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INTRODUCTION
Fame and Glory: the Classic, the Canon and the Literary Pantheon

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We possess the Canon because we are mortal and also rather belated. [...] We are in the pragmatic dilemma of excluding something else each time we read.[1]

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Penguin Books released a highly commercialised, uniformly presented, box of *Banned Books* (2001). The collection brought together and rendered accessible an international selection of writers from the last century (with the exception of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which only precedes the twentieth century by a year) whose books, for reasons ranging from style to vocabulary, from religion to politics, had been removed from the shelves as an (often unsuccessful) attempt to prevent them from circulating. All twelve volumes included have since had their bans removed, and all are now considered classics; indeed, two of the authors have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (Steinbeck in 1962 and Solzhenitsyn in 1970). One might even argue that they have been absorbed into (and celebrated by) the canon precisely *because* of the controversy that led to their initial censorship.

This 'anti-canon', which finds its place in the mainstream via temporary ostracisation, provides a revealing starting point for our consideration of how this mainstream, as represented by the 'canon' and the 'classic', is constructed. As long as there has been literature, there has been censorship. In its many forms and inspired by a plethora of motives, the process of banning texts represents an important factor in the definition of society and its literary centre,[2] a mechanism explored in the Russian formalist context by Robert Daly later in this volume. Literature is deemed integral to social morale and morality, and is thus carefully monitored and regularly divested of bad seeds and deviant ideas, even if these ideas are later retrospectively (and sometimes belatedly) deemed 'advanced'. Defiance of censorship runs parallel to this banning and punishment often ensues, from the excommunication and outlawing of Martin Luther in the 1520s,

[1] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: the Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York NY: Riverhead, 1994), p. 29

[2] G.W.R. Southern, 'Literary Censorship', *Australian Quarterly*, 2, 6 (1930), 110-115 (p.110).

through Diderot's 1749 imprisonment for his allegedly scandalous *Lettre sur les aveugles*, and the exiling of Victor Hugo and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in an effort to quiet their expression and publication of politically deviant views, to the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie for the perceived religious blasphemy in his work. It is clear from their on-going fame and continued readership that these philosophical ideas and literary works, rather than successfully being made to disappear, have, liked Penguin's banned books, flourished in the literary world, being celebrated or held up as moral standards for generations to come. The veneration and unsilenceable nature of deviant works shows the central role played by censorship, which becomes a form of canonisation in its own right.

The attempt to remove works from public circulation is a form of institutionalisation, for it allocates texts and authors an officially sanctioned position, albeit one of exclusion, rather than of veneration. At the opposite end of the scale lies overt classicisation: the desire to enshrine a work in the canon through its inclusion in literary prizes, school syllabi, theatre repertoires and bestseller lists. The task of enacting such positive institutionalisation has regularly been allocated to committees charged with creating and disseminating criteria to address Sainte-Beuve's 1850 question 'What is a classic?',[3] which in turn stems from the age-old philosophical qualm 'What is literature?'. It is the judging panels of literary prizes, the publishers of special collections, and the librarians of our national repositories that are the formal custodians of the official canon from moment to moment.

The collection, the library and the list hail texts as part of a lineage, and tend to fall into national categories, privileging the works of native languages and authors. Two notable examples are the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade and the Library of America (the creation of the latter inspired by the former). Both collections seek to impose a canon of classics, and importantly a canon whose endurance the publisher anticipates. This is made clear by the foregrounding of its aim to provide volumes that are made from high quality, durable materials: the books are not only meant to gain a permanent place on the purchaser's bookcase, but are designed to be re-read, thus both contributing to a reader's intellectual capital and moulding his outlook. The Pléiade collection in particular bears a striking resemblance to a small, traditional, hand-held bible, from its leather binding in

[3] Charles Augustin de Sainte-Beuve, *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique? suivi de deux autres textes* [1850], ed. U. Mönch (Heidelberg: Winter, 1946), or in English, 'What Is a Classic?', trans. by E. Lee, in *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14). For more recent evaluations of the topic, see Alain Viala, ed., *Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?* (= *Littératures classiques*, 19 (1993)).

dark, muted tones, through its gold spine lettering, to the use of bible paper itself.[4] The Library of America's volumes use a similarly durable paper, but are bound in an authoritative black, with a patriotic tricolour stripe intersecting the cover.

