are something we easily let into our lives; we depend on them and we trust them. We share secrets over the internet on social media, we have online bank accounts. But the stories of malevolent machines and media do not surprise us. They are quite common. And they are always going to be.

It does not matter that we got used to these media. They are still uncanny because they can be concurrently comforting and disturbing. They provide us with reliable information, but they can lie and deceive. They are there but they are not. The media are thus inherently uncanny. They exist in a liminal space that is virtual and material at once. They are in one place and all the places at the same time. The growing globalization incites that. Since the media make up such a big part of our lives, there is no escaping them. But before we make villains out of them, it would be good to remember who it is that creates and explores media.

If we look back at the examples in the text, we can see that haunted media did not become haunted on their own. The haunting began with a demon, ghost or even a human using them. The media are not evil in and of themselves – they are merely mediators of evil. Because in the end, it always comes to the person using them. If they want to use media to commit crime or cause harm, they can. The haunted media need a partner in crime to become dangerous. It is easy to blame media technology that is naturally uncanny. But it is us, human beings, who use it or abuse it.

So, is there a demon on the internet? Yes. In fact, there are millions of them.

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'ANOTHER CLUE FOR YOU ALL': THE HYSTERICAL REALISM OF THE 'PAUL IS DEAD' CONSPIRACY THEORY IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF PARANOIA

Tereza Walsbergerová

Abstract

When a rumor spread in 1969, that Paul McCartney had died and been replaced by a double, American Beatlemaniacs scrambled to examine every album in search of death clues.' This paper examines the *Paul Is Dead* conspiracy theory by building on studies of the cult of celebrity, James Wood's concept of hysterical realism, Emily Apter's concept of "oneworldedness", and Timothy Melley's theory of "agency panic." It ultimately argues that our tendency to bury celebrities and create alternate (paranoid) narratives about them stems not only from our rejection of consensus reality but also our simultaneous desire to mythologize our idols to seek comfort in eras of social uncertainty.

Keywords

Hysterical realism, agency panic, oneworldedness, cult of celebrity, death, celebrity death conspiracies, conspiracy theories, paranoia, the condition of postmodernity, doubles, Beatlemania, Paul McCartney, The Beatles

* * *

1. The Spectacle of Celebrity Death

AS a phenomenon in which the cult of celebrity intersects with the uncanniness of death, celebrity death has the power to fascinate, affect, and even – in extreme cases – *mobilize* the public. More importantly, as a spectacle, celebrity death occupies a unique place in pop culture, because it provides an opportunity for the public to participate in the narratives of celebrities, something that would otherwise not be possible. Daniel Harris argues that what lies beneath our fascination with celebrity death are in fact our unconscious "yearnings for equality" (Harris 2011, 889). Just like great rulers, "celebrities also have two bodies, one public, one private" (ibid., 884). The public (ceremonial) body belongs to the public and essentially represents a two-dimensional commodity rather than a four-dimensional person. It is the unreachable and untouchable ideal that dwells beyond and above the general public. These qualities

make it the perfect object of worship. The private (physical) body then *only* belongs to the celebrity. Although this body technically exists on the same plane as the bodies of the general public, and thus cannot be worshipped in the same way that the ceremonial body can, it still represents an aspect of the celebrity that is hidden away from the public and is thus also unreachable. Consequently, the public desperately craves to 'own' both bodies in order to fully participate in that celebrity's narrative. When celebrities die, their ceremonial and private bodies merge into one. This allows the public to fulfill that fantasy. Harris argues that the same equalization happens in case of celebrity death conspiracy theories, as those narratives fulfil the democratic fantasy in their own way:

> In order to counteract the demeaning implications of star worship, we fabricate an implausible narrative, that celebrities are so exhausted by the attentions of the media and their meddlesome fans that they mastermind their own escape in a complex scheme that allows them to break free from the prison of fame and lead normal lives, incognito. We pretend that they detest the limelight, that they regret the paths that they have chosen, and long for nothing so much as the homely anonymity of simple souls like us. (ibid., 889)

Indeed, conspiracy theories that construct a narrative in which celebrities fake their own death in order to 'lead a normal life' represent the public's desire for equality. While in this case the bodies have not merged together, the celebrity has killed its public (ceremonial) body and hidden its private (physical) body away somewhere amongst the general public, effectively becoming our equal.

However, this theory does not and cannot apply to the opposite scenario in which the celebrities dies but their death is covered up through the public use of a double (thus they 'live on'). This paper focuses on this second kind of celebrity death conspiracy theory, arguing that its subscribers opt to disregard (sacrifice) the private (physical) body of the celebrity to make possible the mythologizing of the ceremonial body. The narratives around celebrity death conspiracy theories are exaggerated, illogical, and almost farcical in nature, constructed as a postmodern form of enshrinement meant to provide comfort in times of social uncertainty, and as such can be associated with James Wood's 2000 concept of "hysterical realism." This concept describes narratives with exactly this kind of reality – one that has been stretched out and overworked, containing cartoonish, empty characters who only end up being of secondary importance to the central plot. Although it was originally developed by Wood to describe a new tendency in postmodern literary works, it can also be applied to other forms of narratives – including conspiracy theories. The 1969 celebrity death conspiracy theory about Paul McCartney – known as "Paul Is Dead" (PID)

– will be the case study for this article. I argue that PID is the epitome of an American postmodern celebrity enshrinement, as its subscribers 'sacrifice' McCartney's physical body to not only enshrine his 1966 ceremonial body (to retain the spirit of Beatlemania as a positive teenage rebellion movement of the early 1960s), but also to mythologize that body through a construction of a hysterically realist postmodern narrative which provides comfort to America during "the golden age of paranoia" (Wheen 2009) of the 1960s and 1970s.

2. Thank You Girl (For Loving Me)

As with any conspiracy theory, it is difficult to identify the origin of PID. Several instances seem to be the main sources of the hysteria. The first public mention of the rumor is a 17 September 1969 *Drake Times-Delphic* article by Tim Harper titled "Is Beatle Paul McCartney Dead?" In this article, Harper ponders the rumor, stating that "Lately on campus there has been much conjecturing on the present state of Beatle Paul McCartney" (Harper 1969, 1). Still, the rumor began to snowball. Only a month later, on 12 October 1969 (Patterson 1994, 5) Russ Gibbs – a WKNR-FM radio DJ at the University of Michigan – received a phone call from an upset Beatles fan who was worried that Paul McCartney had indeed died. The story caught the attention of another student of the same university, Frederick LaBour, who decided to turn this idea into an article that was published in *The Michigan Daily* on October 14. This article, titled "McCartney Dead; New Evidence Brought to Light," represents a comprehensive write-up of the conspiracy theory according to which Paul McCartney had been "killed in early November 1966 after leaving EMI recording studios tired, sad and dejected" (LaBour 1969, 2). It also contains a detailed analysis of the so-called "death clues," which were said to have been put into Beatles songs by the other members to alert fans to this conspiracy. The theory became incredibly popular and – fueled by the WMCA-AM DJ Alex Bennett (Patterson 1994, 5) – soon found its way into the national press. In a more recent interview with Alan Glenn for *Michigan Today*, LaBour recalls that the theory was "quoted extensively everywhere" and had reached both coasts fast (Glenn 2009).

It is not difficult to deduce how this story gained this kind of momentum so fast, given the immense power of Beatlemania, a power that was so enormous in America that some go as far as calling it a "social movement" (Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs 1992, 85). I propose that in the peak American Beatlemania years (1964–1966), the ceremonial bodies of Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, and Starr existed

solely for the pleasure of the fans. These are the years in which the group released "I Want to Hold *Your* Hand," "Thank *You* Girl," "P. S. I Love *You*," and "I Need *You*" – songs specifically tailored to profit off of the desire of the audience to own and consume the ceremonial bodies of the group as a commodity. According to Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, "In one city, someone got a hold of the hotel pillowcases that had purportedly been used by the Beatles, cut them into 160,000 tiny squares, mounted them on certificates, and sold them for $1 a piece" (ibid., 86). This incident perfectly illustrates the phenomenon.

The advent of Beatlemania in America had a social significance as well. According to Frontani, the fact that the Beatles became a phenomenon in the US during a time of sociocultural change significantly boosted their image as heralds of a new age. He states: "It was an America on the verge of events that would highlight divisions of age, race, gender, and class" (Frontani 2007, 2). Patterson also highlights the positive effect of the group on the depressed American society by stating:

> The Beatles were the forerunners of [a] new experiment. Their tight harmonies and melodies helped combat the great loss encountered by a generation fostered on Camelot and untimely assassination of John Kennedy – the American President who represented the American dream of endless youth and embedded the growth of hope and opportunity for all. (Patterson 1994, 4)

Dale Ford – a contemporary of Beatlemania – sums up this attitude in Berman's oral history of Beatlemania, *We're Going to See the Beatles* by noting: "I don't think I'll ever enjoy anything as much as the early Beatles. It was so innocent, it wasn't jaded, the music wasn't cynical, it was just fun. It was pure fun" (Berman 2008, 216–17). On top of this, Beatlemania also represented a post-McCarthian type of rebellion wherein the younger generation could stand up to the world of adults in the form of their parents and grandparents. As Patterson puts it: "The sixties generation desperately needed something to believe in" (Patterson 1994, 8). Essentially, the Beatles became a type of religion, and though it was a certain type of conformity, as Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs argue: "it was conformity to an imperative that overruled adult mores and even adult laws" (Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992, 89).

Thus, in the minds and memories of Americans who came of age during this period, Beatlemania would always be associated with revival, revolution, excitement, and general positivity, though their parents would remember it as an age of mass hysteria akin to an "epidemic." Indeed, as Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs also stress, Beatlemania was the first star-centered craze of its intensity and scale in America (ibid., 86), even surpassing excitement about such celebrities as Elvis

or Frank Sinatra. Young American girls were especially in danger of contracting this "illness" as their adoration of the Beatles became a part of their sexual maturation – they would "pee their pants," faint, or even collapse (ibid., 87) from excitement at the concerts. McCartney was responsible for a major part of these afflictions as he was known during Beatlemania as the "cute Beatle," which was established in their first movie, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964).

3. Surrender to the Void

To circle back to the connection between Beatlemania and PID, it is necessary to highlight that the date of McCartney's alleged death – November 1966 – coincides with a key middle point in the group's history when they transitioned from their positive Beatlemania period to their more serious psychedelic period. The 1966 album *Revolver* exemplifies this era and is often seen as the turning point in the Beatles' career. According to Reising, who refers to it as "revolutionary" and an "album of firsts" (2006, 112–13), it is the first example of the group intentionally voicing their political opinions through lyrics. It is also their first album to embrace the themes of death and morbidity (ibid., 115). The song "Tomorrow Never Knows" in particular heralds a major turn towards a new kind of music through both its experimental composition and existential storytelling. The lyrics "Lay down all thoughts, surrender to the void" and "play the game 'Existence' to the end" (The Beatles 1966) in particular represent Lennon and McCartney's preoccupation with one's inner world and mortality which is a far cry from the cheerful altruistic lyrics of "Thank You Girl."

These changes in style, and the turn from light to darkness, coupled with the Beatles' announcement in 1966 that they were to stop touring, confused and sometimes even enraged fans. One of Berman's Beatlemaniac interviewees, Ford, talks about being "disappointed" and "heartbroken" about the end of touring (Berman 2008, 216), while others describe the dwindling interest of their friends in the group as a direct consequence of these changes:

> Debbie Levitt: I know there were a lot of fans back then that did let it go, and never followed it. Or if it wasn't to their liking say, after '65 and couldn't get into *Revolver*, just let it go by. (ibid., 218)

> Wendi Tisland: You know what? I was upset at first. I didn't really care for it. They were changing from the Beatles we knew, their appearances were changing, the music was changing, but I never wrote them off. (ibid., 220)

All of these accounts only reinforce the image of the pre-*Revolver* 'Beatlemania Beatles' as the ultimate American Beatles (and – by association – the ultimate American McCartney), the group that came to America as the headliners of the so-called 'British Invasion' and took it by storm, capturing the hearts and minds of teenagers with the shake of their heads.

In other words, it was to be *this* image of the group and the man that would become enshrined and immortalized. Again, I argue that this is one of the reasons why PID subscribers situate McCartney's death to 1966 – the year that marked the end of the 'mop-top' Beatles. This change was reinforced in 1967 with the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.* As Harper puts it: "*Sergeant Pepper* signified the 'death' of the old Beatles who made girls scream when they sang 'yeah yeah yeah!' The new Beatles blew grass and dropped acid, criticized religion, studied under Maharishi in India, and had a new sound" (Harper 1969, 1). Thus, it is not surprising that *Pepper* would become the quintessential PID album, with nearly all of the tracks containing the so-called 'death clues.'

4. Killing Paul

1969 was the year in which the PID theory was conceived, and the Beatles began to fall apart. Their official breakup on 10 April 1970 was then another event that largely upset the fans. Berman's interviewees describe it as "devastating" and "upsetting:"

> Maryanne Laffin: I was devastated. It was like losing a parent after your parents get divorced. We had a fear that they wouldn't make music again as individuals. And we didn't want to lose that.
>
> Barbara Boggiano: I remember being very, very upset when they broke up. It almost seemed inevitable, but something that was so magical like that . . . But at the time, it just looked like, how can this be? How can these four people come together and make such fabulous music, and how can they break up like this? (Berman 2008, 248)

Ultimately, it was the rift between McCartney and the rest of the group regarding management that sped up the process. McCartney, who was in deep depression during 1969 and 1970, spent most of his time on his farm in Scotland and limited his appearances in public, including the press. His seclusion may have prompted the original hoax as McCartney himself argues in John Neary's 1969 *LIFE* magazine interview: "Perhaps the rumor started because I haven't been much in the press lately . . . The people who are making up these rumors should look to themselves

a little more. There is not enough time in life. They should worry about themselves instead of worrying whether I am dead or not" (Neary 1969, 105). Based on Neary's observations, the snow-ball effect of LaBour's write-up was already unstoppable, however: "Large number of investigators went right to the core of the conundrum and called the Beatles' firm in London, Apple, Ltd" (ibid., 105).

As can be seen, Beatlemaniacs all over the world – but specifically in America – opted to reject the consensus reality of the break-up as it symbolized the end of innocence, youth, and happiness in 1969. People needed a scapegoat. Some blamed Yoko Ono (Berman 2008, 249) as she was an easy and straightforward target, and a number of people opted to go the mythologization route and become subscribers of the PID conspiracy theory: Though "It was unimaginable that the American public easily accepted such an unfounded rumor" as Patterson points out, this is the same country and the same generation that has lived through a number of political scandals and witnessed a multitude of *actual* conspiracies: "We, as a generation, began to dispute what we were told. If a conspiracy hiding the facts of an American President's murder existed, then it would not be out of the realm of possibility to suggest that the death of Paul McCartney could be hidden from the public" (Patterson 1994, 7). This kind of anxiety Patterson describes in his book is consistent with symptoms of the "condition of postmodernity," which include certain "resignation to bottomless fragmentation" (Harvey 1989, 59). As Harvey also points out, "Time-space compression" – which is another symptom of this historical condition – "always exacts its toll on our capacity to grapple with the realities unfolding around us" (ibid., 306), so it makes sense that people choose to cling to realities that give them comfort.

This idea of needing and seeking comfort is consistent with Timothy Melley's concept of "agency panic," which is defined as "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy, the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by someone else or that one has been 'constructed' by powerful, external agents" (Melley 2000, vii). This generation was suffering from paranoia as a form of a post-traumatic stress disorder and if one considers the breakup of the Beatles yet another instance of cultural trauma for the country, it is no wonder that this trauma triggered a conspiracy theory that is still gaining subscribers to this day. Perhaps ironically, the creation of alternative narratives in the form of conspiracy theories is often the answer to this kind of psychological pain and cultural trauma. Someone who chooses to believe in a conspiracy theory is essentially fighting for their agency – again, to seek that comfort – by conforming to the concept of what Emily Apter calls "one-worldedness" and defines as "a delirious aesthetics of systematicity . . . the match between cognition and globalism that is held in place by the paranoid premise

that 'everything is connected'" (Apter 2006, 366). As Patterson points out, "those fans filled with insecurity were only too eager to search for the clues" (Patterson 1994, 10). Clues, that would, indeed, prove that everything is connected. And so, McCartney's body – and more specifically his physical body – became the sacrificial lamb that would bring on this relief and bring back the comforting nostalgia of Beatlemania in the form of a hysterically realist postmodern narrative that mythologizes McCartney's 1966 ceremonial body.

5. Mythologizing Paul

As is clear from the short amount of time that was necessary for PID to spread from America across the world, celebrity death conspiracy theories are capable of harnessing great power and thus hold a prominent place in popular culture. Ballinger defines a celebrity death conspiracy (referred to as CDC in his article) as "specific form of event conspiracy," "a particular type of narrative of celebrity that function[s] to develop and maintain discourses of celebrity status," and "powerful means of immortalizing iconic celebrities" (Ballinger 2014, 180). As opposed to Harris, whose "desire for equality" argument perceives CDCs as a means of bringing the celebrity down on the level of the public, Ballinger seems to be suggesting the opposite – that CDCs can in fact boost that celebrity and "[reinforce] their status as cultural spectacles" (ibid., 179).

I want to suggest that in the case of CDC scenario in which the celebrities die but their death is covered up through the use of a double (while in reality they live on), and certainly in the case of PID, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. While I agree with Harris that it is necessary to ascribe some agency to the fans, the scenario does not work with his equality argument. Rather, it is more consistent with Ballinger's idea of immortalization and cultural spectacles. As he points out, "the essentially pathetic deaths of these celebrities . . . are transformed through conspiracy theory into graphic political events of historical significance" (ibid., 180). This is certainly the case of PID as Beatlemania was such a significant part of the 1960s movements, particularly in the U.S.

What then makes PID even more specific – as well as a case reaching even beyond Ballinger's scope of analysis – is the fact that at least some of its originators (certainly LaBour – as he admits in Glenn's 2009 article) fabricated, fueled, and disseminated the rumor as a *joke* – joke that was then picked up by the group itself (particularly John Lennon) as they opted to participate in this "hoaxing" of the fans. Looking at PID as a narrative (as Ballinger suggests) – essentially *a text*

– it can be examined it alongside other postmodern texts of the time, texts that work with the concepts of "agency panic" as well as "oneworldedness" to try and make sense of the world via literary language. In a 2000 essay which was later published as a part of his 2004 literary study, *The Irresponsible Self*, Wood talks about the necessity to establish a new kind of mode for postmodern works of fiction the storytelling of which has become "a kind of grammar" (Wood 2004, 168). He has named this mode "hysterical realism." As opposed to magical realism, where what is happening could never happen, and actual realism, which is simply too mundane to provide authentic representation of the condition of postmodernity, hysterical realism "exhausts" and "overworks" conventions of realism to a version of reality that has been *pushed to its very limits*. This definition is consistent with Ballinger, who points out that CDC theories as "stories that enhance the spectacular appeal of celebrity figures by endowing them with a high degree of dramatic reality" (Ballinger 2014, 179). What more, it is consistent with the playfulness of the PID conspiracy theory.

While Wood's theory of hysterical realism obviously focuses on works of literary fiction, the way that characters exist, act, and behave in these stories (Wood specifically mentions Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, DeLillo's *Underworld*, Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*) closely resembles the treatment of McCartney in PID. Just as, according to Wood, hysterical realism "suffices to make do with lively caricatures, whose deeper justification arises – if it even arises – from their immersion – in a web of connections" (Wood 2004, 175), so do CDC theories use his 1966 ceremonial body to create such caricature and position it in a center of a web of narratives that both boost the image of the era of Beatlemania and provide comfort to fans in 1969 onwards. As a part of this postmodern hysterical mythologization, McCartney himself becomes void and irrelevant and his physical body is sacrificed for the good of the public.

6. He Blew His Mind Out in a Car

In the hysterically realist narrative of PID, the 'hoaxed' Beatlemaniacs become vital participants (nay, co-protagonists and co-caricatures alongside the ceremonial body of McCartney) in the narrative when they opt to follow the 'clues' left to them by the creators and perpetrators of the theory (who claim that these clues had been left by the group itself). Each clue described by Harper and LaBour in their original articles twist and reimagine the lyrics to take the meaning into a completely different

direction from either the actual authorial meanings of the songs (as described by the group) or even critical interpretations based on cultural studies and literary criticism. These new meanings also possess a sense of the hysterical, slightly macabre, and even *legendary*: Not only had McCartney died and been replaced by a perfect double, but the remaining members of the group decided to defy their managers and secretly send their fans messages coded into the songs to tell the true story of his death. This includes the story of the accident itself which Harper and LaBour indicate to be coded into the group's 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.*

As the first album released after McCartney's alleged death, it tends to be the most referenced in association with the "death clues." The song "A Day in the Life" is then said to represent the narrative of the moment McCartney died. Generally speaking, the song can be described as a commentary on the everyday mundanity of human life and death as a key part of that mundanity. It presents the speaker (the "I" of the song) experiencing a regular day, taking notice of that mundanity in the midst of chaos and anxiety of the condition of postmodernity. Lennon's section of the song in particular reflects the more solemn side of everyday life with the following lyrics:

> He blew his mind out in a car
> He didn't notice that the lights had changed
> A crowd of people stood and stared
> They'd seen his face before
> Nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords (The Beatles 1967)

Though they reportedly refer to a newspaper article Lennon had read while writing the song as well as the death of McCartney's friend Tara Browne (Davies 2014), PID subscribers consider this track – and particularly this section of the track – the ultimate story of McCartney's death. Both Harper and LaBour focus on the song in their articles with LaBour actually interpreting the lyrics "nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords" as related to the alleged decapitation of McCartney during the accident: "When the top of a man's head is sheared off his identity is partially obscured" (LaBour 1969, 2). Once again, this kind of near-absurd and mythologizing narrative is consistent with Wood's description of hysterically realist fiction (i.e. the exhaustion and overworking of realism).