But despite this clear attempt at longevity, like the negative institutionalisation of censorship, the identification of certain texts as belonging to the canon is not necessarily enduring. Whilst some works that have been venerated in the past maintain a central place on the (Western-) world bookshelf, others have since faded. Yet others experience public esteem for them expressed in a somewhat contradictory fashion, through censorship-via-editing: the texts are canonised for the parts that society wishes to praise, with undesirable elements removed.[5] And a fourth group of texts find themselves or their characters re-appropriated, decades or centuries after their composition, to serve new arguments or represent new philosophies, like the modern Italian Penelope investigated by Serena Alessi in this volume.

This failure of both censorship and overt classicisation to 'fix' a universal and eternal canon underlines that in fact, the received notion of the canon as 'a body of literary works [...] considered to be established as being of the highest quality and most enduring value'[6] is somewhat flawed. The motivation to hail texts as classics is by no means neutral, and it is necessary to unpick not only cultural context but also society's fluctuating views on the work and its author in order to explicate this complex relationship.[7] The volumes included in the Penguin *Banned Books* are classics in the early twenty-first century because the ideas expressed therein are now, if not acceptable in the fullest sense, deemed instructive in raising discussion and interrogating discourses. It is notable that these books are chosen to exemplify the reasons for which they were banned, a reflection of a society's former moral boundaries and their inherent contrast with those of the contemporary reader. The falling in and out of favour of texts is subjective and situational, and though some texts remain on our various lists as 'must-reads', their inclusion is not necessarily

[4] It is notable that the notion of canonisation also stems from religious origins: see Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 19.
[5] Cf. the attempts of Anne Frank's cousin, Buddy Elias, to 'un-canonize' her by publishing the uncensored version of her diary in 1997. Marianne MacDonald, 'The things Anne was really frank about', in *The Independent*, 22 October 1996, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-things-that-anne-was-really-frank-about-1359567.html> [accessed 11 Nov. 2013].
[6] art. 'canon', OED Online, draft additions July 2002, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27148?rskey=jbIl1m&result=21&isAdvanced=true#eid10097715> [accessed 11 Nov. 2013].
[7] It is instructive in this context to consider the 'canon debate' regarding literature syllabi in American universities. The debate is outlined in John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and E. Dean Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2001).

guaranteed in perpetuity. The canon is inevitably plural, being defined in different ways according to varying situations: national, temporal, and intellectual criteria can lead to a wide and vastly differing range of priorities.

This contextual view of the canon is present in another reflection by Sainte-Beuve, this time on the words 'literary tradition'. He describes – and Bourdieu later theorises in more depth – a series of texts that have become part of our cultural consciousness, not necessarily by inclusion in lists or collections, but by being read, adapted, discussed and internalised by the population as a whole.[8] The image of a canon imposed by the custodians of cultural heritage is, in this model, inverted: classic status comes from the people, and these list-makers, themselves a product of a specific cultural milieu, merely capture a single moment of an eternally-shifting continuum of veneration and obscurity. Thus any such list is destined from its inception to become out-dated: the institutionalised canon is a mere illusion of fixity, separate from the reality of subjectivity and continual exchange that, for Sainte-Beuve at least, constitutes a more spontaneous process of tradition-forming or classicisation.

This more flexible approach to understanding the mechanisms for raising text to exemplar status encourages us to ask what precisely is being celebrated at any given point by any single form of institutionalisation, a reflection that in turn raises questions about the relationship between an author and his work. The banned books described above are arguably venerated as works, collections of ideas, generating originality through their content and through inventiveness in style. But whilst we may initially see collections such as the Pléiade and the Library of America as providers of texts that match up to invisible, set criteria for the national classic, they are inevitably processed by author: indeed the Pléiade contains a vast array of *œuvres complètes*, relying on the idea that these works encapsulate the thought of a single *individual*, and thus moving towards a veneration of the writer.

This tension between the writer and their work, as well as their place in society, is instructively exemplified by the Nobel Prize. This quintessential awarding institution is notable for its celebration of pan-academic achievement, spanning disciplines from science

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[8] 'This tradition does not just consist of the group of works worthy of being remembered; those which we assemble in our library and study in school: it has to a large extent passed into our laws, into our institutions, into our morals, into our inherited and unconscious education, into our habits and into all our origins.' Sainte-Beuve, 'De la tradition en littérature et dans quel sens il la faut entendre', in *Causeries de lundi*, 15 vols (Paris: Garnier-Frères, 1857-62), XV, pp. 356-82 (p. 358), our translation, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), pp. 298-384. See also Alain Viala, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* (1992:1), 6-15.

to peace, literature to economic sciences. In addition to its wide-ranging subject matter, the Prize has always had an international aim, unlike the various national libraries of the world. In his notably ambiguous will, Alfred Nobel instructed that prizes be given to those who 'shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind'.[9] Against what criteria, in a literary context, are we to measure those individuals who have produced work that is beneficial to mankind, especially so as to provide a hierarchy of value? And how can a suitable balance be struck between a single, highly influential work, and a lifetime of well-received contributions?[10] Moreover, whilst we may simply see the process as a fundamentally positive celebration of talented and inspirational authors against which to measure the body of international literature, the Prize's status as proffered by an external committee is surprisingly forceful: should a candidate refuse their nomination, they still enter into the award's system as the laureate for that year, immortalised in spite of themselves. A famous example of this refusal is Jean-Paul Sartre, who turned down both the money and status conferred by the prize in 1964, notably prompted by his fear of institutionalisation. He thus attempted to counter the threat to his status as 'outside of' the institution by placing himself on the hinge of the canon and its opposite, simultaneously existing within and without the system.

This problematic relationship between producer and product also invites us to consider to what extent the two must necessarily follow the same pathway to recognition. If 'classic' and 'the canon' most frequently refer to specific texts, the terms 'fame' and 'glory' are more likely to be applied to their individual writers.[11] The relationship between author and work is symbiotic: a single, well-received text can endow its author with the title of 'great author', just as association with a well-known name can ensure the success of a lesser text. But the concepts are not indissociable, for both famous text and famous name can live on autonomously. The text continues to exist after its author's death through its reading and interpretation by the cultural community, but can also surpass its original context, particularly through adaptation into different media, where the narrative content takes precedence over its form. The author's autonomous existence instead comes out of his transformation into what we might refer to today as a 'celebrity':[12] a figure who is

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[9] 'The Will', *Nobelprize.org*, <http://www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/> [accessed 4 Nov. 2013].
[10] Cf. Rebecca Braun, 'Fetishizing Intellectual Achievement: The Nobel Prize and European Literary Celebrity', in *Celebrity Studies*, 2, 3 (2011-11), pp. 320-34.
[11] A simple broad-based Internet and dictionary search of these terms reveals that results for the former two are largely defined in relation to works and the latter two to individuals.
[12] See Simon Morgan, 'Celebrity: Academic 'Pseudo-Event' or a Useful Concept for Historians?', *Cultural & Social History*, 8/1 (March 2011), pp. 95-114 and Ulinka Rublack, 'Celebrity as Concept: An Early Modern Perspective', *Cultural & Social History*, 8/3 (Sept 2011), pp. 399-403.

recognised or has meaning beyond the confines of their writing, like the Cavafy described by Foteini Dimirouli later in this volume.