The *Pepper* cover is then said to contain visual clues that tie all the clues from the tracks together. The front of the cover depicts a large crowd of people, mainly celebrities, but also seemingly random figures such as a deceased friend of the group from Liverpool, Stuart Sutcliffe, and the younger versions of The Beatles dressed in black suits. The entire group is standing above what Harper describes

as "grave." One of the onlookers' hand is raised directly above McCartney's head and Harper sees this as "ancient death symbol of either the Greeks or the American Indians" (Harper 1969, 1). LaBour corroborates this part of the theory, claiming that: "It was decided that the appropriate cover would include a grave and so it does" (LaBour 1969, 2). The PID interpretation of the *Pepper* cover even makes connections between the individual tracks. As Harper points out, the cut-out photo of Harrison on the back of the cover (which also contains the lyrics of the songs for first time in the Beatles' discography history) is pointing his index finger at the lyric "Wednesday morning at five o'clock as the day begins" from the song "She's Leaving Home" (The Beatles 1967). Though the song itself has no connection to "A Day in the Life" and tells a story of a young girl who runs away from home to join a commune as many young people were prone to in the late 1960s, Harper considers the timestamp in "She's Leaving Home" directly related to McCartney's car accident described in "A Day in the Life" (even to the point of mistakenly taking them for one song): "George is pointing towards a phrase from the song from 'A Day in the Life' pertaining to a certain Wednesday morning at 5 a.m. when some famous but unnamed person 'blew his mind out in a car'" (Harper 1969, 1).

This obsessive (but at the same time chaotic and even careless) connecting of clues is also consistent with Wood's description of hysterical realism: "The different stories all intertwine, and double and triple on themselves. Characters are forever seeing connections and links and hidden plots, and paranoid parallels . . . There is an obsession in these novels with connecting characters with each other, as information is connected in the World Wide Web" (Wood 2004, 170). Once again, it is apparent that the originators and propellers of PID had on their hands a narrative that perfectly played into the symptoms of the condition of postmodernity (as is apparent from Apter's concept of oneworldedness and Melley's theory of agency panic) and – through their mythologization of McCartney's ceremonial body – were able to both comfort and mock Beatlemaniacs in America and all over the world.

7. Doubling Paul

A key part of the hysterical realism of PID is then the element of the double. This is an element may *also* be considered a staple motif of paranoid fiction as a literary subgenre in general. According to Slethaug, "the double in postmodern fiction explores a divided and discontinuous self in a fragmented universe. Its mission is to decenter the concept of the self, to view human reality as a construct, and to explore the inevitable drift of signifiers away from their referents" (Slethaug 1993,

3). Typically, this doubling is encountered in relation to the protagonist – the "I" of the story (e.g., in P.K. Dick's short story "Imposter") – and so the PID narrative offers a more complicated instance of this phenomenon as it is the subscribers of the conspiracy theory who effectively create these postmodern deconstructionist splits in reaction to their sociocultural distress. Thus, as a part of a hysterically realist narrative that is PID, the McCartney double becomes an *imposter*, a cunning sort of double who is being paid by an authority (in this case the management) who wants to 'trick' Beatles fans into believing that the real McCartney is still alive in order to continue making profit off the Beatles brand. Additionally, this imposter also represents a social construct created by the PID subscribers who have rejected consensus reality for a false universe where this fake McCartney holds power over them.

According to the original creators of the theory, there are several clues in the Beatles albums that there are more than one McCartney – often even more than two. Though Harper indicates that the man calling himself McCartney may be an impostor, it is LaBour who elaborates on the theory in his article, claiming that: "Lennon's plan was to create a false McCartney, bring him into the group as if nothing had happened, and then slowly release the information of the real Paul's death to the world via clues secreted in record albums." LaBour then goes on to describe the system through which this double had been selected, revealing that the management opted to hold a "Look-a-Like contest" in Scotland (LaBour 1969, 2). At this point of the narrative, there are presumably perhaps a dozen McCartney doubles, whichever number of look-alikes decided to sign up for the contest. This notion indicates that the number of possibilities and alternative dimensions for PID just as it was being constructed in LaBour's mind. The winner of this contest – "an orphan from Edinburgh named William Campbell" then, with its near-absurd story of plastic surgery and voice training, pertains to Wood's theory of hysterical realism. Patterson's description of the web of connections that was created between this contest and *Pepper* then once again confirms the status of PID as a hysterical realism: "One of the most fascinating rumors of this period dealt with a McCartney look-alike contest in the early sixties. The Paul McCartney look-alike winner's photograph was never published, but the rumor spread that his name was released as Billy Shears. 'Billy Shears' could well have been a pseudonym for William Campbell" (Patterson 1994, 37). Thus, when in the song "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" McCartney sings

> So let me introduce to you
> The one and only Billy Shears
> And Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (The Beatles 1967),

he (or whoever he is according to PID subscribers) is in fact introducing their "new" band-member to the fans. The following song, "With a Little Help From My Friends," as Patterson adds, then expresses the imposter's anxiety about being accepted by the fans even if he sings "out of tune" (The Beatles 1967), indicating a fear of being identified as the double (Patterson 1994, 38).

As Hassold claims in "The Double and Doubling in Modern and Postmodern Art," "The ways in which doubling is manifested in postmodern art become even more novel and often involve absence as well as metamorphosis. It is almost as if a flood of otherness has been unleashed and has completely erased stable identity" (Hassold 1994, 260). Again, this is consistent with PID when one imagines each potential McCartney double from the competition in a center of individual alternative realities. In the context of these alternative realities, the real McCartney's body – as well as his physical body – becomes obscured and obsolete to make way for this rise of the ceremonial body or bodies.

8. Those Freaks Was Right: Conclusion

Ultimately, though the conspiracy theory most likely originated as a joke, a hoax to perhaps mock those Beatlemaniacs who were not only upset by the imminent breakup of the group but also fatigued by the sociopolitical events of the late 1960s and early 1970s (i.e., the golden age of paranoia), it has prevailed and even continues to metastasize to this day, fueled by the internet. It no longer matters which clues were fabricated as a joke and which clues have been 'discovered' by conspiracy theorists in a serious manner. The PID conspiracy theory is indeed the epitome of an American postmodern celebrity enshrinement – what matters is that the narrative, shrouded in postmodern imagery, has served a purpose to some of the public. Long removed from the main original propellers – Harper, Gibbs, LaBour, and Bennett – the PID theory has provided comfort and entertainment through the mythologization of McCartney's ceremonial body to some Beatles fans in two major ways.

First, it has provided creative minds like Harper and LaBour with the opportunity to deal with the condition of postmodernity through the creation of hysterical narratives and becoming 'postmodern tricksters' – an opportunity so attractive that even Lennon could not resist joining in with the hoaxing of Beatles fans through his McCartney-centered song from *Imagine*, "How Do You Sleep," where one of the lyrics says "Those freaks was right when they said you was dead" (John Lennon 1971). As Lennon has always been seen by the PID subscribers as the person with the most authority and the main disseminator of clues throughout

the Beatles post-1966 discography (LaBour 1969, 2), this song, of course added fuel to the theory.

Second, it has provided comfort to some Beatles fans in times of social insecurity through the revivification of the Beatlemania-era ceremonial body of Paul McCartney. Though the PID narrative is exaggerated, illogical, and almost farcical in nature – all characteristics consistent with the kind of literary mode of writing Wood calls "hysterical realism" – that playfulness along with the joy of "hunting for clues" has ironically given generations of American Beatles fans something stable to hold onto, especially in times of social instability.

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QANON AS A VARIATION OF A SATANIC CONSPIRACY THEORY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This text deals with the phenomenon known as "QAnon" as a variation of a Satanic conspiracy theory. This form of conspiracy operates with evil forces and their agents on Earth in secret Satanic networks. In the case of QAnon, it is mirrored in the narrative which says that prominent Democrats, certain celebrities, financiers and other influential figures are a part of a secret global Satanic and paedophile ring which rules the world. The U.S. president Donald Trump is considered to be secretly fighting against this conspiracy and plans to arrest the evil elites during an expected event known as "The Storm." With a generalized enemy that is Satanized and considered dangerous (as a threat to the American nation) and amoral on the one side, and Trump as a messiah-like hero on the other side, QAnon resonates primarily with the Republican movement. This enemy also became part of a political struggle. QAnon mobilized some Republicans and their supporters in the campaign for the re-election of Donald Trump in 2020 by turning the Q followers into warriors to fight in this important battle of the QAnon cosmic war between good and evil. Nevertheless, QAnon is only one instance of this kind of mobilization in the United States against the imagined inner secret Satanic enemy. Another powerful mobilization could be observed in the connection with the phenomenon of Satanic panic. Some similarities include the narratives about ritual abuse of children by secret Satanists, which took place especially in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, it is important to point out that these narratives have a much older origin and are based on Christian dualism and demonology regarding the idea of the need to fight subversive groups (devil-worshipers, witches, and secret organizations) who have formed a pact with Satan and intend to harm the society. For a large part of American society that nurtures strong belief in both God's and Satan's influence in the world, secret devil-worshippers have traditionally been on of the prominent internal enemies of the American nation. The notion of the need to fight the forces of evil led by Satan and his earthly minions is deeply ingrained in American conspiratorial thinking and in a large part of the American society influenced by Christian fundamentalism and is likely to continue to emerge in other variations, similar to QAnon.

Keywords

QAnon, conspiracy theory, evil elites, construction of an enemy, cosmic war, Christian dualism and demonology, Satanism, paedophilia, children ritual abuse, Donald Trump, U.S. president election

* * *

1. Introduction

THIS text deals with the relatively new conspiracy theory known as "QAnon," which has gained considerable influence in the USA over recent years. QAnon partly rests on the narrative that there is a secret Satanic and paedophile conspiracy of liberals and celebrities. Hillary Clinton, Barrack Obama, George Soros, Tom Hanks, the Rothschild family[1] and many others are all said to be involved in this conspiracy. An important role in the QAnon conspiracy theory is also played by the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump, who allegedly leads a secret struggle against this conspiratorial network, as well as the secret structure that rules the country, known as the Deep State[2].

Although QAnon combines many different conspiracy theories and theses[3], this text will focus primarily on the connection between QAnon and the idea of a secret Satanic conspiracy. Although for many the idea of a Satanic paedophile conspiracy within the QAnon world may seem absurd, it is, and has long been, a key part of the American conspirative mindset related to the fight against an inner Satanic enemy. QAnon is based on the concept of Christian dualism, where in the cosmic war (see Juergensmeyer 2000), the forces of good on the part of the Christian God and the forces of evil led by Satan oppose each other (see also Thomas 2020). The need to engage in this struggle in the United States is mediated mainly by fundamentalist Christian circles, which have historically had a great influence on American society, including the political sphere. As will be shown, QAnon is merely one variation on the mobilization into "battle" in the age-old struggle against the forces of evil and the inner Satanic enemy, which in the end may not even really exist.

I will primarily proceed from the text "From Evil Others to Evil Elites: A Dominant Pattern in Conspiracy Theories Today" by Véronique Campion-Vincent (2005). The next chapter will discuss the concept of conspiracy theory delimitation, referring to Michael Barkun (2016). Next, I briefly describe the QAnon ideology

[1] Sometimes referred to as the leaders of the Satanic cult. It can be linked to the centuries-old trope "about an international banking conspiracy, claiming the Rothschild dynasty is funding an evil global plot" (Trickey 2018).

[2] In the text I understand Deep State as a conspiracy theory concerning the existence of a hidden government secretly ruling the USA. Trump backers' essential argument is that "there are entrenched forces deep within the American government that are working to sabotage the nascent administration, preventing them from enacting policy agenda." (Hafford 2017).

[3] For example, one says that CIA installed Kim Jong-un as the leader of North Korea to control him (see Caffier 2018) or financier J. P. Morgan sank the Titanic to assassinate his supposed rival millionaires (Trickey 2018).

as a mode of conspiracy thinking which resonates with American Republicans. I will also show QAnon to be a variation of the Satanic conspiracy theory, which is a continuation of older narratives about devil-worshipers. Specifically, I will interpret QAnon as an extension of the themes and motives that emerged in the Satanic panic in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. These narratives are currently important for the Republican-oriented side in the fight against the internal enemy, into which the liberal/Democratic part of the political and social spectrum in the USA is also projected. Thus, through the association with Satanism and paedophilia, liberals/Democrats were demonized and therefore discredited in view of the recent Presidential elections, pitting the Republican Donald Trump and the Democrat Joe Biden against each other. It can therefore be said that QAnon helped mobilize Republicans to vote against the "Satanized" Democrats.

2. Conspiracy theory

Conspiracy theories involving evil elites are not a recent phenomenon. Conspiracy thinking and various related conspiracy theories are common in Western history. In addition to conspiracies concerning demonized minorities such as Jews, Romani people, people suffering from leprosy, etc., who were blamed for harming society (Campion-Vincent 2005, 113–14; Victor 2015, 693; Di Nola 1998, 309–11; Ginzburg 2003: 49–81), there have also been conspiracy theories which centre on evil elites, for example, in the form of aristocracy trying to harm ordinary people (Campion-Vincent 2005, 108–9) or to cover-up crimes committed by elites (i.e. aristocrats). A good example of the latter is a theory concerning the identity of Jack the Ripper, claiming that he was a grandson of Queen Victoria and the Royal family covered it up (Kilday and Nash 2018).

According to Michael Barkun, conspiracy theories are modes of thinking. They provide "templates imposed upon the world to give the appearance of order to events." (Barkun 2016, 1) Barkun continues:

> These mental constructs assert that some small and hidden groups have through special means, powers, or manipulations brought about visible and evil effects of whose true cause most people are unaware. Only the conspiracy theorists, with their claim to special knowledge, are said to know the truth. (Barkun 2016, 2)

Campion-Vincent states that conspiracy theories help to explain complex problems, and random, negatively perceived or feared phenomena by a simple causality. They are based on the idea that specific people or organized groups of people are behind these phenomena. They work secretly and conspiratorially with the interest of acting on these phenomena (such as catastrophes, diseases, poverty, etc.) and possibly profit from them (Campion-Vincent 2005, 107, 113–14). Some examples are the conspiracy theory regarding the alleged attempt to chip people in order to seize control by a narrow group of powerful individuals (such as Bill Gates), or the conspiracy theory that imagines a reality in which the spread of COVID-19 is an artificially induced problem meant to cause fear, which is a plot of governments and pharmaceutical companies who would make huge profits from selling a vaccine. The idea of a government being in the hands of secret societies, such as the Illuminati, whose goal is to bring about a New World Order where everything and everybody is controlled by secret elites still survives in the society as well.[4]

Currently, conspiracy theories are experiencing great expansion in the Western cultural area, from the Flat Earth theory to various theories about the causes of the spread of COVID-19. This boom in conspiracy theories, as well as of other forms of disinformation may be partly explained by the transformation of the media. Traditional media such as printed media, radio and television have ceased to be the main source of information for many people. They have largely been replaced by more participatory media such as social media (see McQuail and Deuze 2020, 5–7), where various conspiracy theories spread very effectively across large parts of society.[5] As Ethan Zuckerman states, it is currently possible to observe the "emergence of spaces where non-professional individuals can report what's happening in their communities, amplify stories that might have otherwise been missed, and demand attention towards subaltern narratives" that were "previously ignored because they have little overlap with consensus reality," which results in creating and maintaining alternative realities. (Zuckerman 2019) Conspiracy theories have

[4] Various conspiracy theories and disinformation have been adopted by some politicians and celebrities, too. It significantly contributes to the spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation among the public. For example, one of the most popular singers in modern Czech history, Karel Gott, believed in and publicly spoke about Illuminati and other secret societies and mystical/occult orders ruling the world. According to him, nothing happens by coincidence because secret societies define scenarios in history and manage all important historical events such as wars, including the decision of who will be the victor (Machalická 2019).

[5] Although social media such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* have been trying to prevent this, especially in 2020, which was also connected with the influence of QAnon (see Iyengar 2020 or O'Sullivan 2020).

always been present; what is new is the echo that the stories of conspiracy theorists produce in the general public today (Campion-Vincent 2005, 113).

At the same time, conspiracy theories currently have a significant impact on how people perceive the world around them, and on how they act within it. For example, the question of who people will support in elections and who will rise up in protest is deeply affected by conspiracy theories. Conspiratorial thinking, for example, can also be linked to protests against economic globalization and, in particular, against the International Monetary Fund, where the idea that financial elites have agreed to exploit the world stands out. "These elites are consistently depicted as 'enemies of the people,' linked through malevolent conspiracies, and aiming to throw the powerless into the clutches of 'the free market'" (Campion-Vincent 2005, 111). Popular conspiracy theories also work in popular culture, which, as Christopher Partridge shows, also plays an important role in the way we look at the world around us (Partridge 2004, 4). For example, *The X-Files*, which worked with the idea of a conspiracy by the U.S. government and the secret services to conceal the existence of extraterrestrial life in connection with UFOs and their presence on Earth, had a strong influence on conspiratorial thinking in the American society (Campion-Vincent 2005, 112–13).

As Campion-Vincent also demonstrates, another important aspect of conspiracy theories is that they serve to mobilize the masses against an enemy. They "reinforce the in-group's cohesion through the designation of enemies." Here, the conspirators act as a threat to the whole of society as well as the nation itself. They are seen as a deviant element, one that should be expelled from the national "body," and an enemy to be united against and fought (Campion-Vincent 2005, 106–7). This enemy can be internal or external, real or just supposed. As Juergensmeyer (2000) shows in his analysis of religious violent/terrorist acts, the enemy is also Satanized.

Attributes that indicate danger to members of a community and disruption of the social or even divine natural order are assigned to the enemy. At the same time, the enemy is shown to be highly amoral and is assigned behaviour that is far beyond social norms and taboos (see also Campion-Vincent 2005, 107). This enemy is also perceived as the oppressor of a certain group of people or even entire nations. These elements can also serve to legitimize violence against the enemy, such as terrorist acts (Juergensmeyer 2000). In certain cases, not only extremists but also political elites or members of the general population may take part in it. The Holocaust was an example of mass extermination of the internal enemy in the form of the Jews. The Jewish conspiracy was directed against the German people and the German

race[6] (see Goodrick-Clarke 2004; Partridge 2005, 323). However, theories of a Jewish conspiracy were widespread outside Germany and long before the advent of Nazism. Hundreds of years before Hitler, for example, it was believed that "Jewish magicians [were] kidnapping and stabbing children for evil rituals. The blood produced from these rites was rumoured to be ritually consumed as drink or mixed into matzo" (Thomas 2020).

Essentially, the deep-rooted idea of a global Jewish conspiracy (associated sometimes directly with the fictive document titled "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" from the 1900s, including a link of a Satanic Jewish cabal to the Antichrist) can also be connected to QAnon which outlines a conspiracy of powerful elites of the world (see Thomas 2020).[7] Nevertheless, Zuckerman points out that although the cabal is supposed to include rich financers with Jewish roots like George Soros and the Rothschild family, the theory is more anti-elite than explicitly anti-Semitic (2019). In spite of that, QAnon is often designated as a far-right conspiracy theory (see Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 37). According to Amarasingam and Argentino, it is possible to find "resonance with other far-right extremist movements, such as the various militant, anti-government, white nationalist, and neo-Nazi extremist organizations across the United States" (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 39). Zuckerman speaks about an "overlap behind the 'traditional values' preached by some QAnon patriots and the revanchist anti-feminists of the pickup artist scene" (2019).

3. About QAnon

QAnon is a conspiracy theory (or a bounded set of conspiracy theories and conspirative claims) which outlines the existence of a cabal of Satan-worshiping paedophiles operating in a global child sex-trafficking ring, one that is also ruling the world.[8]

[6] The reiteration of the conspiracy theory of a global Jewish conspiracy is still an important part of the neo-Nazi scene to this day, where it is embedded for example in the idea of a world ruled by the ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government) which posits that the U.S. government is a Jewish-controlled puppet regime. (Goodrick-Clarke 2002, 19).

[7] FBI also indicates that QAnon is a threat to national security because, as a specific ideological base, it can stimulate extremists to violence (Winter 2019). For violent crimes linked to the QAnon conspiracy see Amarasingam and Argentino (2020, 39–41).

[8] It is important to mention the Pizzagate conspiracy theory from 2016 as a predecessor of QAnon. According to it, the pizza restaurant *Comet Ping Pong* in Washington, D.C. was supposed to be a centre of secret child sex trafficking ring and the place of Satanic child abuse rituals. Hillary Clinton and other prominent Democrats were supposed to be related to that ring. The theory alleged that there were codes and Satanic symbols in hacked John Podesta's (chair of Hillary Clinton's 2016 U.S. presidential campaign) emails pointing to the *Comet Ping Pong* and child sex ring. It resulted,

This ring supposedly consists of top Democrats including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, financiers such as George Soros, and celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, and Ellen DeGeneres. As it is seen as a global conspiracy, it also involves conspirators from other parts of the world, including several prominent religious figures such as Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama (Roose 2020).