That the producer of a work should be named, and of interest to its audience, seems self-evident to the modern reader, making it easy to forget that it was not always so. In the oral culture of the Middle Ages it was predominantly the story itself, and not the originator or transmitter of a precise form of that story, that was of greater interest.[13] The classical authors of great epic existed only as headings under which to group sets of texts, whilst many later producers of literary texts felt no need to proclaim their identity.[14] This is a model that began to see widespread change with the accessibility of publication.[15] As the reception of storytelling transformed from a collective to a private experience, so the production of these stories became more individualised; it became a conversation between an author and a reader, and consequently the reader felt a greater need for familiarity with his interlocutor.

But if the increased accessibility of works and more widespread literacy marked the start of this process of authorial recognition, it was later changes in the social status of the author that would cement it. In the French context, Alain Viala describes the 'birth of the author' as taking place in the seventeenth century, with the formation of literary institutions like academies and the growth of royal patronage serving to ennoble a certain class of writer, and to create literary circles in which their social status as 'author' was recognised and reinforced.[16] This was compounded by the eighteenth-century introduction of copyright laws – in 1710 in the United Kingdom, and across Europe (under slightly different guises) from mid-century onwards. Such laws not only solidified the link between the individual and the work from a legal and financial standpoint, thus making authorship more financially viable, but also guaranteed an author's ability to shape his reputation and social standing through writing. Rather than a writer accumulating renown through

[13] Cf. Virginia Woolf, '"Anon" AND "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Last Essays', ed. Brenda R. Silver, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 25, 3/4, Virginia Woolf Issue (Autumn/Winter 1979), 356-441.
[14] On different forms of anonymity see Kate E. Tunstall, '"You're Either Anonymous or You're Not!": Variations on Anonymity in Modern and Early-Modern Culture', *MLN*, 126, 4 (Sept. 2011), 671-88.
[15] Cf. how collaboration in Renaissance drama was often 'flattened' for simplicity when plays were printed. See Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), p. 199.
[16] Alain Viala, *Le Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985). Barthes had proclaimed the death of the author in 1967 in direct opposition to the status of the author as a point of interest and/or importance in relation to the text, and the work of Viala and others seeks to salvage the authorial existence. See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148.

association with an aristocratic patron, an author's glory, and the meaning of his name for contemporary and future audiences, were in his own hands.[17]

If the recognition of the author as the agent of a piece of literature is enshrined in the awarding criteria for the Nobel Prize for literature, the celebration of the glorious literary dead among the *grands hommes* in the Panthéon in Paris, and in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, also indicates how the human figure as producer of texts is considered worthy of something akin to worship. And of course, in the examples of censorship described above, it is the author as undisputed enunciator of the ideas contained within his work who becomes the target of disapprobation: from Luther to Rushdie, is it the individual that must suffer the infamy from which their work can profit.

Indeed, the potentially positive effect of scandal on a work's popularity, reinforcing the hackneyed adage of there being 'no such thing as bad publicity', underlines the extent to which the acquisition of fame by literary producers frequently and increasingly spreads beyond the boundaries of a body of work and its (positive or negative) reception. But such a sprawling concept of reputation is difficult to control. On the one hand, there are authors who court fame. Dante, in Julia Hartley's article, is an anomalously early example of an author consciously writing with one eye on personal glory, but his sense of glory is still bound up with the quality of his text; to the twenty-first century author, the lifestyle interview or appearance at a celebrity event provide the means to achieve a different sort of fame, disconnected from its literary birthplace. On the other hand, we find authors who avoid (or feign to avoid) fame, from the Sartre who refused the Nobel prize, to that 'notorious recluse', J.D. Salinger, to the agoraphobic Elfriede Jelinek, who expressed her mixture of happiness and despair at winning the Nobel Prize, which she accepted via video message. And yet, these extra-literary actions have the same effect as any overt courting of the press: just as the Sartre myth still benefits from the presence of his name on the list of Nobel laureates, Salinger's oft-cited epithet too has turned him into a recognisable, commodifiable character.[18] There are even those whose cultural currency, whether or not it is initially sought, spreads far beyond the locus of its inception in literary production, turning them into extra-literary symbols: whether as representatives of their country, of a political movement, or a particular historical moment (from Manzoni creating modern Italian in his *I promessi sposi*, 1827, to Beauvoir's portrayal of the Resistance in *Le Sang des autres*, 1945), or through the avatars of their most famous characters, who themselves

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[17] Martha Woodmansee, 'The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and legal conditions of the emergence of the "Author"', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17 (1984), pp. 425-26.
[18] <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/> [accessed 28 Oct. 2013]

echo the experiences of a particular generation (such as Evelyn Waugh's bright young things in *Vile Bodies*, 1930).

In all of these examples – fame sought, shunned, or transfigured – the relationship between subject and audience in the construction of the authorial image is incredibly complex. Discourse analysts describe the 'posture' of the author as resulting from the interplay between the 'ethos' created by a text and the authorial image created by external factors and the interpretations of the reader.[19] But the balance between these different elements does not remain constant, for not only can the impact of external factors (whether intentional or otherwise) change with the availability of different means for disseminating works and images, but across the career trajectory of an individual author, the relative importance of text and authorial image is liable to shift with changing circumstances: the author's control over how he is viewed is rarely consistent.

Most notable, perhaps, is the moment of an author's death, which ostensibly removes all further extra-textual agency from the author, handing his image over entirely to the future reading public. But if in one sense this encloses the author and his reputation firmly in the work as a vehicle of transmission to posterity, in another sense, sustained literary glory can, over time, overspill this vehicle, with the fact of fame itself becoming enough to perpetuate it, irrespective of the shifting fate of an author's texts. Shakespeare exists as a cultural reference that by far surpasses our knowledge of his texts; moreover, his place on every school syllabus is in part a result of the virtuous circle of renown, which dictates the necessity of studying the authors that have become well known through study. The adjective 'Kafkaesque' is frequently applied to anything that might display a hint of existential poignancy, and understood – at least to an extent – by audiences to whom *Der Process* and *Das Schloss* are completely unknown. The existence of handbooks that optimistically offer lessons in 'how to be well-versed in' a particular literature, poetry, or drama,[20] yet dedicate just a few lines to each author, is an indication of how name-dropping often suffices: these authors, like the 'classic texts' described above, are part of a general cultural sensibility in which their names no longer signify the producers of texts, but instead represent the knowledge and culture of those who speak them.

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[19] Jérome Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur* (Geneva: Slatkine Érudition, 2007); Dominique Maingueneau, 'Auteur et image d'auteur en analyse du discours', in *Ethos discursive et image d'auteur*, ed. Kahan & Amossy, <http://aad.revues.org/660> [accessed 24 Feb. 2013].
[20] Cf. E.O. Parrott, *How to Become Ridiculously Well-Read in One Evening* (London: Penguin, 1986).

We began with the anti-canon, a series of books barred from recognition in their time, but canonised by later generations precisely because of this initial exclusion. We end on another image in negative, this time of the Pantheon, the only word from our title not yet addressed. The word Pantheon, a temple dedicated to the Greek gods, has been appropriated as a description for those secular gods, whose renown in a particular field is considered unrivalled. But just as the concept of a fixed canon masks a shifting process of contextually motivated classicisation, so the monumental solidity implied by the image of a temple is also illusory. The inhabitants of the literary pantheon are to some extent subject to the same shifts of opinion that push their works in and out of favour. Moreover, they can frequently become separated from their writings, and sit in the temple of literature as mere holograms of authorship, the subject of myriad worried lists of 'books we should have read but have not', and no less famous for it.[21]

This issue of *MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities* does not claim to conduct a full investigation of the processes for creating the classic, canon, fame and glory tentatively outlined above. Such an analysis would require, among other things, a discussion of the various related terminologies (reputation, celebrity, heroism), and of how the process might differ outside of the Western context. However, the issue's consideration of four aspects of these mechanisms – metaphors for hierarchizing genres in Robert Daly's article on Iurii Tynianov, the author striving to reconcile his desire for glory with his religious context in Julia Hartley's piece on Dante, the pathway to broader cultural recognition in Foteini Dimirouli's discussion of Cavafy, and the fate of a classic text in the hands of new authors in Serena Alessi's analysis of the Penelope figure in modern Italy – is nonetheless instructive. It provides insight into how approaching texts and authors in the framework of their status as (at least temporarily) venerated literary artefacts can be productive; how writers' own consciousness of their present and future image motivates their intra- and extra-literary actions; and how the posthumous fate of work and creator is, ultimately, conditioned almost entirely by the contexts in which they are read and re-appropriated by future generations.