According to Zuckerman, in the main narrative "The Cabal," global elites aim to undermine American democracy, destroy American freedom, subjugate the nation, and advance their own nefarious agenda. Based on the conspiracy theory, the U.S. president Donald Trump actively (but secretly) fights against these forces which are also connected with the idea of the Deep State as a hidden U.S. government which is supposed to be working against the American nation. In this war, Donald Trump cooperates with Robert Mueller (lawyer and ex-director of FBI, in 2001–2013) to arrest Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and other members of the Deep State during the expected event called "The Storm" (Zuckerman 2019). For this reason, the re-election of Donald Trump as the U.S. president in November 2020 was crucial because, according to the conspiracy theory, he is the One who can put an end to the operations of the Satanic and paedophile ring which rules the world and which includes politicians, the media and Hollywood (Rozsa 2019). As to why, according to the theory, children are abused in Satanic rituals, Thomas writes the following:

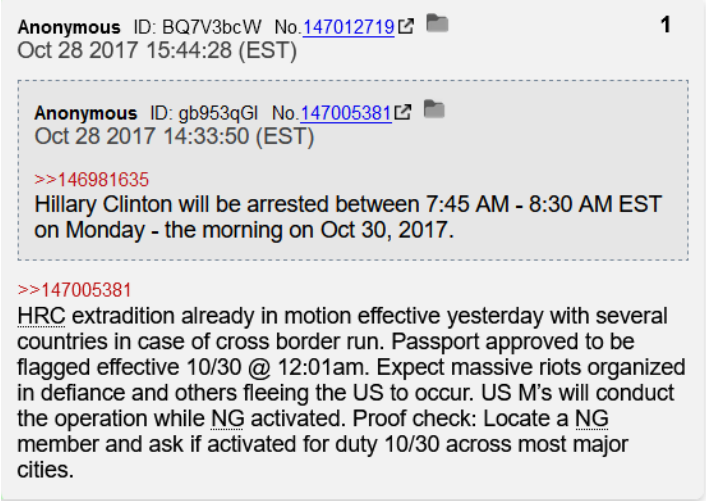
> The conspiracy claims that deep-state politicians and the "Hollywood elite" are involved in a large child abduction network that harvests the chemical compound adrenochrome – which is obtained from the oxidation of adrenaline – from sexually abused children subjected to satanic rituals.
> QAnons say that adrenochrome is consumed by some Democratic politicians and Hollywood elites for its psychedelic and anti-aging effects and is more potent when harvested from a frightened victim. (Thomas 2020).

QAnon began on 28 October 2017 in the anonymous internet forum *4chan*. In a thread called "Calm Before the Storm," an anonymous user "Q" posted that "Hillary Clinton will be arrested between 7:45 AM - 8:30 AM EST on Monday - the morning on Oct 30, 2017" (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 37),[9] which was followed by other posts of Q in *4chan* and *8chan* (latterly *8kun*)[10].

for example, in an armed assault on the restaurant by Edgar Welch, who wanted to rescue children potentially being trapped in the restaurant. See for example Amarasingam and Argentino (2020, 37–9).

[9] This prediction, similarly to other QAnon predictions, never eventuated.

[10] Q (also as "Q Clearance Patriot") continued posting messages over the following 3 years and is currently still active. There is still no consensus on the original Q's identity and who currently manages Q's account (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 38). Nevertheless, over different periods, there has probably been more than one person writing Q's posts (Gilbert 2020).



Source: https://qanon.pub/.

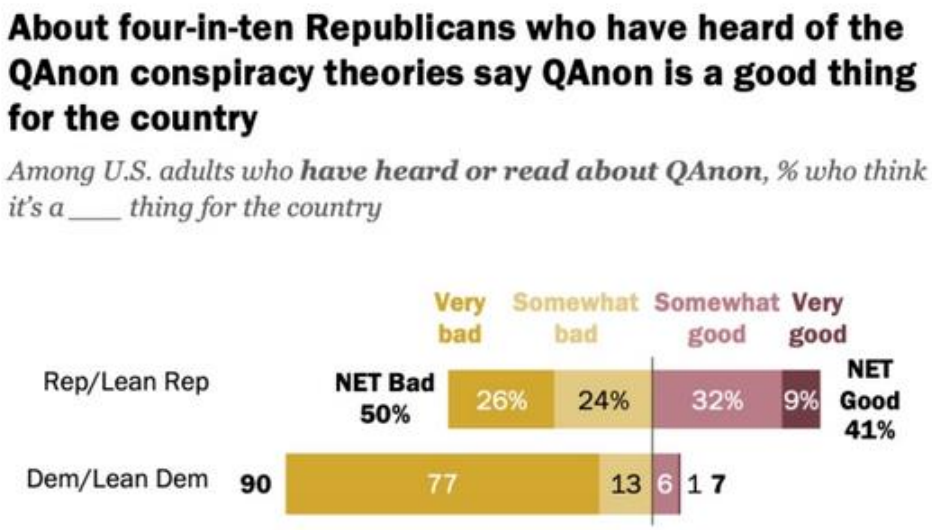
In their posts, "Q" claimed to be a high-level government insider who has 'Q level' clearance at the United States Department of Energy which grants them access to top secret information (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 37–8).

Several followers of Q started to analyse and interpret the posts. The number of Q's followers increased over time and they also established new online communities and related accounts in other platforms and social medias (e.g., *Reddit*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*). As Zuckerman describes, QAnon's spread is heavily based on the active participation of its followers, who do not only want to read the messages but want to be active in the process of uncovering the real "truth" and sharing this "truth" with others. These active Q followers (called "bakers") built upon the central narrative by adding new elements to support its claims. They developed a complex (un)reality and a closed universe of mutually reinforcing facts and interpretations.[11] As Zuckerman also points out, what is interesting about QAnon is also that it may "be the first conspiracy to have fully embraced the participatory nature of the contemporary internet" (2019).

The public visibility and influence of QAnon rapidly grew during 2020. According to PEW Research Center, in March 2020, 76% of survey participants had never heard of QAnon (PEW Research Center 2020a). However, in September 2020, that figure had dropped to 53% of the participants (Pew Research Center 2020b). The survey also showed that "An overwhelming majority of Democrats

[11] It well illustrates the fact that the special knowledge of conspiracy theorists (see Barkun 2016, 2) is not static. This knowledge about the real "truth" is dynamically constructed. It also means that conspiracy theories can be very flexible and are able to evolve and adapt in new conditions.

who have heard something about QAnon (90%) say it is at least 'somewhat bad' for the country, including 77% who say it is 'very bad.'" But 41% of Republicans who have heard of QAnon say it "is somewhat or very good for the country, modestly fewer than the 50% who think it is at least somewhat bad" (Pew Research Center 2020b).



Source: Pew Research Center 2020b.

As the figures above show, QAnon mainly resonates with Republicans. A considerable number of Republican candidates to U.S. Congress in the 2020 elections had also spread messages from the QAnon platform or expressed some degree of support for QAnon[12] (e.g., Republican QAnon supporter Marjorie Taylor Greene, Thomas 2020). Donald Trump himself retweeted a number of posts from the *Twitter* accounts connected to QAnon (Nguyen 2020). Nevertheless, he denied knowing anything about QAnon besides his knowledge that QAnon fans like him, which he appreciates, and that they "love our country" and "they are very strongly against paedophilia" (Breuninger 2020; Gabbat 2020). But the fact is that during 2020 a huge network of QAnon accounts[13] (for example QAnon *Facebook* pages alone boast 3 million followers, Thomas 2020) were spreading disinformation and pro-

[12] Alex Kaplan lists 97 U.S. Congress candidates "who have endorsed or given credence to the conspiracy theory or promoted QAnon content": 89 from them were Republicans, 2 Democrats, 1 Libertarian, 1 member of the Independent Party of Delaware, and 4 independents. (Kaplan 2020).

[13] According to Wong "The largest Facebook groups dedicated to QAnon had approximately 200,000 members in them before Facebook banned them in mid-August. When Twitter took similar action against QAnon accounts in July, it limited features for approximately 150,000 accounts" (2020).

Trump propaganda on social media, especially on *Twitter*, which was closely connected with Trump's re-election campaign (Porter 2020).

QAnon definitively helped mobilize a part of the Republicans and their adherents before the Presidential elections in November 2020 by constructing, designating and Satanizing the enemy which in their minds is simply seen as directly responsible for the "evil" in America and in the world. As it will be explained in the next chapter, this was accomplished by maintaining the connection of the enemy with Satanism and child abuse as a potent mobilization aspect against the enemy in American society.

4. QAnon as a Variation of Satanic Conspiracy

In QAnon (un)reality, supporters of Donald Trump assign him a messianic role in the war against the secret elite, and connect him with the expectations of "The Storm" and "Great Awakening"[14] of the American nation[15]. The enemy in this war is portrayed as a secret global ring of Satanic paedophiles: but why *secret Satanic paedophiles*?

The answer lies in the setting of American society itself. The "secret Satanic enemy" is one of its most prominent internal and external enemies. It is comparable for example to the "Communists" as a category of internal "social deviant" groups which were imagined and believed to be a threat to American society, especially during the anti-Communist Red Scare of the 1950s (Victor 2015, 693). The whole Communist Bloc during the Cold War was conceptualized as a powerful external enemy – as a party of evil in a dualistic view of the world (Di Nola 358–9; Partridge 2005, 321) – while "Communists" in USA were thought to be internal agents of evil. The fear of "Communists" as a threat to the nation is still perceptible in American society today, and the stigmatizing label "Communists" was also frequently used by the Republicans and their supporters during the 2020 presidential elections to demonise the Democrats. For example, Donald Trump himself commented on the Democratic vice-presidential nominee Kamala Harris in this way: "She is a Communist. She's not a Socialist. She's well beyond a socialist. Take a look at her views. She wants to open up the borders to allow killers and murderers and rapists to pour into our country" (Press Trust of India 2020).

[14] In QAnon "Great Awakening" is connected with a "mass realization about the truth of the world" (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 40).

[15] For its millennialism, eschatology, and reiteration of Biblical narratives, QAnon can also be seen as a kind of new religious movement of the current digital era (see Argentino 2020).

Another way to demonise opponents in the American society is to refer to them as devil-worshippers, which is also a very influential stigmatization. This kind of demonization of the enemy is heavily based on the Christian dualist worldview where the American nation (i.e. the moral part) is on God's side[16] and the enemies are forces of evil on Satan's side (Di Nola 1998, 358–9; Argentino 2020). However, this Christian dualism is not a strict dualism because the two forces are not equal and balanced. It is because the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil in particular events in the end (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 2), such as the Apocalypse in the Bible (or the "Storm" in the QAnon theory). For many Americans, the struggle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan comprise a metaphysical dimension and the battles form a part of their religious view of the world. The majority of the American people believe in the real existence of God and Satan (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 11–12), which differentiates USA from most European countries (Muchembled 2008, 291–2). For example, in the PEW research (2015), 63% of Americans were absolutely certain about the existence of God, while 20% were fairly certain about the existence of God.[17] According to Statista research from 2016, 61% of Americans believed in the Devil (Statista Research Department 2016).

Historically, Christian dualism in American society was rooted in the Protestantism of the American settlers (mainly Calvinism, and specifically puritanism) and their fears of the forces of evil around them and within their communities (resulting, for example, in the Salem witch trials). Calvinism was the main religious stream in modern American history and Protestantism, and Christianity in general, is still dominant in the current religious American milieu (Václavík 2013, 32–3; Hutchinson 2003). According to the PEW research, 65% of American adults described themselves as Christians in 2019, 43% of adults identified with Protestantism, and 20% with Catholicism (Pew Research Center 2019).

Christian fundamentalism and conservativism formed in many denominations, organizations, and movements such as Christian Right has had a huge impact in American society and is traditionally closely connected to the political sphere, mostly to the Republicans (see Václavík 2013, 43–4). As Christian dualism and demonology, including references to demonic evil forces acting in this world, are the core of American Christian fundamentalism (see Partridge 2005, 220), such a setting logically results in conspirative thinking claiming there are hidden forces

[16] See for example declaration "In God we trust" as the official motto of USA.
[17] 88% of evangelical Protestants was absolutely certain about the existence of God (Pew Research Center 2015).

of evil with secret human agents on the Earth who harm, or intend to harm, American society and the nation as a whole (Partridge 2005, 316–25). As Partridge describes: "Conspiracies about dark networks of individuals plotting world domination overlap with eschatological discourse about the rise of the Antichrist because both deal with the problem of powerlessness in the face of widespread evil" (Partridge 2005, 324). This conspirative thinking resulted in the creation of QAnon, which fits well the world view of parts of conservative Christians, as well as Republicans. According to Wong, "QAnon appears to be most popular among older Republicans and evangelical Christians" (2020).

QAnon followers have used a wide range of online tactics, including the making of "documentaries" based on misinformation or hashtags with QAnon messaging (Wong 2020). The campaign which alerted followers to child abuse, sex trafficking, and paedophilia, using hashtags #SaveTheChildren[18] and #SaveOurChildren was very influential. It helped spread QAnon among evangelical Christian social media (Petrosky 2020) and also attracted people from outside of QAnon, such as influencer mothers sharing QAnon's frightening stories about kidnappings (Jennings 2020).

Nevertheless, the construction of the Satanic enemy is not limited to QAnon, but is a natural part of long-term American conspirative imagination based on Christian dualism and demonology. The Satanic enemy is still present in (re)constructing the American nation, sometimes latently, and sometimes very explicitly. It was clearly visible during the Satanic panic of 1980s and 1990s, which spread globally, but began in the USA and reached very high intensities there. During the Satanic panic in the USA, a broadly shared moral panic emerged about the existence of a secret and conspirative network of Satanists[19] connected to politics, schools, and kindergartens. These imagined secret Satanic networks were blamed for obscene orgies, drugs, cannibalism, bloody sacrifice of animals and humans, and especially for the sacrifice and sexual abuse of children[20] during their devil-worship rituals (Bromley 1991; Victor 1990; Victor 2015; Frankfurter 2001). Some proponents of this conspiracy theory assumed that up to tens of thousands of child victims were annually sacrificed by Satanists which was related to the national data of missing children (Bromley 1991, 57). Nevertheless, extensive police investigations

[18] "Save the Children" is a child welfare organization and the use of this name in a QAnon hashtag was unauthorized.

[19] There were even some assertions that this Satanic conspiratorial network is international (Victor 2015, 693).

[20] The ritual torture and sexual abuse of children was also supposed to reverse their perception of good and evil, and to brainwash them into becoming part of this secret Satanic cult (Victor 2015, 693; see also Frankfurter 2001, 380).

and court trials did not produce any evidence about the existence of this Satanic conspiracy.[21] As Introvigne writes:

> Not even in one case was a satanic organization or cult discovered by the police and the courts, although in a handful of cases a single individual or a small group mentioned Satanism as a motivation for their crimes. The conclusion was that a very limited number of self-styled Satanists did commit crimes, but there was no conspiracy to systematically abuse children or sacrifice human beings to Satan by organized, international and "multi-generational" Satanist cults. (2016, 453)

As Victor describes, the Satanic cult rumours were derived from ancient legends about "children who are kidnapped and murdered by a secret conspiracy of evil strangers who use the children's blood and body parts in religious rituals. The legend is an enduring one, because it offers universal appeal to the latent fears of all parents everywhere" (Victor 1990, 60). It is one of the sources of imagination that "purity and innocence is being endangered by powerful agents of absolute evil" (Victor 1990, 60). Because of the children abuse and sacrifice elements, too, the Satanic panic resonated in Christian fundamentalist circles, as well as in the general society.

For example, a lot of parental organizations, psychologists, and psychiatrists took this conspiracy theory very seriously, and trusted the stories of their patients and children about Satanic rituals which (might) have never happened, and which included the evil activities mentioned above. The spread of Satanic panic was heavily influenced by the publication of the book *Michelle Remembers* (1980), co-authored by the psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder and his patient Michelle Smith, who had allegedly been abused in a Satanic cult as a child. As Frankfurter describes, based on this kind of testimonies, mental health experts, who interpreted them as recovered memories, operated with Satanic ritual abuse (SRA) as a category of child sexual abuse typically resulting in such extreme post-traumatic responses such as multiple personality disorder, self-mutilation, and suicide (Frankfurter 2001, 353–4). It is also important to note that the fear of Satanism also grew out of the fear of "dangerous cults" (e.g., mass suicide and murders in Jim Jones's *Peoples Temple*), who were blamed for using brainwashing on their followers in the previous decade (1970s). As Frankfurter continues:

[21] The main American Satanic organizations such as *Church of Satan* and *Temple of Set* strictly distanced themselves from the ritual abuse and sacrifice of children.

> The existence of Satanic cults was taken for granted in these circles, partly because such experts found more and more of their patients offering lurid firsthand "testimonies" to Satanist cults – invariably as "recovered memories" – and partly because the culture had been sensitized since the 1970s to anxieties about real alternative religions. (Frankfurter 2001, 353–4)

Partridge points out that "while invested with Christian demonological content, Satanic panic stories include elements which can be found throughout history and in many cultures" and "the letting of blood, sacrifice, cannibalism, and the defilement and murder of children appear in numerous demonologies that societies have constructed in order to demonize those they mistrust" (Partridge 2005, 219). Partridge continues that "in all these cultures, evil is most powerfully attributed to the demonized other by incorporating children into the narrative" (Partridge 2005, 220). These allegations were made about first-century Christians, witches in Europe, as they have been made about Jews (Partridge 2005, 220). In Europe since the Middle Ages, the internal enemy as the demonic other inside Christian culture (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 8–9) is alleged to be in a conspiracy with Satan as the absolute evil and the archenemy of God, as it was also the case of different (real or imagined) heretic movements and groups, witches (Partridge and Christianson 2014, 8–10), Jews, and recently secret organizations such as the Order of Freemasons or the Order of Illuminati (Partridge 2005, 320–1). It is still present in parts of current Christian and post-Christian cultures and conspirative milieus.

QAnon is only an instance of Satanic conspiracies in history (and in the USA) rooted in Christian dualism and demonological paradigm. Following this paradigm, in this specific case, the Democrats, liberal elites, and celebrities are constructed as the Satanic and paedophile enemy. This is still a very powerful construction in the American society and can be effectively used for the stigmatization of opponents. Similar to other Satanic conspiracies, an enemy is simply designated, connected with Satan and evil, and portraited as dangerous and amoral. In the context of QAnon (un)reality, it specifically means that the forces of evil are associated with the secret international Satanic cabal ring which endangers order (i.e., God's order) because it works against American society and the nation (see Zuckerman 2019). As described, amoral aspects highlighted by associations with paedophilia and violence against children appear very effective in the construction of an enemy both cross-culturally and cross-historically.

The QAnon narrative also operates with a messianic figure. Like Jesus Christ, Donald Trump is believed to have the agency to triumph over the Satanic arch enemy in a specific event (i.e. "The Storm"). Nevertheless, it will only be one (although maybe final) battle in an ancient cosmic war. As Juergensmeyer describes,

cosmic war is "cosmic" because it evokes great battles related to the metaphysical conflict between good and evil (Juergensmeyer 2000, 146). In Christian dualism it is a matter of God's forces of good struggling against Satan's forces of evil throughout human history. As Campion-Vincen points out, the important aspect of conspiracy theories is the mobilization against the enemy (Campion-Vincen 2005, 106–7). Q followers perceived themselves as warriors[22] in the cosmic war between good and evil and they mobilized for one of the most important battles of the cosmic war – the re-election of Donald Trump as president of the USA.

5. Discussion

The scope of the article was very limited as it focused only on the Satanic conspiracy aspect of QAnon. Nevertheless, the situation surrounding QAnon is, of course, more complex. It has many aspects, levels, connections and raises many questions which were not discussed in this text. For example, we could ask how much QAnon supporters believe in QAnon narratives and theses.

It is also not possible to assert that all QAnon supporters believe in QAnon claims literarily, including the central narrative of the Satanic paedophile ring and its Satanic rituals where children are abused (see Edelman 2020). According to Schaffner's poll filled also by 350 QAnon supporters the claim that "Democratic politicians and Hollywood stars are part of a global network that tortures and sexually abuses children in Satanic rituals" 62 percent of the QAnon supporters as definitely or probably true. The other QAnon theories in the poll – "Trump is preparing mass arrests, Mueller was secretly ordered by Trump to investigate paedophiles, and celebrities harvest adrenochrome from children" – scored between 44 and 54 percent. (Edelman 2020; Schaffner 2020).

Based on these numbers, questions can be raised concerning the meanings and functions of QAnon for its supporters. QAnon can be seen as a product of the current strong polarisation of American society and the "cultural war" between the Democrats and the Republicans and their different ideals for American society. QAnon represents fears of and resistance to the world that is (in the Republican view) supposed to be brought about by the Democrats, such as fears regarding mass immigration. QAnon also expresses fears about the role of the American nation in the globalised world. These fears are in a conspirative mind usually projected into globalist forces such as international banks, UN or secret societies which supposedly aim

[22] As "digital soldiers" who ho want to be part of the Great Awakening (McGahan 2020).

to create a totalitarian "new world order," which is in the QAnon (un)reality aimed to destroy the American freedom and independence. In this context the hero status given to Donald Trump by QAnon shows that he is a tribune of the people who wants to "make America great again." This is also very closely intertwined with the Deep State theory. According to QAnon, Donald Trump is supposed to be secretly fighting against the Deep State, which promises the QAnon followers that the imagined America will be returned to the (right part of the) American nation.

QAnon also grew on substrates of other conspiracy theories working with distrust in the official government, such as the conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11 including theses that there were individuals in the government involved in the September 11 attacks. QAnon can also be seen as one expression of the paranoid style of American Politics described by Hofstadter (1964). He gave examples from American history that showed the paranoid style with the "sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" as a permanent force in American politics and exists on both sides of politics. Hofstadter, referring to Norman Cohn, describes the paranoid style in this manner:

> Norman Cohn believed he found a persistent psychic complex that corresponds broadly with what I have been considering – a style made up of certain preoccupations and fantasies: "the megalomaniac view of oneself as the Elect, wholly good, abominably persecuted, yet assured of ultimate triumph; the attribution of gigantic and demonic powers to the adversary; the refusal to accept the ineluctable limitations and imperfections of human existence, such as transience, dissention, conflict, fallibility whether intellectual or moral; the obsession with inerrable prophecies . . . systematized misinterpretations, always gross and often grotesque." (Hofstadter 1964)

This characterization is an important link for a better understanding and exploration of QAnon and the role of Donald Trump.

In QAnon many things work together. It connected an internal enemy (liberals/Democrats) and an external enemy ("globalists") with the Satanic conspiracy. It revived the narratives of secret Satanists abusing children which obviously did not die in 1990s. QAnon showed that these narratives are still valid for a part of the American society and created a new Satanic panic (or paranoia) around them. In comparison with the 1980s and 1990s Satanic panic, QAnon interconnected hugely different conspiracy theories about evil elites and hidden forces in the world into one bulk grown in a virtual environment, generalized the Satanic enemy by linking various elites to the Satanic paedophile ring, and extensively used the Satanic paedophile conspiracy topic in the political struggle via digital technologies.

In the current reality, where Donald Trump did not win the presidential election and "The Storm" did not come, it is important to consider how QAnon will continue to operate. At the moment, it seems that it is not the end of QAnon as it adopted a new conspiracy narrative of rigged elections and ballot frauds (see Collins 2020), which was spread by Donald Trump himself (already before the election in November 2020). It will be interesting to see how QAnon morphs in the new circumstances of a Biden presidency and if it maintains its main narrative of conspirative Satanic paedophiles.

6. Conclusion

The article discussed the conspiracy theory known as QAnon as a variation of Satanic conspiracy. Since forming 3 years ago, QAnon has become a very influential conspiracy theory in the United States. Under QAnon, the stigma of the generalized enemy that is Satanized and considered dangerous (as a threat to the American people) and absolutely amoral (references to paedophilia, child abuse and child trafficking) fell upon the Democrats, liberals, some financiers, celebrities, and other well-known figures. They are accused of being members of an international Satanic and paedophile conspiracy that the Republican President Donald Trump has been secretly fighting. QAnon thus logically resonates primarily with the fundamentalist and conservative Christian circles, and some members of the Republican movement.

This Satanic paedophile enemy also became part of a political struggle. QAnon mobilized Republican voters and might have had an impact on the 2020 United States presidential elections. The campaign for Donald Trump's re-election made it possible for the QAnon followers to identify themselves as warriors in what they believe to be the most important battles in the QAnon's cosmic war between good and evil. Although Donald Trump narrowly lost the election, QAnon is an example of the influence conspiracy theories can have in both the current political situation and the development of public affairs.

Although QAnon is explicitly political, it is still one example of the mobilization in the United States against the inner Satanic enemy, which is forms a part of American conspiratorial thinking. One example of the way in which such mobilizations could be observed is the phenomenon of the Satanic panic which took place in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, the narratives in the context of the Satanic panic have much older origins and are based on Christian dualism and demonology regarding the idea of the need to combat subversive groups which are deemed to have a pact with the Devil and aim to harm the society.

For a large part of American society, which maintains a very strong belief in the real existence of God and Satan, one of the internal enemies of the American nation have traditionally been Communists, as well as Satanists. QAnon illustrates well how deeply the idea of a secret Satanic enemy is rooted in American society. The notions of the need to fight the forces of evil led by Satan and his earthly minions are deeply ingrained in American conspiratorial thinking and in American society as a whole, and are likely to continue to emerge in other variations, as they have done in QAnon, which can also be viewed as a new Satanic panic of today. As Victor notes, they "will continue well into the future, as long as there are large numbers of people who believe that an evil supernatural entity has human co-conspirators" (Victor 2015, 693).

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INTERVIEWS, CONFERENCE REPORTS, REVIEWS, TRIBUTES

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BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES: 11TH BRNO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ENGLISH, AMERICAN AND CANADIAN STUDIES: 12–14 FEBRUARY 2020

Anna Mikyšková

ON 12–14 November 2020, in accordance with a tradition which goes back to the mid-1980s, Brno hosted the conference of English, American and Canadian studies. The conference is held every five years by the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University in cooperation with the Czech Association for the Study of English (CZASE). The aim of this interdisciplinary conference is to provide academics with an international platform where they can share and discuss their research within and across various disciplines, including literary and cultural studies, linguistics, translation studies and ELT methodology. This year, that objective was emphasized in the conference topic "Breaking the Boundaries" which encouraged more than 130 delegates to rethink established methods of research, to question the limits of their fields and to bring new perspectives to scholarly dialogue.

The three-day conference offered four keynote lectures and seven blocks of multiple parallel sessions devoted to various disciplines and topics, which all took place in building B of the Faculty of Arts. The conference was officially opened on Wednesday by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Milan Pol, and by the Head of the Brno English Department and the Chair of CZASE, Jana Chamonikolasová.

At the conference opening, Libuše Dušková received a commemorative medal of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, for her life-long contribution to the field of English linguistics. Professor Dušková is a renowned Czech linguist, a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, a Professor Emerita of English linguistics at Charles University, and the author of the influential *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny* (*A Grammar of Contemporary English with Reference to Czech*, 1988) which is still widely used.

Jan Chovanec then introduced the first plenary speaker, Professor Greg Myers from Lancaster University, UK, who delivered a lecture entitled *How Interviewees and Interviews Shape Stories for Oral History*. In his talk, Myers focused

on the significance of storytelling in oral history interviews and argued that the method of oral history is shaped by the collaborative framing and reframing strategies of both the interviewer and interviewees, and has far-reaching implications for our understanding of the speaker's identity and time and truth in general.

The six parallel sessions that followed offered topics such as *Landscape as a Symbol and Myth*; *The Language of US Law, Politics and Culture*; *Functional Syntax* and *Resources and Outcomes in L2 Learning and Teaching*. The first poster session took place during the afternoon break. The posters presented were, for instance, *Political Party Fluctuation in Canadian Federal Elections in the 21st Century: A National and Provincial Analysis* by Kenneth Froehling, *Teachers' Perception of Foreign Languages in School Environment* by Barbora Kousalová, and *Beauty or a Beast? Angela Carter's Nights in the Circus Transgressing Seemingly Established Concepts of Beauty, Good, and Evil* by Barbora Kotucz.

The programme continued with a second plenary lecture *Breaking the Boundaries, or Redrawing Them? Multimodal Conversation Analysis in EFL Classroom Interaction Research* given by Olcay Sert from Mälardalen University, Sweden. Apart from the full attendance of conference delegates, the lecture attracted a number of academics from the Faculty of Education who also wanted to hear the talk about the use of conversation analysis in second language acquisition. Sert presented the results of his micro-analytic and multimodal research into L2 English classroom interaction (conducted in various European settings), and demonstrated that the multimodal conversation analysis approach has the potential to "break traditional methodological and conceptual boundaries, while also redrawing these boundaries with CA's exceptional power in describing social phenomena."

The following parallel sessions opened discussions, for instance, on *Grotesque Freakishness in Medieval Literature; In-Betweenness and Liminality in Fiction* and *Conversation-Analytic Perspectives on L2 Learning and Teaching*. The academic programme of the first day was concluded with a welcome reception which took place in the beautiful interior of the internal courtyard at the Faculty of Social Sciences, where conference delegates could refresh themselves at a buffet, enjoy the informal company of their colleagues and make new acquaintances from as well as outside their fields of expertise.

The reception was livened up by a performance of the students' choir *The Gypsywood Singers*. As their choir master, I have to say that we were honoured and thrilled to have the possibility to offer a sample of our singing repertoire to an international academic audience. The evening was spent in a friendly atmosphere which set the tone for the rest of the event.

The second day of the conference started with a morning block of six parallel seminars which offered sessions such as *Indigenous Cultures and Communities*, *Self-Representation in Media Discourse*, and a translation session on *Literary Translation & Culture*. After the break, Professor Ulla Haselstein from the Freie Universität, Berlin, gave a plenary lecture entitled *Braiding the Strands: Contemporary Indigenous Literature* in which she drew attention to the major shift in the development of contemporary American indigenous fiction. She explained how the early paradigm of Native American Renaissance had gradually changed into the bleak story of contemporary Urban Indians struggling with poverty, dissolution of social bonds and broken identity based on a catastrophic history and traumatic experience.

The Thursday afternoon programme proved to be the most diverse part of the conference. The afternoon was devoted to two blocks of parallel sessions and the second poster session during the break. Seminars such as *Healing, Experimenting and Struggling in Poetry*; *American Literature of the 19th Century*; *Cultural Conflict in Canadian Literature and Art* and theatre seminar *Gender and Character Conventions in Restoration Drama* engaged with all major forms of literature. Linguists discussed numerous current issues in seminars on *Negotiating Power in Public Discourse* and *Academic Writing*. Academics from the field of ELT methodology could take part in *Conversation-Analytic Perspectives on Correction and Repair in L2 Learning and Teaching* seminar, and, last but not least, delegates interested in translation studies appreciated the session on *Translation Didactics & From Data to Theory*.

The second day of the conference concluded with a final plenary lecture by Sue-Ann Harding from Queen's University, Belfast. In her lecture entitled *Walking, Breathing, Knowing: Insights from Anthropology for Practising Interdisciplinarity*, Harding offered a new way to rethink the boundaries and liminal spaces of various disciplines. Coming from the field of translations studies, Harding employed concepts from narratology and anthropology to sketch new pathways for interdisciplinary and intercultural knowledge, thus linking it with the conference's topic.

Additionally, conference delegates were invited on Wednesday and Thursday to take part in guided tours of Villa Tugendhat, the gem of Brno functionalist architecture. A considerable number of delegates accepted and enjoyed the visit.

The last day of the conference was devoted to literary and linguistic sessions. The morning started with a linguistic session on *Changes in Prosodic Behaviours* and was simultaneously accompanied by literary seminars on *Technology and Human and National Identity*; *Changing Perceptions in British Society and Popular Entertainment* and *Genres, Adaptations and Afterlives of Restoration Drama*.

The latter was a continuation of the Restoration drama seminar from the previous day and it was also the seminar where I presented my paper on early 18th-century ballad operas. I am confident that the same amount of professional support that I was fortunate to receive on that day was typical of all thirty-eight seminars that had taken place during the conference. After the last break, conference delegates held the very last discussions of this wonderful event, for instance in the seminar on *English Renaissance Drama and Theatre* or in the last linguistic session on *Identity Construction and Cultural Accommodation*.

At half past eleven, all delegates gathered in the main auditorium hall for the official conference closing and multiple thanks were in order: to all conference delegates for their active participation, to the head of the English department Jana Chamonikolasová for her support, to the academic programme committee, organizing committee and also student volunteers, who all deserve our gratitude for making this engaging event possible.

The conference closing was followed by the general assembly of the Czech Association for the Study of English, but non-CZASE members were slowly embarking on their journey home, carrying away not only new professional insights and contacts, but also a heightened awareness of a friendly academic community which we are all happy to be part of. As Jana Chamonikolasová pointed out, the main purpose of such conferences is to "strengthen the researchers' motivation to explore new research areas and facilitate the creation of new networks within English studies", and I wholeheartedly agree with her that the 11th Brno International Conference of English, American and Canadian Studies has succeeded in both.

P.S. Little did the delegates and organizers know that our "Breaking the Boundaries" conference would be one of the last face-to-face events for some time as the coronavirus crisis struck later in Spring 2020. Let us hope that the time for such events where people can meet, share ideas, and form new friendships will soon once again become a reality.

Link to the conference program:
https://anglistika.phil.muni.cz/brno2020/programme/final-programme

Link to the conference book of abstracts:
https://anglistika.phil.muni.cz/brno2020/programme/book-of-abstracts

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WALLACE CHAFE – A VISIONARY PARIAH AMONG LINGUISTS

Jiří Lukl

> If this book has a higher purpose, it is to provide a bit of evidence that sooner or later we will have to restore conscious experience to the central role it enjoyed in the human sciences a hundred years ago. Much, I believe, depends on such a reorientation (Chafe 1994, 7).

THESE words conclude the introductory chapter to *Discourse, Consciousness and Time*, the defining work of the linguist Wallace L. Chafe, who passed away February 3, 2019. I believe they characterize well the core of his linguistic thinking that if we are to achieve a measure of true understanding of language, we need to study it as an expression of, and a window to, consciousness.

Wallace Chafe was born in 1927 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In his own words, so reminiscent of the child-like enthusiasm with which he approached his subject matter, from an early age he was fascinated "by the way ideas come and go in my consciousness. I have marveled at my ability, [...], to have thoughts that have nothing to do with what is going on around me, by the ability of language to capture and communicate those thoughts, and by the different ways both speaking and writing allow my consciousness to participate to some degree in the consciousness of others" (1994, 4).

Being a person of many interests, Chafe did not originally pursue linguistics as his career path. After a period of time spent in the US Navy at the end and after the Second World War, he enrolled in Yale to first study music, then architecture and finally German literature. He graduated in German literature in 1950 (Dpt. of Linguistics, UCSB, 21 Feb 2019) and only then did he give any serious thought to the study of linguistics.

After a prolonged sojourn in Switzerland, he returned to Yale in 1954, this time as a graduate student in the university's linguistics program (2002, 246). There, Chafe began the long journey that would take him along a path from the specifically Bloomfieldian American flavor of structuralism to a brief encounter with generative semantics until he eventually found himself drawn to the study of language and the mind, and their intimate relationship. Nevertheless, Chafe devoted his graduate studies to the investigation of indigenous languages of North America, also a life-

long passion. In this respect professor Floyd Lounsbury was Chafe's major influence and the one who introduced him to the Iroquoian family of languages (2002, 247). Chafe decided to inquire into Seneca, a language that Lounsbury did not pay that much attention to, and in 1958 completed a dissertation on its morphology, which was later published as a monograph (1967). Since then, Chafe had done research and published many articles not only on Seneca, but also on other Iroquoian languages, like Onondaga, and on the languages of the Caddo family. His passion for the native languages themselves was matched by his enthusiasm for field linguistics, from which he derived much joy. He even suggested that where the study of languages is concerned field linguistics is "the purest application of the scientific method" (2002, 248).

Aside from being an insightful and inspiring linguist, Chafe was also a gifted writer. He was able to discuss the most complex issues in a simple, engaging, yet still highly academic manner. His writings are full of hidden jokes, amusing quips[1] and sometimes even more or less covert sarcastic remarks towards areas and methods of linguistic inquiry which he considered to be at best not very useful, at worst utterly detrimental to the advancement of the field. The most derisive remarks were reserved for the behaviorist tradition in both psychology and linguistics (see e.g., 1994, 12–14), and for generative linguistics, of which he remarked "that linguistics without generativism would have enjoyed a more productive history from the late 1950s until now, that today we would be able to boast of more substantive accomplishments" (2002, 250).

In fact, one of the most distinguishing features of Chafe's career was his role as a kind of linguistics pariah, never engaging in the "trendy" discussions of the day, never being part of the mainstream, "forever working on the margins of the discipline" (2002, 249). He confessed that "I think I know what it was like to be an atheist in medieval Europe" (2002, 249). It is tempting to picture him in the manner of an anti-hero so typical for Western films: not a bandit, but not welcomed or well-liked by the townsfolk either, yet always being the one to "save the day," so to speak. Of course, in Chafe's case, the analogy stops there, as the people who knew or met him personally describe him as a kind man, warm friend, and brilliant mentor.

Most of Chafe's research post-1970 was informed by his firm belief that linguistic inquiry can only be successful if it views its subject matter through consciousness, which in turn may be better understood by studying real-life ordinary

[1] I always smile to myself when I recall Chafe's subtle jab at the frequency with which examples from Virginia Woolf appear in studies devoted to displaced experience by saying: "Finally, I will break sharply with tradition by failing to cite even one example from Virginia Woolf" (1994, 196).

linguistic data, especially its spoken variety. He admired the work of the American psychologist William James (see Chafe 2000), whose contributions were for a while disregarded when the discipline turned away from the study of the mind to positivist philosophy embodied in behaviorism.

Chafe's 1994 monograph is a culmination of more than twenty years of research which started as tacit suggestions about the role of consciousness in the production and reception of language (e.g., 1973, 1974). In the twenty years, Chafe refined his observations, supplied them with enough data taken, for example, from his Pear Stories project (1980), and framed his arguments as a coherent set (I will refrain here from using the words "theory" or "theoretical framework", as Chafe himself was quite opposed to them). The result was a picture of language which sees its structure being determined not only by the pragmatic-functional aspects of communication, but also importantly by the flow and displacement of the stream of thought. Chafe in fact suggested that language and consciousness are so intertwined that the former displays the same constant properties as the latter – and is in fact an extension of it. Language, then, just as consciousness, has focus, which is limited in its scope and which is embedded in a broader peripheral consciousness, it is dynamic, it has a point of view and a need for orientation (1994, 26–30).

According to Chafe, the limited scope of the focus of consciousness is expressed linguistically in the *intonation unit*, which also forms a single complete unit of information. Such an intonation unit (of information) is characterized by its relative brevity – Chafe suggested the modal length of four words to be the size of one intonation unit in English – and by containing a single intonational and informational prominence (1994, 53–70, 108–19). Such intonation/information units may combine to form larger units of information, which however are more complex and depend to a large extent on peripheral, rather than focal, consciousness (137–45).

The focus and periphery of consciousness, together with all the things a mind is not currently conscious of, are the basis for three states a piece of information may be in in our minds (1994, 53–4). An information may be either *active* (you are currently thinking of it; it is in focus), *semi-active* (it is "in the air," the periphery of consciousness – and may likely be activated soon), or *inactive* (it lies outside of the focus and periphery, dormant). The dynamic quality of consciousness then invokes James's stream of thought, the fact that ideas in our minds ebb and flow, and as they rapidly replace one another, their activation states fluctuate.

According to Chafe language reflects the activation states of ideas in the following manner: at any moment in time, information stored in the speaker's memory

will be either active, semi-active, or inactive. Then the speaker decides to communicate some of their thoughts to the listener. As they prepare for the act of communication, the speaker activates all the ideas that are part of the utterance. At this point, they are fully focused on what they are going to say.

Since, as Chafe suggests, an act of communication is nothing more than a means of providing indirect access to one's mind, the task of the speaker is to ensure that the channel providing the access is clear enough that the resultant picture in the listener's mind of the referents/participants, events, and states (i.e., ideas; 1994, 66–7) described will be as faithful as possible to the original image in the speaker's mind. In other words, the ideas communicated should not be distorted during the transfer. Inevitably, there will be some degree of distortion, sas the link achieved by language is imperfect, but the choice of appropriate linguistic forms will eliminate most of it, while the choice of inappropriate ones will cause the communication to break down.

In terms of *activation cost*, a term introduced by Chafe, the speaker's goal is to activate the communicated ideas in the mind of the listener. By the end of the utterance (if successful), all the ideas will be in focus in the listener's mind. The level of success depends to a large degree on the speaker's choice of appropriate linguistic forms and structures. This choice reflects the speaker's understanding that some of the ideas they are trying to communicate will already be in focus (i.e., activated) in the listener's mind (before the utterance takes place, that is) and that therefore they do not have to expend unnecessary energy – cost – in their activation. In fact, their only responsibility with respect to such ideas is to *keep* them active. Other ideas will be in the periphery (i.e., semi-active) in the listener's mind and will be more 'costly' to activate, and finally, some ideas will be completely inactive and will require the greatest amount of linguistic effort to be brought into the listener's focus.

From the listener's perspective, the linguistic forms and structures used by the speaker signal from which area of their mind they should retrieve the necessary information. If an idea is presented as *given*, with a pronoun, for instance, the listener will know it to be something that they are already thinking about, something that they have in focus. An idea may be active/in focus due to several factors, such as recent mention or the presence of its referent in the physical environment of the interlocution. If an idea is presented as *new*, the listener will know that what is being communicated is either completely new (as is frequently the case in teacher-student interactions) to them, or is discourse new (i.e., something that the listener has stored in their memory but is not currently thinking of it). In both situations, the listener will require substantially more information to correctly identify the idea with something stored in their memory or to integrate it into their mind, and for that

reason new ideas are most often expressed with full noun phrases. In the case of the completely new pieces of information, indefinite noun phrases are used. Finally, a semi-active idea is one which, while the listener is not focused on it precisely, is related in some way to the topic at hand. For that reason, it may be judged by the speaker to be *accessible* to the listener. Unfortunately, as Chafe showed, accessible ideas cannot easily be distinguished from new ideas in terms of the form they are expressed by, and one needs to resort to other means of identification, such as their frequency of occurrence in a text. Nevertheless, Chafe did convincingly show that there is room and reason for accessible ideas in linguistic description (for more details see 1994, 82–92).

Not surprisingly, the interaction between the mind of the speaker and the mind of the listener through language is not always entirely successful, giving rise to frequent misunderstandings.

The remaining two properties of consciousness do not play such a central role in Chafe's writings. That consciousness requires a point of view is to suggest that consciousness needs an anchor to which it can tie experiences, and that this anchor is frequently the self. In other words, people prefer to talk about the world from their own unique perspective and often prefer to talk about experiences in which they themselves were involved (Chafe 1976, 54). Point of view is linguistically expressed in the choice of the grammatical person, it typically being the first person (singular and plural) and in that the grammatical subjects most often coincide with the experiencing self and usually occur at the beginning of an utterance. Finally, the need of a consciousness to be oriented is nothing more than its need to know where, when, with whom and in what kind of activity or situation it is located (1994, 128–9).

As much of his research since the late 1960s represented a unique manner of tackling the problems of information structure, it can hardly be surprising that it brought him in proximity to the functionalist approach formulated by the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, especially Jan Firbas. Chafe recognized the important role played by Czech linguists in pioneering extensive research into information structure as early as 1970 in his *Meaning and the Structure of Language*. From this monograph onwards, one can trace a curious development of Chafe's awareness of the theory of functional sentence perspective in his publications.