[21] In just one example, a Guardian survey in 2013 revealed a 'top ten' list of books that people believe they should have read, but have not. See 'Open thread: have you ever lied about reading a book?', *The Guardian*, 9 Sept. 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/sep/09/have-you-ever-lied-about-a-book> [accessed 13 Nov. 2013]. The survey found that half of the 2000 readers polled displayed unread books on their shelves, implying that the mere fact of possessing classic texts has some cultural value.

Metaphors of Genre Inequality in Iurii Tynianov's 'The Literary Fact'

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Iurii Tynianov was one of the leading figures in the Society for the Study of Poetic Language [OPOIAZ], a group of literary theorists and linguists founded in Petrograd around 1916, which constituted one of the two hubs of a movement now better known as Russian Formalism, the other being the Moscow Linguistic Circle. His principal interest as a theorist was the process that he termed 'literary evolution', which he explored in detail in his two major theoretical articles of the 1920s, 'The Literary Fact' (1924) and 'On Literary Evolution' (1927). In both of these articles, literary genre is the basic unit of analysis.

This paper will focus on the representation of the inequality among literary genres, the unstable position of one genre relative to others, in the first of these articles, 'The Literary Fact'.[1] This first theoretical article, written during a period of relative calm for the Formalists, is much more digressive and suggestive than the second, 'On Literary Evolution', a condensed and tightly structured piece presented as a numbered list of theses. It therefore offers a more direct insight into the origins of Tynianov's ideas.[2] The aims of this approach are, first, to demonstrate that in 'The Literary Fact' Tynianov uses at least three different metaphors to represent the inequality among literary genres; secondly, to reveal, through an examination of the immediate context in which he uses them, that each of these metaphors is associated with a different theory of historical development; and, thirdly, to anchor this highly suggestive use of metaphor within the context of the development of Formalism. This approach raises broader questions both about the language of literary scholarship, which cannot be overlooked as a neutral means of expression, and about the multiplicity of extra-literary forces that determine literary inequalities.

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[1] 'The Literary Fact' was first published in the journal *Lef* in 1924 and was later included as the first chapter in *Archaists and Innovators*, a collection of seventeen of Tynianov's articles of the 1920s: 'O literaturnom fakte', *Lef*, 2 [6] (1924), 101-16; 'Literaturnyi fakt', *Arkhaisty i novatory* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1929), pp. 5-29. All quotations from the article in this paper are from the English translation by Ann Shukman, 'The Literary Fact', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 30-46.

[2] For a broader context in which to situate the second of these two theoretical articles, an account of the 'crisis' that eventually led to the 'rout' of Formalism in 1930, see Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History – Doctrine*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1980), pp. 118-39. See also Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 99-137.

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The title of the article, 'The Literary Fact', refers to a concept that Tynianov introduces to model the instability of the boundaries of literature: the same genre can be considered a literary fact in one era, but not in the next. The familiar letter, for example, was a fact of everyday life [*byt*] at the beginning of the eighteenth century, briefly becoming a 'literary fact' only later. In the same article, Tynianov also considers the position of literary genres relative to other literary genres. It is possible to trace the theorization of this inequality as far back as Aristotle, since it is explained in the *Poetics* that some 'forms' [*schemata*] are 'more esteemed' [*entimotera*] than others.[3] Similarly, Tynianov explains that some genres enjoy greater prominence, prestige, or popularity than others at any given time. But, he argues, the position of a genre relative to others changes. He thus follows Viktor Shklovskii, another leading member of OPOIAZ, who had often made reference to the instability of the 'canon' in his early work on prose, arguing that literature 'canonizes' some genres, only to 'decanonize' them at a later stage.[4] Shklovskii deemed 'The Literary Fact' 'a very important article, perhaps even decisive in its significance'.[5]