In *Meaning and the Structure of Language*, Chafe acknowledged the contributions made by the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle in no more than a footnote (210). Later, perhaps as his own acquaintance with and understanding of the Firbasian approach grew, Chafe engaged in a more extensive polemic with the theory,

first disagreeing on whether the given-new distinction is merely a binary opposition, as he suggested at the time, or whether it includes an entire gamut of degrees of information states, as suggested by Firbas (Chafe 1974, 119 –20, 1976, 33). According to Chafe, the idea of a gamut of information states is implausible when one takes consciousness into account.[2] By 1994, Chafe had already been forced to conclude that information must be stored in our brains in three distinct states, thus breaking from his earlier conviction of a binary system and so symbolically taking a step towards the theory of FSP. While still having some reservations, especially with respect to the fact that Firbas and others had continued to ignore the role of consciousness in their writings, Chafe was able to find many points of agreement between his research and that of the FSP scholars, a tradition of mutual respect that was continued by Chamonikolasová (2000, 2007) and that culminated in Chafe's contribution to the 2008 issue of *Brno Studies in English*.

It is telling that late in his career, Chafe devoted much attention to not only linguistic, but also to paralinguistic, phenomena, such as laughter and the verbal and non-verbal expression of emotions in general, and to means of communication that are only distantly related to language, such as music (1994, 186–91). Quite naturally, he explored these phenomena from a cognitive viewpoint, trying to understand how they relate to the stream of consciousness and how they may be better understood through it. At every turn, Chafe stood out as a polymath and a scholar who was able to combine his broad array of interests in unexpected, yet coherent, ways. And with focus on such issues as laughter and language (see e.g., Chafe 2007), he once again proved to be a man forever searching for answers along the borders of linguistic knowledge, perhaps not being in the vanguard of modern linguistic research, but certainly opening new, surprising frontiers.

Wallace Chafe was never entirely content within the limits of mainstream linguistics. He shunned armchair Bloomfieldian structuralism in favor of researching Native American languages in the field. At the time when dozens of linguists became enamored with generativism, Chafe remained skeptical of it. And as dissatisfied generativists were formulating the fundamentals of generative semantics, Chafe worked out his own unique approach to the problem of semantics and deep structure. Finally, when generative semantics gave rise to mainstream cognitive

[2] It is to be noted that at the time Chafe probably misunderstood Firbas's concept of communicative dynamism and thought of it as relating to the same issues of information structure as the given-new distinction. While communicative dynamism certainly does incorporate this binary opposition, it also includes considerations of dynamic semantics and linearity, as pointed out by Firbas in his response to Chafe (1987; see also Firbas 1992).

linguistics, Chafe, once again, walked his own path and formulated a separate vision of language and cognition, trusting above all his own instincts as a linguist and as a human being. Wallace Chafe was, and will remain, a symbol of what may be achieved if one is able to break away from the trends of the day and think about language – or any other subject, for that matter – in original, groundbreaking ways.

Allow me to conclude with a sentiment, one that hopefully truthfully reflects Chafe's unshakeable belief in the importance of the study of consciousness and language: If the mind is a universe of its own, as vast and as intricate as the physical Universe, then understanding language as a mirror and extension of the mind may be as important as realizing the background microwave radiation is a mirror and a telescope to the Big Bang and the early days of the Universe.

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Positions held by Wallace Chafe

1958–1959 Buffalo

1959–1962 Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology

1962–2019 Berkeley UC Santa Barbara, Department of Linguistics

- 1969–1974 and 1977–1978: department chair
- 1975–1986: director of the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages
- 1991-2019 (after retirement): Research professor

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ISOLATION, SOLITUDE, DISTANCE AND COMMUNICATION IN TIMES OF EPIDEMIC

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REFLECTIONS OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S DYSTOPIAS IN THE PANDEMIC OF 2020

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Abstract

The paper focuses on Margaret Atwood's novels *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* and considers ways in which the pandemic of her dystopian world may, to various degrees, serve as a reflection of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020. The setting of both novels is the same dystopian world, however, they each present different ideological takes on dealing with a pandemic. The paper analyses the creation of Crakers as the new humanoid species, which are supposed to inhabit the earth in its post-pandemic state. It reflects not only political and social structures Atwood borrowed from the real-world, but also types of behavior that some political national leaders currently display. While the first novel addresses the issues of power, exploitation, and the God complex; *The Year of the Flood*, with its two female characters, investigates dealing with the pandemic via the lens of ecofeminism, ecology, nature, and sustainability. Conversely to Crake's elitist megalomaniac ideas that leave the world and its state largely out of the discussion, in the second novel, Atwood connects to the ecology of the post-pandemic world and focuses on ways of understanding it from the natural, rather than ideological standpoint. The paper considers these opposing viewpoints and shows defamiliarized versions reflected in the current state of the real world. In relation to that, correlations between fictional and real-life dichotomies of masculine and feminine perspectives on handling the pandemic both in the real world as well as in the novel are also discussed.

Keywords

Margaret Atwood, Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood, dystopia, pandemic, COVID-19, leadership, ecofeminism

* * *

1. Introduction

MARGARET Atwood's dystopian novels are undoubtedly reflected in many past, as well as present moments of the real world. Because the author often borrows from real historical events when building up her dystopian worlds, Atwood's storytelling continually finds its ways of addressing the future, and suggests that time

places no restrictions upon her works. The COVID-19 pandemic has left the world exploring a territory that it has not, at least in the same way and capacity, experienced before. As a result of that, it offers an opportunity to researchers to look for insights into our current situation in literary, cultural, or historical artifacts, which could lead toward a greater understanding of what is happening around us.

Along the lines of such exploration, this paper focuses on two of Margaret Atwood's novels from the *Maddaddam* trilogy – *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* – and considers ways in which the pandemic of her dystopian world may, to various degrees, serve as a reflection of the real-world COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The reason behind choosing these two novels, in particular, is the presence of a pandemic at the center of the fictional world and also the fact that they are both set in the same dystopian world. However, in each of them the dystopian world is viewed from a different perspective, which broadens one's perspective when searching for reflections of them in the real world. By observing two perspectives of the same dystopian world via the lens of different characters, the narratives unravel the ideological standpoints of the novels with regard to the ongoing pandemic and the ways it is being dealt with. The paper analyzes how differently organized dystopian worlds provide different, often opposing, reflections of human behavior during pandemics, which one can also find within the space of the real world today.

In regard to *Oryx and Crake*, the paper primarily focuses on one of the protagonists – Crake, and the virus that he artificially creates and spreads via developing the so-called BlyssPluss pill. In his own way, Crake holds tremendous power, both because of his capabilities as a bioengineer and his higher-class social position. In line with that, I trace and explore Crake's behavior and find reflections of not only political and social structures Atwood borrowed from the real-world when writing the novel, but also, the types of behavior that some national leaders (i.e., those holding similar power and privilege as Crake) currently display.

Conversely to the focus in *Oryx and Crake*, exploring Atwood's second novel of the trilogy – *The Year of the Flood*, the paper investigates the process of dealing with the pandemic via the lens of human interconnection with the environment, nature, community, and sustainable lifestyle. It searches for the real-life reflections in the behavior of those who hold the power to change and do so with the emphasis on communication, empathy, and the sense of togetherness, such as, again, various national leaders, but also those that deal with the pandemic in the exclusion from the capitalist and consumerist systems, and inhabit spaces of ecovillages where the course of their behavior is dictated by nature and the community, rather than political leadership.

In light of both novels, I consider these opposing viewpoints and point out their defamiliarized versions as reflected in the current state of the real world, as well as search for correlations between fictional and real-life dichotomies of masculine and feminine perspectives on handling pandemics. Moreover, I show how Atwood's disorderly dystopian worlds are reflected in the real world.

In the first of the two Atwood's novels, *Oryx and Crake*, the storyline revolves around Crake and his biological experiment called the Paradice project, whose main focus is to exterminate humanity by engineering and distributing the BlyssPluss pill, which contains a lethal virus. The decision to create a worldwide pandemic and, as a result, killing all people, is influenced by problems Crake sees in the world, such as racism, capitalism, consumerism, corruption, and exploitation stemming from the capitalist system, as well as his concern about the "demand for resources [that] has exceeded supply for decades [and soon] the demand is going to exceed supply for everyone" (Atwood 2003, 432). The setting of *Oryx and Crake* takes place primarily in the so-called 'Compounds', which is an affluent area where the privileged elites live. In line with the setting as well as Crake's power position within the story, some of the themes notably brought to the attention by this novel are privilege, top-down hierarchy, discussion of social classes and the noticeable rigid differences between them, and subsequent power and decision-making on the part of Crake.

Observing the perspective of this dystopian world and the pandemic created by Crake portrayed in *The Year of the Flood*, there are several straightforward yet important differences. Along with two female protagonists – Toby and Ren – there is a group of people called God's Gardeners, a religious sect that in its values connects love and appreciation for the environment and nature with the devotion to god. Through the interaction of Toby, Ren, and the Gardeners, Atwood draws attention to more social and ecological rhetoric surrounding the process of dealing with a pandemic. Furthermore, she raises the awareness of issues such as global warming, rising temperatures, and industries which contribute to the destruction of nature. As opposed to *Oryx and Crake*, the setting in this novel is quite different – the elitist corporate Compounds are replaced by a dangerous, non-corporate, peripheral district known as the 'Pleeblands'. When it comes to the themes dominating the story in *The Year of the Flood*, the focus of the narrative is primarily on environmental issues and the role nature plays in humanity dealing with the pandemic, as well as the sense of community, and the emphasis on the collective, rather than individual benefits and prosperity.

2. God Complex: Self-Oriented Approach toward the Pandemic

Before discussing how these novels are reflected in the current COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to preface by introducing some of the crucial character traits to be found in both Crake – the main protagonist of *Oryx and Crake* – and several high-profile world leaders holding power to control their countries' course of actions during the pandemic. In his own perception, Crake wants to better the world by getting rid of what is wrong with it. However, importantly, he does so via exercising a sort of God-like power, of being able to hold the decision, as if the alpha patriarch of the earth bringing a great catastrophe upon it, and yet excluding himself from being affected by it or partaking in the negative aspects of the world. Crake's role and actions within this dystopian world bring to life a centuries-old story of Noah's Ark from the Bible's Book of Genesis. What ties them together is not only the act of the rebirth of everything living and of wiping humanity's slate clean of the wrong and the bad. In a more general sense, it is the presence of chaos, its innate presence, and the narrative in which the chaos is dealt with by a similar type of ultimate action. Crake's deification is further strengthened by the manner in which Snowman portrays him in front of Crakers – the new species that Crake had created. Snowman says: "In the beginning, there was chaos. […] In the chaos, everything was mixed together, […] And then Oryx said to Crake, Let us get rid of the chaos. And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away. […] There. Empty. And this is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness. He cleared away the dirt, he cleared room" (Atwood 2003, 119–21). Via Snowman's portrayal, Crake, who is, at this point of the story, already dead, thus becomes a sort of mythical being similar to God.

Throughout Atwood's novel, Crake's tendencies of abandoning the former version of the world versus perpetuating its tendencies sometimes get confused. When Crake talks about designing Crakers, he expresses his excitement by saying:

> It was amazing – said Crake – what once-unimaginable things had been accomplished by the team here. […] Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world's current illnesses. For instance, racism – or, as they referred to it in Paradice, pseudospeciation – had been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism: the Paradice people simply did not register skin color. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. (Atwood 2003, 371)

Through Crake, Atwood indeed brings forth the discussion that those mentioned really are issues that are also to be found in the real world and which people often

fight. At the same time, however, based on Crake's actions, she also draws the attention to the difference between revolting against the current state of issues with individual powers and rights, which do not interfere with those of others, and the opposite – Crake's type of a revolt. While he proudly talks about the enhancements of the new species which will get rid of problems such as human tendencies to form hierarchical structures, racism, or even hereditary diseases, at the same time, he acts upon this major change in the world structure and the lives of everyone around from the position of the hierarchical top. Such actions place his rights and powers above everyone else's and thus, ironically, go against the values he claims to be standing for and go in line with those he seems to be against.

Many of Crake's characteristics and behavioral traits are reflected in the behavior of leaders as they navigate their decision-making throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Why leaders, in particular, one might ask, considering the fact that Crake is not in a position holding executive political power in the novel. While that is true, he, nevertheless was in a position of great power, and despite not being a president, a sovereign, a prime minister, or a politician in any other way, it was him making the single most crucial decision guiding the further development of the fictional world and people's lives within it.

In this section, the paper thus more closely explores those world leaders whose focus is, similarly to Crake's, oriented toward their own self and their own prosperity, rather than the collective one. These leaders also tend to focus on the preservation of people's pre-pandemic habits, such as spending habits, unrestricted gatherings, and travel, which all simultaneously lead to the preservation of the pre-pandemic economy and a working capitalist system. In this way, such a style of leadership rejects the change necessary to deal with the pandemic and might be using the pandemic for personal gains, such as election, re-election, or even passing laws. In the case of the latter, one may look, for instance, at the cabinet of Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland trying to pass an extreme anti-abortion law in times of restricted public gatherings assuming the citizens of the country would have trouble getting together and protesting against it. Regarding the described leadership style more broadly, I decided to focus on three high-profile leaders, who in many ways reflect the abovementioned traits of Crake's behavior in *Oryx and Crake,* and have all shown reluctance toward taking the pandemic seriously and, consequently, all contracted the coronavirus themselves – Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and Boris Johnson.

The most prominent, well-known, and talked about of these leaders is, without a doubt, the president of the United States, Donald Trump. Because of him being a very active user of Twitter, the paper shares several of his tweets, which illustrate

his position towards the pandemic as well as dealing with it as a president. In one of his election-related as well as COVID-19-related tweets, he says: "The United States cannot have all Mail In Ballots. It will be the greatest Rigged Election in history. People grab them from mailboxes, print thousands of forgeries and 'force' people to sign. Also, forge names. Some absentee OK, when necessary. Trying to use Covid for this Scam!" (Trump May 2020) Trump encourages voters to vote in person instead of via mail-in-ballot system in the then-upcoming election, due to his personal and ungrounded belief in the fraudulent nature of the election. Through his actions and recommendations, he endangered the lives of those voters that, based on his advice, waited in lines and voted in person, and at the same time undermines the votes of those voting via mail while adhering to self-isolation and social distancing practices recommended by the World Health Organization. In *Oryx and Crake*, in his decision to create the pandemic and solve the problems of the world through it, Crake denies the democratic right of everyone else in the world to partake in this decision and be either for or against it. Donald Trump similarly tried to use the presence of the pandemic and the large amounts of ballots cast via mail due to it, to undermine the democratic right of these voters by claiming they were cast illegally. Like Crake, Trump is driven by a similar power of self-centeredness and the desire of achieving goals by denying democracy and leaning toward authoritarian actions.

In one of his other tweets, he says: "Coronavirus deaths are way down. Mortality rate is one of the lowest in the World. Our Economy is roaring back and will NOT be shut down" (Trump June 2020). According to the data shared by the World Health Organization, at the point of writing this tweet as well as today, the United States of America has been at the top of the list with the highest percentage of positive COVID-19 cases. Donald Trump thus fabricates false information about the COVID-19 death rate as well as about the state of the US economy. The mention of the economy roaring back, regardless of whether it is true or not, stresses the importance that the working economy holds for Donald Trump even in a situation when it is put up against the importance of public safety of imposing social distancing strategies, nation-wide testing, or lockdowns. Instead of taking such actions, he trivializes the pandemic and tells the people of his country: "Don't be afraid of Covid. Don't let it dominate your life" (Trump October 2020). After contracting the coronavirus himself and having recovered from the illness, Trump continued spreading misleading information about him being immune and not being able to infect anyone else with the virus, a presumption refuted by not only many cases of COVID-19 reinfections, but also by scientists (De Vrieze 2020). Even

though it is important to note that, in the case of Donald Trump, the decision to impose a nation-wide lockdown is not within his executive power, and, as an expert in constitutional interpretation Keith Whittington says, "is pretty far out of bounds for the president" (Watson 2020), it is equally crucial to stress that he also refused to recommend any of the social-distancing measures to either the governors holding power in individual states, or to the citizens of the United States themselves.

In the more recent US news, it has come to the attention that the inmates in prisons of El Paso, Texas are being used to move COVID-19 bodies for $2 per hour while, as the researchers at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs have stated, simultaneously dying at a rate 35% higher than the rest of the prison population (Deitch et al. 2020, 11). This suggests the administration's lack of care for the groups of people truly affected by the pandemic as well as reflects Crake's position of a similar kind of carelessness toward other people when developing the pandemic. That applies whether it comes to Crake's actions in a more general sense of annihilating humanity, as well as in regard to the process of the pandemic's creation – the development of the BlyssPluss pill. Similar to prison inmates moving infected bodies for $2 per hour, when Snowman inquires about where the people used for the clinical trials of the pill in Atwood's dystopia come from, Crake responds: "From the poorer countries. Pay them a few dollars, they don't even know what they're taking. Sex clinics, of course – they're happy to help. Whorehouses. Prisons. And from the ranks of the desperate, as usual" (Atwood 2003, 296).

Regarding the political leadership, the reflections of Crake's behavioral characteristics, however, stretch beyond Donald Trump's take on dealing with the pandemic. President of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro, for instance, thinks that COVID-19 is a "little flu" that should be faced "like a man, not a boy" (Phillips 2020). Similar to Trump, Bolsonaro was frequently seen without a mask at press conferences, or when wearing it, doing to incorrectly and thus ineffectively. Moreover, he also stated that self-isolation was for the weak (Phillips 2020), and, after contracting the coronavirus himself, he said he would "shake off the illness thanks to his athletic background" (Londoño 2020). Akin to Donald Trump as well as Crake, Bolsonaro's statement offers a very self-centered perspective of the pandemic viewed through the lens of himself individually, rather than the people of the country he leads.

In the early months of the pandemic in Europe, the prime minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson appeared on TV shaking hands with the staff in a hospital despite being advised against doing so by a group of scientists. Johnson said: "I was at a hospital where there were a few coronavirus patients and I shook hands with everybody" (as reported by Lewis 2020). This act was supposed to strengthen

his strategy during that time, whose aim was pursuing herd immunity in order to combat the virus. He is said to regard illness as a sign of personal weakness and thus was reluctant in introducing lockdown in his country during the time it had the highest number of deaths in Europe. He only later did so after contracting and recovering from the coronavirus himself. His actions, however, were motivated by his own first-hand experience with the virus, its seriousness, and ways of combating it, rather than a general nation-wide call for leadership action. Similar to the cases of the previous two leaders discussed, it signifies a more self-centered perspective of the pandemic and ways of dealing with it.

Thus, when asking how seeing the reflection of Crake, who created a pandemic and never had to deal with it, in the leadership styles of those who did not create it, however, had to face it as leaders of countries, is possible, it is essential to break down the actions into behaviors and their motivations. The denial of the pandemic, along with its trivialization by public statements such as comparing COVID-19 to a little flu, or regarding it as something not worth people's attention, not worth having it dominate people's lives, in its simplicity reflects Crake's ideas of solving the problems he sees in the world. He decides to eliminate humans because he does not like the aspects of the human society that humans have brought into it, such as capitalism, racism, exploitation, corruption, etc. Even though creating new human beings arguably cannot be simple, even in a world where such creation is possible, the simplicity stems in this decision being very obviously reminiscent of that, which he is paradoxically against – the typical consumerist behavior of buying a new shirt when the old one has a stain, focusing on it being replaceable, rather than mendable. Similar to the actions of Crake, those of Trump, Bolsonaro, and Johnson likewise do not focus on improving the current situation by introducing change and instead choose ignorance that costs lives. They exclude themselves from being affected by their decisions in a crisis, or lack thereof, and focus on the individual good guided by self-centeredness, one's powerfulness, or social position, rather than the collective good focused on equality.

3. Focus on Community, Communication, and Empathy in Times of Pandemic

Following the reflections of Crake that one can find in the real-world pandemic of 2020, we move toward the other approach of handling the pandemic that this paper looks closely at. Instead of the self-centered approach described earlier, this strategy focuses on public health, common safety, and effective communication. It is characterized by reflecting science in the person's decisive actions and via that

also reflecting nature, taking necessary steps toward the inevitable change and focus on the collective rather than individual good, which is thus distinguished by more flat hierarchies of decision-making. With that, I move the focus of the analysis to *The Year of the Flood*, and discuss some of the defining aspects of the pandemic whose reflections are to be found in the real world. The emphasis on one's realization that the surrounding nature is ever-present and is intertwined with people's daily activities and decision-making is vital for the discussion of Atwood's narrative. This is most profoundly expressed by the religious sect named God's Gardeners which the main protagonists – Toby and Ren – cohabitate with. Via the interplay of all of these characters, Atwood points out the importance of the ecology, the interconnection with nature, a sense of community, self-sufficiency, and frugality as important when dealing with a crisis. As one of the crucial characteristic values, the Gardeners are notably cruelty-free and preach vegetarianism. In one of the first memories of Toby encountering the Gardeners, she says they were chanting while holding their slates with slogans saying: "*God's Gardeners for God's Garden! Don't Eat Death! Animals R Us!* […] *No meat! No meat! No meat!*" (Atwood 2010, 60). Because of the animal origin of COVID-19, meat-eating, the environmental crisis, the exploitation of animals, as well as topics such as vegetarianism, and veganism are oft-discussed in regard to the current pandemic.

Being vegetarian, Gardeners grow their own food and avoid using chemicals and pesticides to do so. Atwood further emphasizes their self-sufficiency via the importance that they put on using natural and renewable sources of energy rather than fossil fuels. Gardeners' shower water, for instance, "came down a garden hose out of a rain barrel and was gravity-fed, so no energy was used" (Atwood 2010, 91). The Gardeners draw the attention toward the use of natural and sustainable resources as well as focus on recycling scraps and leftover materials. As Toby states regarding the use of natural items: "The Gardeners were skimpy on toys — *Nature is our playground* — and the only toys they approved of were sewed out of leftover fabric or knitted with saved-up string" (Atwood 2010, 92).

God's Gardeners' approach to life, nature, and sustainability is reflected in the real-world communities of people living similarly in so-called 'ecovillages'. For instance, Dan Durica, an American living in an ecovillage named Dancing Rabbit located in Missouri, says: "I can provide basic needs for myself, not only in a sustainable way but in a way that I don't have to be dependent on the broader economy anymore" ("How Sustainable Living Prepared Me for a Pandemic" 2020). Durica shares his way of life in the ecovillage via his YouTube channel called "Hardcore Sustainable" and offers insights into the challenges he experiences on a daily basis.

When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, he stresses "the ways that [he has] implemented sustainability in [his] life have also been really useful for this crisis, because [he has] systems set up to be much more self-sufficient" ("How Sustainable Living Prepared Me for a Pandemic" 2020). He further stresses that "it's important for people to realize during this crisis that preparing in this way, trying to live sustainably, can also be adaptable to other crises that society and our economy might be going through" ("How Sustainable Living Prepared Me for a Pandemic" 2020). In one of his YouTube videos, Durica also points out that because of his sustainable lifestyle, he was able to notice changes in the lives of people in general, including those who do not live in ecovillages like himself. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, he has seen an increased interest in his own channel where, according to his words, the views of the videos have gone up. Furthermore, he has also noticed a broader, more general interest in sustainability and self-sufficiency. Signifying the greater interest, in one of his videos, he also mentions noticing seeds and other farming supplies being sold out in 2020, saying that such a thing has never occurred during his time of living in an ecovillage ("How Sustainable Living Prepared Me for a Pandemic" 2020).

Returning to *The Year of the Flood*, the parallel of Durica's lifestyle and values in the ecovillage is to be found in the Gardeners' general relationship to nature and, as Wieczorek points out, also in Toby's time spent in the God's Garden developing "the skills and knowledge she acquired during her unfinished studies at the Martha Graham Academy. That is, she becomes an expert in horticulture. […] Toby's spiritual connection to bees and nature indicates that women have a less dominating relationship with nature, which reflects the beliefs of spiritual ecofeminists" (2018, 118). Toby's life as a woman in *The Year of the Flood* is intertwined with the injustice of power, her being dominated, exploited and sexually abused by men, and even having her mother, also finding herself in a position lacking power, and falling ill "as a result of taking supplements engineered by the corporation she was working for" (Wieczorek 2018, 116). As Wieczorek points out, "in Atwood's narrative, certain parallels can be seen between the treatment of animals and women. Namely, they are both exploited by capitalist forces; their role in a post-industrial society is to serve" (2018, 117). Because Toby cannot find support and solace in the functioning government, she finds it in her relationship with nature via the community of people equal to her, nature, and each other, as well as equally disadvantaged people, when perceived in a more general sense of social classes, support from the state, etcetera. Toby, however, is not only a representative example of the exploitation of nature, women, and the underprivileged in Atwood's dystopian

world. Toby's being in the world of *The Year of the Flood* additionally parallels the lives of various groups of equally underprivileged people lacking governmental support or health care while trying to survive the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

Reading further, one can also notice major differences when it comes to the description of the hierarchical structure among the characters that Atwood describes as follows:

> Figuring out the Gardener hierarchy took [Toby] some time. Adam One insisted that all Gardeners were equal on the spiritual level, but the same did not hold true for the material one: the Adams and the Eves ranked higher, though their numbers indicated their areas of expertise rather than their order of importance. (Atwood 2010, 78–9)

Contrary to the position of Crake, the hierarchies within the community of God's Gardeners reflect a person's expertise, and so the hierarchical top in terms of having the ultimate executive power does not exist. In the flat hierarchies of God's Gardeners, Atwood reflects on the communal devotion of Jesus's Apostles that is described in the Acts of the Bible's New Testament saying that "all who believed were together and had all things common" (Acts 2:44 New Revised Standard Version) and "[n]ow the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common (Acts 4:32 New Revised Standard Version). The togetherness and equality is reflected not only in God's Gardeners' lack of top-down hierarchies, which are more characteristic of capitalistic structures, but also their sense of taking care not only of each other but also of their surroundings and nature and treating those equal to themselves and humans around them. It is also notable by their ways of dealing with the pandemic created by Crake, where they collectively, rather than individually, store the food and other necessary things together. In regard to the biblical parallels, Wieczorek says:

> The Gardeners reinterpret the teachings of the Bible so as to encourage all the members of their cult to take a biocentric approach to nature. It is noteworthy that spiritualist ecofeminists, such as Susan Griffin and Charlene Spretnak, Consider the Judeo-Christian beliefs that God gave human beings dominion over earth, to have led to the destruction of ecosystems. […] In this way, the Gardeners reject the Jewish-Christian tradition, which has contributed to the instrumental and hierarchical treatment of nature and women. (2018, 115–16)

In that way, the Gardeners' way of life puts the emphasis on their perception of themselves as being equal with nature, and, in a more general sense, being equal

with everything living, especially the less powerful and more vulnerable beings. Furthermore, via the depiction of the way the members of their cult live, Atwood simultaneously criticizes the Christian church of today, which oftentimes preaches about the values of humility and equality, rather than acts upon them as an institution, and whose hierarchical structures along with the church's notable wealth rather resemble a capitalist or a corporate structure. Via such disparity, she also draws attention to the ambiguity of the Bible in terms of meaning, and the fact that its interpretation does not depend as much on the book itself but rather the one holding it. It is, after all, Donald Trump's favorite book, as he himself claims, and was also used by his cabinet to interpret the COVID-19 pandemic as being the wrath of God brought to the Earth because of "several groups [of people], including those who have 'a proclivity toward lesbianism and homosexuality'" (Sopelsa 2020). Unlike the biblical interpretation of Gardeners, the one used by Trump's cabinet goes against the values of equality and inclusivity, and just as Crake himself prior to creating the pandemic, shifts blame for the undesirable state of the world – whatever the particulars of that state might be – from oneself to the 'other.'

The ways of living and the approach to nature, science, common safety, and the importance of the community as opposed to the importance of self, are all characteristics of the Gardeners' lifestyles which find their reflections in real-world leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Differently from the leaders discussed earlier, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Johnson, who, more than anything, in their approach resembled the character of Crake, these leaders regard as highly important to instead focus on public health, common safety, consideration of science, and empathetic communication.

Throughout 2020, there have been multiple occasions of media coverage focusing on the exceptional capacity of predominantly female country leaders to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This section of the paper aims to explore the reflections of their actions one can see in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood,* and whether their gender potentially has an impact on the differences between their decisive actions and those of the male leaders discussed earlier. In regard to the process of dealing with the coronavirus from the perspective of a country leader, Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister of New Zealand, said that "one can actually lead with both resolve and kindness" (Hassan 2020) when fighting against the pandemic. With support and solidarity for her fellow New Zealanders, and because of the financial crisis existing alongside the pandemic, she and her cabinet took 20% pay cuts for six months after first introducing lockdown (Hassan 2020). Besides that, Ardern hosts live videos from her self-isolation at home where she appears in her

casual leisure clothes, sharing all sorts of activities including cooking, tidying, or being bored while socially distancing, in order to show compassion with other people's isolation as well as emphasizing the equity between her and the citizens. Similar to the way in which the characters in *The Year of the Flood* deal with the pandemic, Ardern, too, deems the focus on community and equal treatment of all as one of the crucial points guiding her decisions.

In contradiction to one of Trump's previously quoted tweets, in which he tells people to not be afraid of the coronavirus, the prime minister of Norway Erna Solberg stresses that "it's okay to be scared" (Hassan 2020). Uniquely among other world leaders, Solberg has held a press conference dedicated specifically to children, in which she explained the pandemic to them, showed compassion and understanding for them not being able to be at school or meet friends during an early-imposed lockdown (Hassan 2020). She also introduced extensive monitoring in Norway and overall, her executive actions during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown her leadership's interest in all social and age groups as well as the inclusiveness of vulnerability as a real phenomenon existing alongside such a crisis. Solberg and her decision-making processes during the COVID-19 pandemic is a prominent example of feminist leadership. As Billing points out: "Feminist leadership understands that we're only as safe — or empowered — as the most vulnerable among us. An intersectional analysis helps us to understand how the virus disproportionately impacts specific groups of people, who, because of their intersecting identities, face unique forms of burden" (Billing 2020). In line with the focus on public health and safety seen in Solberg's decision-making in Norway, the Icelandic prime minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir and her cabinet offered free tests for everyone as well as launched an intensive contact-tracing initiative early on during the pandemic (Hassan 2020).

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived at Sint Maarten, the prime minister Silveria Jacobs said: "Simply. Stop. Moving. If you do not have the type of bread you like in your house, eat crackers. If you do not have bread, eat cereal, eat oats, sardines" (Hassan 2020). In her statement, she reflects the importance of living with what one already has and utilizing it, which is reflected in *The Year of the Flood* with Toby saying that "the food was pleasant enough — Rebecca did her best with the limited materials available — but it was repetitious" (Atwood 2010, 69). Both Jacobs and Toby point at the importance of resourcefulness as well as prioritizing one's safety over the maintenance of the pre-crisis life standards and habits.

4. The Question of Gender

After analyzing the leadership behavior of these politicians during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as studying their reflections in Atwood's novels, the readers and observers of the pandemic situation might still wonder whether gender really matters when it comes to leading the fight against the pandemic. In 2020, Uma Kambhampati and Supriya Garikipati were pondering on the same question, and in order to find out, conducted a study in which they observed how gender affects national leadership. The researchers admit that "[g]iven the consistent result on women's relative aversion to risk and anecdotal reports of risky behaviour by male leaders, it is tempting to draw simplistic conclusions" (2020, 3) They, however, stress that "[a] reliable conclusion on the issue […] requires more systematic investigation" (2020, 3). In their research, they consistently compared countries with roughly the same size, demographic, countries that are either neighboring or within the same geographic area, in order to eliminate differences in their outcome based on aspects other than the leadership itself, and the pandemic rules and restrictions implemented throughout (2020, 4–6). In their findings, they suggest that in terms of risk management, women leaders are more risk-averse in the domain of human life, but more risk-taking in the domain of the economy, while it is the opposite for male leaders, such as the ones discussed earlier (2020, 12).

Being risk-averse when it comes to health and survival is also reflected in the attitude of God's Gardeners, who start preparing for the pandemic even before it happens. As explained, one of the predictions of the pandemic catastrophe states that: "A massive die-off of the human race was impending […] but the Gardeners […] intended to float above the Waterless Flood, with the aid of the food they were stashing away in the hidden storeplaces" (Atwood 2010, 81). The Gardeners' behavior reflects their preparations for future self-sufficiency and the focus on nature as one of their resources for growing produce that they can, along with other food, store for times of crisis. In such a way, they try to grasp the upcoming situation well in advance and thus avoid as much risk when it comes to one's health and safety as possible.

In regard to task management, the researchers found out that "women are more 'interpersonally-oriented.' […] Consistent with this finding, women tended to adopt a more democratic and participative style and a less autocratic or directive style than men." (Garikipati and Kambhampati 2020, 14) As opposed to the male leadership studied, Garikipati and Kambhampati also emphasize the presence of empathy in the communication styles of the female leaders as well as the focus on community rather than on the self and thus an individual (2020, 15). Jennifer Curtin,

a researcher from the University of Auckland studying female leadership in general, introduces a nuance in the discussion on gender when she states:

> Women political leaders doing so well […] during this time is because there are several high-profile male leaders that are taking quite a contrasting approach to managing this crisis. Some have reported this as a more aggressive rhetorical approach, […] portrayed as hypermasculine. And so, the contrast between empathetic, resolute women leaders and, perhaps, hypermasculine male leaders is quite extreme, contrasting, and more noticeable. (Corona Crisis: Is Female Leadership Superior? 2020)

She thus admits that these female leaders could likely be considered doing normally or appropriately, rather than exceptionally well, if there was not a notable presence of influential male world leaders taking a contrasting and more aggressive approach. Curtin also suggests that it may be feminist, rather than necessarily female leadership, that leads toward more favorable outcomes in times of pandemic. She stresses the importance of empathy and understanding of female leaders toward women in their countries, knowing that despite the fatality rates of men being higher than those of women, women are, nevertheless, more negatively affected by the pandemic due to taking up the majority of caregiving when it comes to children, as well as, importantly, comprising the majority of all health care workers worldwide (Corona Crisis: Is Female Leadership Superior? 2020). The evidence contained within the study conducted by Erika Fraser exploring the impact that COVID-19 pandemic might have on violence against women and girls further suggests that women and girls are also negatively affected by experiencing a higher risk of domestic violence as well as "violence against healthcare workers, due to the serious stress that the pandemic places on patients, their relatives and other healthcare workers" (Fraser 2020, 2).

Returning to the discussion on leadership, Margaret Heffernan, an entrepreneur who has written about management during a pandemic, says:

> If you don't have institutional power, the best way to protect yourself is by knowing what's going on [and] have trusted relationships with people who can tell you and give you early warning. Powerlessness has developed in women a capacity which in a crisis you really need, which is the ability to reach out to people, develop relationships of trust [and] communicate with high levels of empathy. […] If you walk into a culture where everything is set up for you, as most white men in the Western world do, you don't have to develop those skills, because everything is kind of designed for you. (The right stuff: Are female leaders better at managing Covid-19? 2020)

She stresses that not gender necessarily, but rather one's position within society's institutional power structure is what has a significant impact on one's behavior during a crisis. Furthermore, such direction of behavior analysis also reflects male characters in Atwood's novels such as the members of God's Gardeners, but in many ways also Snowman, who are in their respective ways disadvantaged in the world they live in and find themselves on the periphery of power, rather than at the center of it.

Because Snowman is the only remnant of the original human species in the world, he has the power of knowledge as well as the ability to use it to his own advantage and in his own ways. However, as opposed to Crake, Snowman holds a different kind of power – the power to create the narrative of the new world, to curate the information of the past, and the power to form a bond with the new species through it. In her work titled *Margaret Atwood*, Carol Howells remarks that through the characters in *Oryx and Crake*, "Atwood is exploring fictions of masculinity, with Crake the personification of the urge towards male mastery through reason and science and [Snowman] representing an alternative 'female' allegiance to the life of emotions and imagination" (Howells 1996, 177). In light of the dichotomy of Crake and Snowman, as well as due to Snowman's bond with the new species, one may view Snowman through a feminist or even ecofeminist lens. Regardless of the gender identification, one could also think similarly, or perhaps even more so, about the God's Gardeners, not only because of lacking institutional power to change the course of actions beyond their own narrow community, but also, importantly, because of their capability to prepare for the crisis in a sustainable and resourceful way as well as due to the valued common good that is intertwined in the process of doing so. In that regard, Atwood further emphasizes the nuance of the relationship between one's gender and one's behavior in the ecofeminist sense.

Looking at Atwood's stance toward the interconnection of feminist and ecological aspects and its representation throughout her work, as early as in her second novel *Surfacing*, the author has continually explored the relationship women have with nature, social and environmental awareness, and the inclination men have toward materialism, rational and technocratic domination of nature, and women. *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* are not exceptions to that narrative. While Crake criticizes the former world, its oppression, exploitation, and corruption, he does not try to solve the problems he sees in ways opposing the system he criticizes. Instead, he again chooses the hierarchical top and uses his power to decide and dominate. Even though the leaders discussed in this paper that reflect some of the main characteristics of Crake's behavior are not responsible for the emergence of COVID-19, a similar lack of care, as well as a lack of effective decision-making, contributes to them being the perpetrators of the current state in their countries as well as affecting other countries around the world. In Snowman's character,

conversely, one can see the opposition to that and observe the lack of impulses to hold the ultimate power and control the natural via the technological, as well as his inclination toward social justice and a behavior displaying compassion with not only Crakers but also nature of the remaining post-pandemic world.

5. Conclusion

Over the years, Atwood's dystopian fiction has been able to pertinently capture and defamiliarize important moments of history as well as more minute moments of living in the world which, when compared with real world events, have been capable of producing new reflections and meanings for her readership. The fact that even a year ago, Atwood's novels *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* did not resonate with the situation in the world nearly as much as they currently do shows that readers are able to re-experience the significance of these dystopian novels again over time, just as they do via Atwood's most well-known novel *The Handmaid's Tale* ever since having been written in 1985.

In line with that, this paper explored the ways in which the main characters in the two novels and their behaviors during the fictional pandemic are reflected in the real-world behavior and decision-making processes of national leaders. As argued, the leadership styles of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and Boris Johnson not only share many similarities in between themselves but also notably reflect Crake in his self-centeredness as well as the inclination toward male mastery connected with the lack of care for those finding themselves on the periphery of power. Conversely, female leaders, such as Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand), Erna Solberg (Norway), Katrín Jakobsdóttir (Iceland), and Silveria Jacobs (Sint Maarten), shared various behavioral characteristics with the characters from *The Year of the Flood*, mainly the God's Gardeners. In that way, it puts both the discussed world leaders as welle as these two novels into opposition. While presenting the same dystopian world featuring the same pandemic, the characters, their positions within the power structure of their world, as well as their understanding of nature and the regard for the environment, play an integral role in setting them apart.

Focusing on the overall analyses of both of Atwood's novels would undoubtedly offer many valuable insights into her fictional worlds as well as the real world we live in. In that way, the paper naturally leaves space for further analyses of topics related to Atwood's dystopian worlds. I opted to focus on the narrower selection of main character's behavioral traits, their position of power, actions, and relationships in regard to themselves, people around them, their natural environment and observed what role those aspects play when it comes to living in the pandemic times

as well as whether there are parallels between them and the real world to be found. In spite of the narrower focus, the aspects discussed offer an in-depth look into how Atwood approaches and comments on social, political, and gender-related topics via the interplay between the characters and their surroundings, as well as how significant parts of their characters poignantly transcend the boundaries of the fictional text and find reflections in the real-world pandemic situation.

As Rita Felski notes in *Uses of Literature*, "[t]o propose that the meaning of literature lies in its use is to open up for investigation a vast terrain of practices, expectations, emotions, hopes, dreams, and interpretations – a terrain that is, in William James's words, 'multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed'" (Felski 2008, 8). Atwood's novels revolving around the world pandemic help extrapolate what the world around us might look like if the words of their author are made real. It also reminds its readers that the origin of the thoughts creating dystopian worlds lies in the real world and makes it possible for them to return to it in their defamiliarized forms. The paper calls attention to the fact that the vast terrain is already open and that dystopian literature and its ideas transgress the boundaries of the literary and fold themselves back into the real while being crucial for increasingly becoming a more distinct tool to address various kinds of concerns within the public space, whether it is the leadership of a country during a crisis, the discussion of social classes and privilege, or the relationship toward nature and environment.

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THE RELEVANCE OF MARGARET MEAD'S CONCEPTS IN HEALTH AND ILLNESS TO THE ERA OF COVID-19

Tagrid Morad

Abstract

The contribution of the medical anthropologist to the study of COVID-19 is significant, especially when treating the pandemic as a syndemic. Merrill Singer, an American medical anthropologist, and his colleagues claimed that a "syndemic approach reveals biological and social interactions that are important for prognosis, treatment, and health policy." Gilbert Lewis described the medical anthropologist role as a mediator between the individual (from a particular culture, that has its own special patterns that affects his or her illness behavior), and the physician. Illness behavior is not just a medical term, it's a social construct that is determined and shaped by cultural, social, economic, occupational and medical factors. Anthropology, ethnography and literature would crystallize health and illness behavior to the extent that medicine could not do alone. The goal of this paper is to highlight Margaret Mead's insights on health and illness and its relevance to the current pandemic, discuss Mead's contribution to illness behavior, and show how her legacy helps us to understand the impact of the disease. Practical aspects of Mead's contribution were found in her writings, such as in her autobiography *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years*, and in other works that discuss her research within the framework of COVID-19. Emphasis is put on the importance of documentary literature written by medical anthropologists to the scientific debate. The role of writers (inc. medical writers), anthropologists and other professionals is of vehement importance to contain the ongoing global epidemic.

Keywords

COVID-19, Margaret Mead, Illness behavior, Ethnographic Autobiography, Medical Anthropology

* * *

1. Introduction: Approaching COVID-19 as a Syndemic

PATHOGENS cause epidemics and the latter shapes cultures and makes people develop strategies to limit contact with other groups. The ability to assess the threat

and modulate behavioral response and make changes to life differs from culture to culture. At the individual level, the lay person perceives illness differently from a physician, who has little opportunity to see patients in their homes or workplaces in order to assess some of the social forces that may have influenced and shaped the patient's attitudes to their illness and their responses to it (Lewis 1981, 151). Across time this has become the role of the medical anthropologist. As part of their education, medical anthropologists acquire skills to study a culture. They learn the language of the studied culture, follows its patterns of behavior and other more complicated events at a personal level, usually for longer periods of time (Lewis 1981, 151). A physician will find the contribution of the medical anthropologist significant to their work with patients from cultural backgrounds different to their own.

Within the field of anthropological studies of infectious diseases, medical anthropologists conventionally focused on social, political and cultural aspects in the control of infectious disease outbreaks (Lynteris and Poleykett 2018, 434).