Several commentators have demonstrated, often with direct reference to 'The Literary Fact', that it is difficult to assimilate Tynianov's account of literary evolution into a broader theory of history. In his 1928 critique of Formalism, for example, Pavel Medvedev claimed that, though Tynianov attempts to provide an account of literary evolution in the article, he in fact 'strives to show that there is no evolution in literature and that another type of succession dominates'.[6] More recently, intellectual historian Galin Tihanov has argued that Tynianov's 'somewhat melodramatic' account of the changing hierarchy of literary genres 'almost assumes the tone of a fairytale' in 'The Literary Fact': 'Literary forms are not born and do not disappear', concludes Tihanov, 'they only change their resonance and their place on the map of literature.'[7] These readings of 'The Literary Fact' make it clear that the description given in the article of literary evolution does not provide

[3] Aristotle, 'Poetics', trans. by Stephen Halliwell, in *Aristotle, 'Poetics', Longinus, 'On the Sublime', Demetrius, 'On Style'*, Loeb Classical Library, 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1-141 (pp. 40-41).
[4] See, for example, Shklovskii, *Rozanov* (Petrograd: OPOIAZ, 1921), included, as 'Literatura vne siuzheta', in *O teorii prozy*, expanded ed. (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929), pp. 226-45. Shklovskii uses the term 'canonization' ambiguously, implying both that the process transforms extra-literary genres into literary ones and that it occurs among already literary genres.
[5] V.B. Shklovskii, 'Pis′mo Tynianovu', *Tret'ia fabrika* (Moscow: Krug, 1926), pp. 98-100 (p. 98). My translation.
[6] M.M. Bakhtin / P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. by Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 159-73 (p. 165).
[7] Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Bakhtin, Lukács and the Ideas of their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 128-40 (all quotations p. 132).

a satisfactory theory of historical development in literature. Literary genres, for Tynianov, simply swap places, endlessly.

Nevertheless, more can be garnered from his descriptions of individual moments in this process. Tynianov uses several different metaphors to model examples of this shifting inequality, each of which is bound up with a different way of thinking about change.[8] Three examples are examined in this paper: 'high' genres and 'low' genres; those at the 'centre' of literature and those at its 'periphery'; and those in the 'canon' as opposed to 'mistakes'. The immediate context in which each of these metaphors is used can be shown to evoke, however subtly, more sophisticated theories of historical development.

The high and the low

The most frequently used metaphor for the inequality among genres in 'The Literary Fact' is that of 'high' and 'low' genres. This common metaphor has a long history in Russia. In the eighteenth century, a period from which Tynianov draws many of his examples, Lomonosov had codified the division of literature into 'high' and 'low' genres, the position of a genre being determined by its corresponding lexical 'style'. These 'styles' were modelled on the division of society into 'high' and 'low' classes.[9] Tynianov thus appropriates an eighteenth-century categorization, reworking it into a tool for twentieth-century literary analysis.

But the account of the alternations of these 'high' and 'low' genres acquires a revolutionary fervour in certain passages of 'The Literary Fact'. Consider the following:

> Poetry was predominant in literature [*Glavenstvuiushchei v oblasti literatury byla poeziia*]; and in poetry the high genres held sway [*glavenstvovali*]. There was no opening, no crack, through which the letter could become a literary fact. But then this trend wore itself out; interest in prose and the lesser genres pushed out the lofty [*vysokii*] ode.
> The ode, the predominant genre, began to sink to the level of sycophantic verses [*v oblast´ "shinel´nykh stikhov"*], that is, doggerel addressed by petty clerks to their superiors; it sank into everyday life. The constructive principle of a new tendency began to be felt dialectically. ('The Literary Fact', p. 40).