Richrad Horton claims that a social aspect for preparedness control is needed in order to tackle COVID-19 (2020, 874). He argues that a syndemic approach towards the pandemic reveals biological and social interactions that are vital for prognosis, treatment, and health policy (Horton 2020, 874). The Lancet Commission revealed that the availability of inexpensive and practical interventions in the next few years could prevent almost 5 million deaths among the world's poverty-stricken people (Horton 2020, 874). And that is without taking into account the reduced risks of dying from COVID-19 (Horton 2020, 874). The most important consequence of seeing COVID-19 as a syndemic is to emphasize its social origins.

Approaching COVID-19 as a syndemic means more protection for vulnerable people by means other than medical, such as social distancing.

2. Objectives: The Contribution of Past Medical Anthropological Research to Science

A meaningful past anthropological extensive work enables medical anthropologists and other public health professionals to focus on differences that matter in the present. Previous discussions within the field prepared contemporary medical anthropology to look beyond the bounds of the traditional model of disease (Campbell 2011, 76). And yet, works by medical anthropologists are still missing in the literature.

A recent study from 2013 that focuses on the use of bamboo in the construction of Alexandre Yersin's microbiological laboratory in plague-stricken Hong Kong is included in an article about aspects of epidemic control (Lynteris and Poleykett

2018, 434). Margaret Mead's autobiography *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (1972) also includes a description about the use of bamboo as a building material. In her autobiography, Mead describes Bajoeng Gede, as "a village in which most courtyard walls consisted of bamboo fencing, instead of the clay walls which, in other villages, shut each courtyard off from sight" (1972, 232). Mead writes how she later realized that the culture was worried about contamination issues. Another important detail that Mead noticed is that all the members of the population had hypothyroidism.

A quick access to recent studies that examine the benefits of Bamboo, shows that Bamboo shoots that are used for construction are effective in reducing nitrates contamination and removing atmospheric carbon than any other species (Sharma et al. 2014, 250). Consuming Bamboo shoots (BS) have also been used in naturopathy since ancient times as a cure to treat diseases and its antithyroid potential has been examined and proved (Sarkar et al. 2020, 1, 6).

Mead's research is of tremendous value to the study of prevention and control of complex infections and should be given a place within its scientific discourse. This paper will provide more examples of Mead's insights on health and illness that are significant in fighting against the impact of COVID-19.

3. Methods: Tackling the Effects of the Pandemic

In order to understand the relevance of Mead's insights on health and illness to COVID-19, her autobiography has been analyzed according to the following selected factors, all found to be of great importance in tackling the effects of the pandemic (in a random order):

1. Health systems (Carr 2020, 493)
2. Stabilizing financial systems and helping businesses survive (Baker and Judge 2020, 2)
3. Securing the essentials for remote communities - delivery of food and essential supplies (Jayaram 2020, 11)
4. Talking about mental health and treating mental illness (Torales et al. 2020, 317)
5. Global collaboration to effectively combat COVID-19 (essential for developing countries that are at risk of experiencing massive outbreaks due to absence of medical resources, detection technology, and epidemic statistics) (Li et al. 2020, 1)
6. Strong leadership (Barnard 2020, 755)
7. Community action towards global social challenges when fighting back societal rejection, discrimination, and stigmatization (Kontoangelos et al. 2020, 497)

8. And effective crisis and risk communication strategies (which are especially crucial in developing countries that vary in their cultural, linguistic and ethnic background) (Ataguba and Ataguba 2020, 1)

Mead's autobiography is divided into three parts. This paper will focus on "PART TWO," in which Mead discusses her field work experience and the cultural differences that she observed among her close ones who lived in different cultures.

Mead's contribution to COVID-19 as presented in the media will be discussed as well.

4. Results: The Relevance of Margaret Mead's Concepts in Health and Illness to the Era of COVID-19

In "Samoa: The Adolescent Girl", Mead writes how her friend equipped her prior to her travel with "a hundred little squares of torn old muslin 'to wipe the children's noses.'" (Mead 1972, 146). This description emphasizes the need for a health system that will secure and supply essential products to remote communities. Enter COVID-19, without the necessary medical supply, such as masks and cleaning products, the virus will continue to spread.

In "Return from the field", Mead writes about her second husband, the New Zealand anthropologist Reo Fortune. Mead claims that Fortune did not seem to be bothered in any way by his lifestyle, which did not include the luxuries of modern culture such as watching a live symphony playing music (Mead 1972, 158). In the same chapter, however, Mead also discusses her meeting with Ruth Benedict, her colleague at the time, who told her how "deeply depressed" she was for spending her summer partly alone (Mead 1972, 163).

These cases that Mead describes emphasize the importance of understanding cultural illness behavior when it comes to mental health. A cultural stigma can be a "barrier [when] recognizing personal mental illness and seeking help" (Schomerus et al. 2019, 469). A person's stigmatizing attitudes reflect the population attitudes and impact the decision of seeking help (Schomerus et al. 2019, 469–70).

There is a stigma surrounding mental health issues, which was found to be especially high among Pacific peoples (Minster and Trowland 2018, iii). Recent initiations in New Zealand such as "Like Minds, Like Mine" counter the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness (Vaughan and Hansen 2004, 113).

Mead's description of her husband's behavior presents the need for essential communication and strong leadership that will promote openness when it comes

to mental health issues, an aspect that must be dealt with especially during COVID-19 when isolation has become the new norm. The American Museum of Natural History with which Mead was associated made a list of subjects in which she was considered to be an expert. Mental health was among the topics listed. There are other occasions where Mead discusses issues like suicides and other mental disturbances in result to self-isolation as a consequence of disability and illness. Mead hasn't hesitated to voice her opinion on other types of epidemics in America like drug abuse. She has called for addicts not to be stigmatized but to see them as the "casualties of a badly organized society" (Quarles 2017). She calls for treatment and to support police in coping with this epidemic.

In "Manus: The Thought of Primitive Children," Mead describes the Manus women having "their necks and arms hung about with the hair and bones of the dead" (1972, 169). A portrait of starvation that shows how much a global response is needed in order to help remote communities. The Manus people were also found to be a trading tribe – they exchanged goods in markets with the people of distant islands and among themselves. Such a description emphasizes the importance of helping this tribe to survive when it comes to businesses, i.e., offering financial assistance. This can help communities that face the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic to deal better with the unprecedented financial stress.

In "The Years between Field Trips", Mead describes her field work experience with Native Americans.

Mead explains how the youngsters were sent to schools for Indians, which educated children from different linguistic groups. The children were taught by federal employees who, according to Mead, "knew little, and usually cared less, about their pupils and the cultures from which they came" (1972, 191). Mead writes that this had resulted in the pupils returning to their reservation, without acquiring proficiency in English, and feeling more estranged from their traditional culture (1972, 191).

Native Americans at the time also often rejected medical care which was offered to them, and it is possible as Mead argues, that with the right "culture contact," such as learning to value Native American culture, a positive change will happen (1972, 190).

During COVID-19 we all have a role to play in protecting ourselves and others. Stigma and discrimination can happen when people link COVID-19 with a population, community, or nationality. A global response should address discrimination and inequality and provide resources that will reduce stigma.

In "Arapesh and Mundugumor: Sex Roles in Culture," Mead describes the Mundugumor as "a fierce group of cannibals who occupied the best high ground along

the riverbank. They preyed on their miserable swamp-dwelling neighbors and carried off their women to swell the households of the leading men" (1972, 204). Mead later explained that when the Australian administration took over, it decided to put the village leaders into prison. When the leaders were freed, they returned to their village and told their people that warfare and ceremonial life will not be part of their lives (Mead 1972, 204). All the young men had to leave and go to work. This is a case of a strong leadership that did not destroy the village of the cannibals but instead used their leaders to make a change. Responding to COVID-19 as well means knowing how to handle a crisis as a leader. Strong leadership and community compliance are significant key elements that help to combat the pandemic.

In this chapter, Mead also provides an interesting comparison of illness behavior between the Mundugumor people and Fortune. She writes how Fortune found the Mundugumor people to be fascinating, because they treated illness the same way he did. Mead describes how Fortune's way of treating illness in himself was a physical activity (i.e.. mount climbing), even with high fever, in order to fight sickness out of his system (1972, 206).

Mario Jacoby writes that the Mundugumor "treat illness and accidents even among children as matters for exasperation and anger" (2006, 63). In this culture it is only the strongest who survive, those who can conquer the hard challenges of life (Jacoby 2006, 63).

In this case there is a need for a strong leadership and a health system that will examine illness behavior in different cultures in order to prepare for future challenges. Especially when what seems to other cultures as unconventional treatment to treat diseases, could be perceived as normal treatment in a particular culture. As Mead states: "so I had ceased to expect any sympathy…I had a good deal of fever, and this, combined with Reo's unrelenting attitude toward illness, and the general sense of frustration over the people, made it a very unpleasant three months" (1972, 207).

In "Tchambuli: Sex and Temperament," Mead describes how the Washkuk houses were scattered far apart along steep roads (Mead 1972, 211). Mead had to walk a mile to find a house with a man, a woman, a child and two dogs (1972, 211). This community was not of a big population. Mead's insight into this culture's housing conditions emphasizes the importance of making efforts to reach all communities, even those who are not compactly built and are close together, in terms of medical care and supplies (1972, 227).

In "Bali and Iatmul: A Quantum Leap," Mead writes about her meeting with Australian explorers, adventurers, and civil servants in New Guinea. She describes how she didn't bother to discuss with them her research, because they

thought that "the peoples of New Guinea were very alien and strange- souls to be saved," and who cannot be taught (1972, 226). Mead explains that in their view, these people need "to be controlled, governed, and slightly civilized" (1972, 226). This discriminative attitude as described in Mead's autobiography towards the peoples of New Guinea, underlines the lack of awareness, and the crucial need for a global and a local response that will take on the initiative to teach about aboriginal people.

In the same chapter, Mead writes how on the Sepik, "the mosquitoes and the heat provid[ed] a constant irritation of bites, cuts, itches, and small vexatious infections that might turn into tropical ulcers. There was no skilled help, no way of getting anything done that one did not initiate and take responsibility for oneself" (1972, 226). And there was no treatment for malaria (Mead 1972, 227). This point underlines the significant contribution that global collaboration can have in providing medical care to remote areas.

5. Margaret Mead's Contribution to COVID-19 in the Media

The most recent study up to date that includes a debate on Mead and COVID-19, discusses the story of Thomas McDade, a biological anthropologist (King 2020). During the pandemic, McDade came up with the idea of using an older method that he practiced for over two decades in the field, only this time, in order to detect COVID-19. The minimally invasive method "dried blood spot" (DBS) was used by McDade to gather blood samples in the field, without having study participants to attend a lab or a clinic.

The fascinating part of McDade's journey to biological anthropology and specifically to DBS, lies within his inspiration, who is in fact Margaret Mead. Her book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) (a paper that was also discussed in her autobiography), raised curiosity in the young McDade who became interested during his grad school in the study of stress and its relation to human immune system among adolescents in Samoa. Following in Mead's footsteps, he traveled to Samoa and used DBS technique to collect data for his study analysis. Mead's work is mentioned as the engine power that led to scientific interest in remote communities and consequently to the utilization of a technology that allows the examination of different diseases and conditions in distant populations. Becoming one of the most popular off-the-shelf techniques used during this pandemic.

Mead's work is also used in a study that focuses on raising awareness towards the side effect of isolation and loneliness among elderly and children during the pandemic. In their column, Lucy Rinaldi and Cheryl McFadden provide various alternatives that offer support to the struggling members of the community, especially

in the absence of face-to-face interaction. They also discuss the importance of developing relationships despite age differences between children, adolescents, and seniors. Relying on Mead's research, the authors show (through different programs) that treating mental illness is within the nation's capabilities and its endeavors to take action and care for its members.

Belleruth Naparstek writes about the connection of loneliness to the high rate of heart disease, depression, cognitive decline, and early death. In this case, the author uses Mead's example for first sign of civilization as an indication of why compassion towards each other during the pandemic plays an important role in reducing the risk for the above-mentioned diseases. Naparstek writes that Mead considered a 15,000-year-old fractured thighbone that had broken and later healed as the first sign of civilization. Such an injury takes six weeks to heal, in which the ill must rely on their community in order to survive. Offering support and care besides medical aid is the key to healing. This was as much the case for our ancestors as it is for us today, when being alert towards the members of our community can save lives.

6. Discussion: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach of Literature and Science

Warwick H. Anderson cites Mead's call for medical assistance in the case of an outbreak to help suffering indigenous people, but it is not enough to establish medical policy that will rely only on traditional medicine (Anderson 2008, 3676; Bhasin 2007, 1). In some countries, state health programmes do not include necessary anthropological consultations (Bhasin 2007, 1). Auto/ethnographies that include insights on health and illness can contribute. These should be considered in order to further rescue and revalue cultures, that contributed their part to human health and to the development of indigenous medical knowledge and its systems (Bhasin 2007, 1).

Shirley Lindenbaum's research on the case of the kuru epidemic of the Fore from Papua New Guinea concluded that "Anthropologists and medical investigators did not bring an end to the epidemic" (Lindenbaum 2008, 3720). But rather it was the scientific perceptiveness of how kuru was transmitted, which resulted from the joint efforts of anthropology and medicine (2008, 3720). Lindenbaum in her review defined anthropology as "a natural science and a humanistic discipline, mediating between human biology and ecology on one hand and the study of human understanding on the other" (2008, 3715). Her description of the kuru disease is a great example of how anthropology and medicine can contribute to our understanding of illness behavior. Regarding our global epidemic many details of the start of it remain unclear, but anthropology could offer some explanations to its occurrence.

Mead was trained to be an expert in interpretation. It is apparent from her writing that she mastered the method called "thick description" (Geertz 1973; Ponterotto 2006). Her love for detail and context offers us more than just a description of the culture. It gives a multidimensional picture of emotional and relational components with the halo of wholeness. That is the case when she writes about illness behavior, disability and mental health, while moving on the developmental scale and reflecting scientifically on its origins and causations.

Clifford Geertz appropriated Gilbert Ryle's philosophical term of "thick description" to discuss works done in the field of ethnography (Ponterotto 2006, 539). He claimed that the validity "of the author's interpretations, the context under which these interpretations were made must be richly and thickly described" (Ponterotto, 2006, 539). Norman K. Denzin then spread the concept across disciplines such as communication, sociology, and the humanities (Ponterotto 2006, 540). The significance of this concept lies within its ability to "[i]nsert history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (Ponterotto 2006, 540). Mead's words reflect many voices of healthy and ill people, children and elderly, men and women, seeking sympathy and expressing sorrow. Today we face a global epidemic while telecommunication is broadcasting remote voices of fearful people. We share that feeling of loss of control and certainty. At the same time, we try to bring this saga to its resolution and the question is whether modern medicine can contain this crisis or take inspiration from Mead and other anthropological pioneers to tailor solutions that fit each culture differently.

So, what do we have now? We have an epidemic and there is no laboratory that can explain all the W's and H (why, what, where, when, who and how). Medicine could learn from the interpretation of the context by adopting and adapting the concept of "thick description" (Geertz 1973; Ponterotto 2006). Ethnographic studies and qualitative research using thick description would add more insight into how to contain the infection and offer more local solutions suitable for each: society, culture, geographic region, health system and more (Geertz 1973; Ponterotto 2006).

7. Conclusion: The Role of the Writer (Including the Medical Writer)

Literature can provide clarity on some of the cultures that Mead studied and framing her research within COVID-19 responses attempts to combat the challenges that humanity is facing during this pandemic. It is worth turning to Mead's work in order

to understand and be better "informed" on how each culture deals with illness and what are her needs.

In his discussion of thick description, Geertz mentiones that "the essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1973, 323). In order to communicate the global character of the COVID-19 epidemic we need to address many cultures, many societies and many individual interpretations of this experience. And since we have no answers for all different questions that each one of us of the mankind can raise, we need to find the very versatile answers that could be comprehended by all individuals. Health professionals assisted by ethnographers can contribute more to the understanding of epidemic and would offer humanity adjustable approaches to contain the epidemic. And thus, ethnography and anthropology can make the approximation of the scientific answers more acceptable and understandable. Literature and science would be enriched by more ethnographic and/or autobiographical studies, also because we can learn from it the many varied ways people behaved during epidemics when we know that cultures preserve their memories on these periods and canonize their experiences and behaviors to be used in a time of need.

Since we reveal nowadays that individual behavior and social interactions affect the magnitude and control of the epidemic, we know that remote cultures have fresher collective memory of epidemics that could be adapted and adopted partially or to larger extent to deal effectively with our global epidemic. Even in western culture most of the descriptions and knowledge about epidemics is not in medical writings and textbooks, but mainly in other forms of literature. Literature along centuries constitute a canon of collective and individual experiences even from catastrophic times that could be of value for the sake of people today.

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Tagrid Morad is a PhD student at Masaryk University. She obtained her MS from Polytechnic Institute of New York University and MA from Ben-Gurion University. She is a member of the European Medical Writers Association. Her specialization is in medical communication. She published several articles in international medical journals, including International Journal of Child Health and Human Development and International Journal on Disability and Human Development. Her work has been also published in the book Bedouin Health: Perspectives from Israel. She presented her work in the fields of disability, literature and pharmacovigilance at international conferences. She has been selected to present her work on the Future of Medicine: The Voice of Medical Writers, at the Inventions and Innovations: Medicine 2040 Symposium. In her dissertation she focuses on creating a multi-dimensional model that assesses the available data in, out and of ethnographic autobiographies or other literary genres. Her recent article emphasizes the importance of ethnographic autobiographies to the scientific community.

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INTERVIEWS, CONFERENCE REPORTS, REVIEWS, TRIBUTES

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OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EYE OF A STORM: "NEW PATHWAYS IN ANGLOPHONE LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES IN PANDEMIC TIMES" CONFERENCE REPORT

Denisa Krásná, Tereza Šmilauerová and Lenka Žárská

ON the 20th and 21st of November 2020, an international conference "New Pathways in Anglophone Literary and Cultural Studies in Pandemic Times" took place in Brno, Czech Republic. The event was organized by the Department of English and American Studies of Masaryk University and hosted graduate students and researchers from various countries across the world including the United States, the Czech Republic, India, and Brazil. The keynote speeches were delivered by PhDr. Thomas Don Sparling, from Central European Association for Canadian Studies, Dr. Mathias Clasen of the English Department at Aarhus University, and Dr. Sagar Deva from the University of Leeds.

Three of the department's graduate students, Denisa Krásná, Tereza Šmilauerová and Lenka Žárská, constituted the organizing committee. "New Pathways in Pandemic Times" was the second installment in "New Pathways," a series of the department's biannual conferences for emerging scholars. The event opened in the afternoon of the 20th with a short welcoming speech by Dr. Tomáš Pospíšil, a vice-dean for international relations and an associate professor of the Department of English and American Studies, followed immediately with the first keynote speech.

1. Keynote 1: PhDr. Thomas Don Sparling

The speech "'Something We Can't See Is Causing Us to Die' Books: Pandemics and Canadian Literature," delivered by Don Sparling, traced a disease trope in Canadian literature. First, it introduced seeking for the meaning as a basic human strategy in crises, including pandemic, which is particularly difficult for the Western world since they are used to being in control, not to being left at the mercy of anything we cannot see. That meaning was traditionally derived from religion, in case of European cultures from the Bible's narrative. The resulting conviction was that any crisis came according to God's will. Later, in the 17th century, this explanation started

to be left for a counter-narrative where a disease is anthropomorphized, portrayed as a cunning and powerful enemy. Sparling briefly shared with the audience, as an example, a story from his childhood when the spreading panic of polio epidemic in the United States was stopped with the introduction of a vaccine, causing the re-emergence of the feeling that the absence of danger is granted for the American citizens. There is, however, a hidden fear deep inside the human mind that a new disease might come at any time and erase the humankind.

Then the speaker turned to Canadian literature on pandemic, including *The Last Canadian* (William C. Heine, 1974), *The Tiger Flu* (Larissa Lai, 2018), and *The Year of the Flood* (Margaret Atwood, 2009), and defined main common topics – such as focus on climate changes and the poisoning of the environment by the humankind, religious fundamentalism, racism, and patriarchy – meaning that the genre is used to discuss current social issues. The essence of the literature is thus a message that the current social and environmental situation is unsustainable and offered solutions to it only provisional and temporary. Moreover, the authors claim the humankind as the cause of a pandemic. Therefore, wishing that the Earth overrides anthropo-dominance, the answer they provide is executed by nature itself, leading to punishment of trespassing humans by annihilation of the majority. The concluding message of the speech was the famous quote by Walt Kelly, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

2. Panel 1: North America in Pandemic Times

After a coffee break, the first panel, chaired by Denisa Krásná, began to discuss literary and cultural perspectives on various issues connected to pandemic and American society and culture. Jan Čapek, from Masaryk University, started with an analysis of the movie *The Lighthouse* (2019), "A Self-Inflicted Wound: Isolation in *The Lighthouse* (2019)." The paper explored the cinematic depiction of one of phenomena closely tied to a pandemic, the interpersonal and inner isolation, leading to tension and violence. Čapek proposed that character of the Young is haunted by a sense of guilt and unconsciously keeping himself in a vicious circle of resentment, frustration, and violence. The psychological tracing of the character was followed with a brief analysis of visual aspects of the movie's final scene where isolation and destructive instincts result in the Young's literal fall from grace, ending with his violent death.

The following speaker, Ivana Plevíková from Masaryk University, interlinked in her paper, "Reflections of Margaret Atwood's Dystopias in the Pandemic of 2020,"

a literary analysis of two novels by Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), with an analysis of the current political leaders and their attitudes toward the covid-19 crisis. According to her claims, the two books present a mirror to and pre-shadow the current situation. The paper stressed the importance of the reflection of not only political and social structures Atwood borrowed from the real world when writing the novel, but also types of behavior that some political leaders continually display today. The center of both analyses was then dichotomic categorization of two types of leadership – one represented by three male leaders, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Boris Johnson, and the other by three female leaders, Jacinda Ardern, Erna Solberg and Katrín Jakobsdóttir. The former type was characterized with a focus on an individual gain, their personal point of view, and tendencies to accepting misinformation, misinforming, and belittling the gravity of the situation. The latter type, social leaders, was described as not trying to regain the past state, capitalism, and instead focusing on the health situation and well-being of all citizens. Their attitude reflects the concerns of nature and science, they prefer a flat hierarchy in decision-making, and they concentrate on communicating with compassion and identifiability. Those two kinds were illustrated on the authoritarian leader Crake from *Oryx and Crake* and The Gardeners of God from *The Year of the Flood* that implemented flat hierarchy in their cult. The paper concluded that women as leaders tend to take lesser risk in the areas connected to health and more risk in the economic sphere, they emphasize empathy and interpersonal relationships, and put the community before an individual.

The third paper, "Québec and Its Cultural Complex: Closer Look at Quebecois Psyche from Jungian Perspective" by Aleš Vrbata from the State University of Feira de Santana, presented to the audience a concept of cultural complex, developed within the Jungian tradition during 1980s and 1990s, as an interdisciplinary endeavor attempting to look beyond symptoms of collective complexes to identify an archetypal core of drama occurring in the collective unconscious. The speaker then moved to Québec as a territory compared to the Third World countries due to its colonization in the 18th century, leading to implementation of the aforementioned concept by some of Canadian historians. It explains how the unhealed Québécois cultural complex triggers a vicious circle of permanent and compulsive collective psychology based on one specific chapter in its history. In such an arrangement of psychology and politics, Québécois leaders have usually stressed the importance of "survival" by means of literature, history, language, religion, and ancestral tradition. The paper argued that the solution to such a historically given condition lies in a constructive, creative, active and conscious integration of the past.

The last speaker of the day, Martin Ondryáš from Masaryk University, discussed his paper, "The Price of Progress: Selected Contemporary Issues of Indigenous Peoples in Canada". Ondryáš's paper shows how the historical burden of the so-called residential schools led to various current problems of indigenous peoples of Canada. First, the issue of residential schools was described and characterized as a tool of power, enforcing assimilation to the European culture and religion of Christianity. Then the paper explored two selected current problems of the indigenous communities. The first of the topics discussed were the aboriginal gangs in Canadian Prairies (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta) which started in 1980s and 1990s and bring to their members both wealth and the sense of belonging through fraternal organization offering support and encouragement for the youth. Then Ondryáš moved to the issue of murders and kidnappings of indigenous women, which comprise almost one fourth of all murdered and missing women in Canada. The paper thus shed light on increasingly – yet not sufficiently – discussed Canadian topics.

The discussion following the panel was lively, engaging all speakers and further examining the topics of their papers and putting them into a wider, inter-field context.

3. Keynote 2: Dr. Mathias Clasen

The second day of the conference opened with Dr. Mathias Clasen of Aarhus University, Denmark and his speech titled "Simulating the Apocalypse: On the Adaptive Functions of Scary Stories". In his paper, Dr. Clasen presented his research on the psychology of fear and entertainment, and the rising interest in horror fiction and entertainment during the pandemic. By depicting fiction as a way in which people make sense of the world, he sees apocalyptic literature and other media as a frame of reference for an unprecedented situation that the human race has so far only faced in imagination. Reading or experiencing horror or (post)-apocalyptic stories then becomes comparable to "consulting a map when in unknown territory", which is also why the popularity of such fiction rises in the times of crises – for instance, we see rise of post-apocalyptic fiction after both World Wars. In the second part of his speech, Dr. Clasen discussed the empirical studies of his research group which took place in haunted houses concerning fear regulation and the relationship between fear and joy, and looked at fear as play, in which humans recreate horror as simulation of threat scenarios, similar to predator play which is common in animals. Lastly, Dr. Clasen introduced his recent study on whether the horror and prepper genre fans handle the current pandemic better, suggesting that these groups do indeed show better psychological resilience due to their experience with emotional regulation, supporting the idea of fiction as a crucial, adaptive instrument of orientation and preparation.

4. Panel 2: Epidemic in the Society and the Individual

The second panel, chaired by Lenka Žárská, began with the presentation of Tagrid Morad from Masaryk University on "The Relevance of Margaret Mead's Concepts in Health and Illness to the Era of COVID-19." In her contribution, Morad brought attention to medical anthropology and its possible role in the current pandemic, building on different approaches towards medicine and illness in different cultures. Morad discussed how some older findings of medical anthropologists such as Margaret Mead have been ignored despite their potentiality, and suggests a syndemic approach to the pandemic, calling for inclusion of different disciplines in medicine which would acknowledge the role of social forces in prognosis, treatment and health policy when dealing with the ongoing situation.

In the presentation which followed, Tereza Šmilauerová from Masaryk University examined the situation of Asian Americans in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic with the focus on the recent xenophobic race-based abuse of Asian Americans due to the origin of the virus in China. Šmilauerová brought attention to the recent cases of politicians and media fueling the antagonism towards this group with their rhetoric, tracing the current trend of ethnic violence and ostracism towards immigrants back through the previous centuries. She also discussed the emerging approaches and solutions of Asian Americans towards the situation, such as vlogging and video activism, multiracial movements, official news' reports or artivism.

The panel was concluded with Felix Purat of Palacky University, Olomouc and his presentation titled "Science Fiction as Regional Literature: A Different Perspective on Philip K. Dick and Other Sci-Fi Writers." Purat introduced science fiction as a genre in which independence of geography and nationality seems to be a common factor, with frequent focus on the human race as a whole. He then suggested taking the opposite approach, highlighting the stronger connection the geographic context has in tying science fiction to what is generally known as "mainstream" or "literary" fiction, via the bridge of regional studies. On the example of Philip K. Dick, he showed that the science fiction author can also be regarded as a regional writer, not only when taking into account the setting of his novels but defined by the specific culture also found in other Californian writers, suggesting that the science fiction genre has the capability to generate distinctly different reactions from different geographic entities.

5. Keynote 3: Dr. Sagar Deva

The final keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Sagar Deva from the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. Dr Deva's presentation "Why did the UK and US fail

to control Covid? Exceptionalism, Populism, and Incompetence in the Anglosphere" shed some light on the roots of the new wave of anti-intellectualism and right-wing populism in the UK and US that Dr Deva marked as pivotal in the failure of Boris Johnson and Donald Trump to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. By tracing the history of imperialism and colonialism, Dr Deva showed how British and American identities are constructed around the belief in their nations' exceptional character that distinguishes them from the rest of the world and is often rendered as superior. While remaining significant global powers, both the UK and US have seen some decline in their international influence and have been shattered by the recent financial crisis. Both events have contributed to the newly revived Anglospheric exceptionalism that entails anti-immigration sentiments as well as distrust in scientists and intellectuals who are labelled "elites" by right-wing populists. Large parts of the presentation dealt with Brexit that Dr Deva explained in relation to the British people's perception of their nation as inherently distinct from other European nations and thus incompatible with the European project. He revealed, however, that recent surveys suggest a marked shift in the Brexiteers' conviction that was shaken by Johnson's ineffective response to the pandemic. Similarly, the presentation unmasked how the American concept of "liberty", that has been repeatedly evoked by Trump to criticize state interference, inhibited timely reaction to the pandemic. Finally, Dr Deva proposed that Trump's underplaying of the COVID-19 pandemic and his failure to slow down the spread of the virus in the US cost him the recent presidential election that he lost to Joe Biden despite still attracting an alarming number of voters. Dr Deva's keynote was followed by a lively discussion about Trumpism, Brexit, right-wing populism in Central European countries, and the role coronavirus played in the US elections.

6. Panel 3: Social Breakdowns and Suffering in the Anthropocene

The last panel, chaired by Tereza Šmilauerová, opened with Tereza Walsbergerová from Masaryk University whose presentation "Taken Bad: Conspiracism and/as Sickness in Diane Johnson's *The Shadow Knows*" evoked some of the themes and questions raised by Don Sparling the previous day, especially concerning conspiracism and so-called "plague fiction". Walsbergerová emphasized the genre's continuing relevance as it reveals societal ills and socially constructed ideologies that are irrelevant in the face of a larger catastrophe such as a global pandemic. Her presentation was devoted to postmodern fiction that treats society as inherently ill and uses

physical illness as a tool for uncovering other forms of postmodern suffering that Walsbergerová paralleled to paranoia, "one of the most corrosive symptoms of the condition of postmodernity" (Walsbergerová, 21 Nov 2020). She then went on to demonstrate this parallel on Diane Johnson's feminist novel *The Shadow Knows* (1974), particularly on the conspiracism and physical illness of its two female characters, N. and Ev respectively. Walsbergerová's careful analysis ultimately suggested that through the dichotomy of the mind and the body the novel reflects the disconnect between traditional Western feminism and intersectional feminism in the 1970s America.

The panel continued with a presentation "Representation of COVID-19 in Anglophone literature and cultural values in institutions: Learning from the past and looking to the future" by Parin Somani, an independent scholar from India. Somani's presentation stood out from the vast majority of gloomy and highly critical talks for its positive outlook and hopeful message. Somani contended that the current pandemic has put into question the existing value systems through the disruption of institutional functioning. Moreover, her research revealed that recent Anglophone literature has witnessed the emergence of works that encourage the reassessment of Eurocentric worldview. Somani attributes this trend to the COVID-19 pandemic that she believes has re-ignited old and new social justice movements such as the BLM protests. As globalization allows for a widespread and rapid transfer of information, cultural values and diverse experiences are shared among institutions which allows for new pathways to originate in Anglophone studies. Finally, Somani stressed the importance of transcultural institutional cooperation if global success in institutional functioning is to be achieved.

The third presenter, Sarah Rose Olson from Western Washington University, USA, introduced her paper "Interspecies Pedagogies for Educating in the Anthropocene" in which she proposed the pedagogical framework of "Critical Humane Education;" an eco-educational model encouraging critical and systematic thinking (Olson, 2019). Olson first spoke of the importance of including Critical Animal Studies (CAS) in Environmental Education and Literary Studies as CAS offers unique insights of interspecies justice that contests anthropocentric thinking by shifting focus to other-than-human animals and the natural world that is viewed as interconnected. Olson then explained how she applied these theoretical methods in practice and presented research results collected from a seminar titled "Introduction to Critical Animal Studies: Theory, Agency, and Action". Her analysis of student responses, assignments, and discussions showed that students gained new holistic perspectives for confronting socio-political issues that include interspecies justice.

The final presentation of the conference was delivered by Denisa Krásná from Masaryk University whose paper "Sick Land, Sick Animals, Sick People, Sick Planet: Intersectional Analysis of Distance as the Foundation of Exploitative Capitalism" highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed some harmful practices that were normalized in the Western capitalist society. Like the previous presenters, Krásná emphasized the necessity of an intersectional approach to address the pressing issues of our times and revealed the link between the rights of human and other-than-human animals. As Covid-19 outbreaks in slaughterhouses and meat processing plants are reported all around the world, inhumane practices and dire unsanitary conditions in meat plants have been uncovered. Using Anna Szorenyi's theory of distanced suffering and Karl Marx's theories of social alienation and "metabolic rift" as frameworks, Krásná argued that *distance* is the foundation of capitalism that drives human and animal suffering and ultimately causes environmental destruction.

The conference ended on a positive note with a final lively discussion about postmodern narratives, interspecies social justice, and intersectional approaches. As several participants suggested in their presentations, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened doors to many new pathways in Anglophone studies.

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FILOVER: PUBLIC LECTURES AT THE FACULTY OF ARTS OF MASARYK UNIVERSITY IN BRNO

Jiří Lukl, Ivona Vrzalová and Miroslav Vrzal

IN the spring and autumn of 2019, two series of lectures for public organized at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno took place. The series had been prepared as part of the FILOVER project, the abbreviation standing for "*Filo*zofická *veř*ejnosti" (The Arts Faculty for the Public), whose main aim is to present and popularize the research that is being done at the Faculty of Arts.

The project was originally inspired by CEREHIS ("Centrum pre religionistiku a historické štúdiá," Center for Religious and Historical Studies; based in Košice, Slovakia), which attempts to do the same, although it is not directly connected to any specific institution of higher education, and it exclusively focuses on historical and religious studies. The FILOVER project itself began to take shape in the early autumn of 2018, when three doctoral students of the Faculty of Arts came together with a shared vision of popularizing the Faculty, its departments, studies, and the humanities and social sciences in general, as they felt that these areas were rather underappreciated amongst the general public. They were also driven by their affection for the Faculty and the humanities, which, in a way, is reflected in the name of the project. "Filover" may also be read as "Fi-lover" – the lover of philosophy (taken to its extreme, this method would render "the lover of the love of knowledge"). The students behind the project are Miroslav Vrzal, who has since completed his studies and earned his Ph.D. in the study of religions, Ivona Vrzalová, née Schöfrová, a doctoral student of English literature, and Jiří Lukl, a doctoral student of English linguistics.

FILOVER has garnered the continuous support of the Faculty of Arts and especially of the Faculty library, who lent the FILOVER team its Reading room (Čítárna) in building D for the lectures, and of the two home departments of the team, The Department of English and American Studies and the Department for the Study of Religions.

As it was not certain how wide a support the project would receive from the various departments of the Faculty of Arts, the team decided that the series scheduled for spring 2019, in sense and fact the pilot series, would draw from the well of academia of the two parent departments, and so they came up with the theme "Anglisticko-religionistické jaro 2019" (The Spring of Anglicist and Religious Studies

2019). There were eight lectures in total, four from the Department of English and American Studies and four from the Department for the Study of Religions. The lectures took place by-weekly, on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. and ran from late February to early June. The attendance varied from 30 to 70 people, averaging around 50 people a lecture.

Doctor Jan Beneš and his audience during his lecture "USA za mřížemi" (The United States behind Bars) (Photograph: Eva Růžičková)

The lectures began with Jan Beneš's talk titled "USA za mřížemi" (The United States behind Bars1) on 26th February. Doctor Beneš talked about the issues of stringent American criminal laws contributing to an overpopulation in US penal facilities, which are increasingly "industrialized" and privately owned. In essence, prisons have become businesses where more prisoners mean more money. The series

[1] All the lectures were given in Czech. We provide the English translations of the titles for ease of comprehension.

continued with Jan Reichstäter's "Křesťanská Evropa? Christianizace a asimilace pohanských elementů v prostoru severně od Alp" (Christian Europe? Christianization and the Assimilation of Pagan Elements North of the Alps) on 12th March, which focused on the history of contact, peaceful or otherwise, between Christianity and the Pagan religions during the times of the late Roman Empire and in the centuries following its fall. In the third lecture which took place on 26th March and which was titled "b jako brno aneb rozprávky v ulicích města Brna" (b as brno or tales in the streets of the city of Brno"), Jana Pelclová analyzed the discourse of various tags and graffiti one can find in the streets of Brno. Another lecture followed on 9th April. Aleš Chalupa presented a novel approach to the study of the process of Christianization in and of the Roman Empire. According to Chalupa, this process was to a certain degree influenced by such macro-historical factors as plagues, famine and climate change. The lecture was titled "Jak Evropa ke křesťanství přišla: Nový pohled na okolnosti christianizace Římské říše" (How Christianity Came to Europe: A New View on the Circumstances of the Christianization of the Roman Empire). On 23rd April followed another Anglicist lecture, this time on the Great Bard and his appearance as a character in films and TV shows. The lecture was given by Filip Krajník and was titled "William Shakespeare jako filmová a televizní postava" (William Shakespeare as a Film and TV Character). František Novotný delivered the next lecture titled "Kacíři a libertini v Brně? Kauza Jana a Alberta a její context" (Heretics and Libertines in Brno? The Case of Jan and Albert and its Context) on 7th May. The lecture focused on mid-fourteenth century situation in Central Europe and especially in Brno concerning various religious sects and their persecution.

The Anglo-Americanist part of the series concluded with a lecture by Tomáš Pospíšil given on 21st May and titled "Filmy Atoma Egoyana: Hledání identity v čase kulturních konfliktů a nových médií" (The Films of Atom Egoyan: The Searching for Identity at the Time of Conflict of Cultures and New Media). The lecture presented some of the filmography of this Canadian director and then focused on the film *Adoration,* interpreting the film's most important themes and motives. The entire spring series concluded on 4th June with a lecture by one of the organizers, Miroslav Vrzal. The lecture was titled "Metal a satanismus" (Metal and Satanism) and presented some of the more (but also less) known connections between various satanic religious groups and beliefs and the musical genre which is well known for its tendencies towards extreme expression through music but also through other means.

The FILOVER Team (from left to right: Jiří Lukl, Miroslav Vrzal and Ivona Vrzalová) and associate professor Tomáš Pospíšil (Photograph: Veronika Konečná)

Seeing that the lectures in the first series proved to be of interest to the audience, as some of them reached or even breached the capacity of the Reading room, the FILOVER team began to plan and prepare the next series for autumn 2019. It was decided that more departments should be involved in it; however, given that FILOVER continued to receive generous support from the Department of English and American Studies and the Department for the Study of Religions, lectures by academics from these two departments would still form the bulk of the autumn series. The lectures still attracted considerable attention and averaged between 30 and 35 people in the audience. This time, the lectures took place on selected Wednesdays at 5:30 pm.

The semester was opened by Dominika Kováčová on 25th September with a lecture titled "#influencer: Celebrity sociálních médií a jejich jazykový projev" (#influencer: Social Media Celebrities and Their Linguistic Expression). The lecture was based on research Kováčová had done for her dissertation thesis and examined the world of social media, specifically of influencers and the language that they use to effectively establish themselves, garner support from a large number of users and maintain that support over time. She was followed by the historian Lukáš Fasora and his lecture, which took place on 9th October and which was the presentation

of a book that he co-authored titled "Mýty a tradice středoevropské univerzitní kultury" (The Myths and Traditions of Central-European University Culture). The book was published in 2019 as a contribution to Masaryk University's centenary celebrations. The publication mainly focuses on non-metropolitan universities. The following lecture presented the world of contemporary Russian literature. With the title "Současná ruská literatura pohledem českého překladu" (Contemporary Russian Literature Seen through the Lens of Czech Translation), the lecture, delivered by Josef Šaur on 23rd October, asked the questions: which titles from Russian literature have been translated into Czech in the last twenty years and what does it say about contemporary Czech perception of Russian literature? What can contemporary Russian literature tell us about the state of Russian society? Is contemporary Russian literature worth reading at all?

Professor Lukáš Fasora during his lecture "Mýty a tradice středoevropské univerzitní kultury" (The Myths and Traditions of Central-European University Culture) (Photograph: Kristýna Exnerová)

Marek Vlha and his lecture "Bohemians aneb Češi, Cikáni, bohémové. Příběh jednoho pojmu a zrození obrazu českého etnika v USA" ('Bohemians' or Czechs, Gypsies, Bohemians. The Story of One Name and the Birth of the Image of the Czech Ethnic Group in USA) given on 6th November talked about a topic that might be

considered to lie on the boundary between Anglicist and Historical studies – the formation of Czech enclaves in the United States and their perception by general American society. Martin Lang delivered the first religious studies talk of Autumn on 13th November. His "Evoluční a kognitivní studium rituálu aneb jak zkoumat náboženství v laboratoři" (Evolutionary and Cognitive Study of Ritual or How to Investigate Religion in a Lab) presented cutting edge research of ritualistic behavior leading to the formation of cohesive religious groups. The cognitive research utilized various hi-tech instruments typically employed by neuropsychological sciences. The next lecture was given by Jiří Rambousek on 27th November. It was titled "Carrollova Alenka: kraj divů nejen pro děti" (Carroll's Alice: The Land of Wonders Not Only for Children). In the lecture, doctor Rambousek dealt with the various issues of translating *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, including the many neologisms that Carroll had used, as well as hidden meanings for adult readers.

The last lecture of the series was given by Tomáš Hampejs on 4th December, who talked about the advantage of using digital models for the investigation of religions, in this case specifically ancient religions of the Mediterranean. The lecture was titled "Věštění z digitálních modelů: výlety do formálních imaginací studia starověkých náboženství" (Divination from Digital Models: Excursions into Formal Imaginations of the Study of Ancient Religions).

After another successful series, naturally, the FILOVER team began to plan a third series for the spring of 2020, and one lecture, shared by Tomáš Kačer with a presentation of his monograph *Dvousetletá pustina: Dějiny starší americké dramatiky* (A Two-Hundred-Year Wasteland: The History of Older American Drama), and Šárka Havlíčková Kysová with a presentation of her monograph *Režisér jako koncept: Tvorba operního režiséra Miloše Wasserbauera v padesátých a šedesátých letech 20. Století* (Director as a Concept: The Work of Opera Director Miloš Wasserbauer in 1950s and 1960s), did in fact take place on 26th February. However, then the global pandemic of COVID-19 stifled social, cultural and academic life around the Globe, ended the series, and put the FILOVER project temporarily on hold.

The team is now currently hoping for the project to restart soon after this forced prolonged pause. It is certain that this is not going to happen in the spring semester of 2021. However, when it *does restart, new lectures on a broad array of topics will be prepared so that the public might* continue to get acquainted with the various interesting and important research being done at the Faculty of Arts.

The FILOVER team would once again like to thank all parties that participated on the success of the project in any way. Namely, the team greatly appreciates the assistance it received from the Faculty library, the generosity of the Department

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