The high-low metaphor is extended in this passage in line with its connotations of class struggle: the higher genre 'wore itself out' and was 'pushed out' by the lower order. These

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[8] L.D. Gudkov has attempted to classify the many metaphors for change used by the members of OPOIAZ, with no focus on a specific text, in 'Poniatie i metafory istorii u Tynianova i opoiazovtsev', *Tynianovskii sbornik*, 3 (Riga: 1988), pp. 91-108.

[9] For a classic study of the fate of this categorization, see Iu. M. Lotman and B.A. Uspenskii, 'Spory o iazyke v nachale XIX v. kak fakt russkoi kul'tury', in Uspenskii, *Izbrannye trudy*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Gnozis, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 331-467.

details combine to evoke narratives of revolution, which, it goes without saying, were not uncommon in the period that followed the events of 1917 in Russia. Tynianov does not begin the passage with an explanation of the fact that he is establishing an analogy between change in the hierarchy of genres and revolution in the social order. Rather, one term simply leads to another, and the analogy suggests itself.

More revealing, however, is the final word of the passage, 'dialectically', which, coming immediately after a series of revolutionary metaphors, represents an attempt to associate this narrative with Marxist theories of social development, driven by the dialectical movements of history. Tynianov uses the term 'dialectically' six times in the article, all of them to describe the emergence of a new 'constructive principle'.[10] But in fact, as Medvedev argued in 1928, dialectical thinking is integrated into his account of literary evolution somewhat superficially: Tynianov often seems to present a given 'constructive principle', for example, simply as one of two alternatingly dominant candidates.[11] His use of the word is therefore better understood as an appeal to the authority attached to a particular discourse on social change.

The centre and the periphery

A second metaphor for the inequality among literary genres in 'The Literary Fact' is that of their respective positions relative to a 'centre': some genres are positioned at the 'centre' of literature, others at its 'periphery'. It is not clear what determines the position of a genre in this model, but what is significant is that literature evolves when peripheral genres displace central ones.

> At a period when a genre is disintegrating, it shifts from the centre to the periphery, and a new phenomenon floats in to take its place in the centre, coming up from among the trivia, out of the backyards and low haunts of literature. (This is the phenomenon of the 'canonization of the younger genres' which Viktor Shklovsky has written about.) This is how the adventure novel became cheap reading matter [*stal bul´varnym*], and how the same thing is happening now to the psychological tale. ('The Literary Fact', p. 33)

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[10] The literary text results from the application of a 'constructive principle' to the 'material'. Tynianov's account of this process has been examined by Alastair Renfrew, *Towards a New Material Aesthetics: Bakhtin, Genre and the Fates of Literary Theory* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006), pp. 26-31.

[11] Medvedev, p. 166. For a discussion of the revolutionary language in Tynianov, see Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers, *Das dynamische System: Zur Entwicklung von Begriff und Metaphorik des Systems bei Jurij N. Tynjanov* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 223-31. For a different interpretation, of the term 'struggle' [*bor'ba*] as a borrowing from early twentieth-century psychology, see Ilona Svetlikova, *Istoki russkogo formalizma* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005), pp. 99-124.

The centre-periphery metaphor is extended in the above passage in accordance with its connotations of geographical space. Over time, a genre 'shifts' from the centre to allow others to 'float in' from its 'backyards'. This extended metaphor at first seems to be no more than a transposition of the high-low metaphor, but there is a significant difference between the two: the notion of a periphery implies a border. It therefore allows Tynianov to model, simultaneously, the evolving position of one literary genre relative to others and its entry into literature in the first place.

In a later passage in the article, however, Tynianov takes this spatial metaphor in a different direction. He argues that the dominant genre, as defined by its constructive principle, spreads over other genres, colonizing them.

> *Once a constructive principle is applied to any one field it strives to enlarge itself* [rasshirit´sia] *and to spread* [rasprostranit´sia] *over as wide an area as possible.*
> We might call this the 'imperialism' of the constructive principle. One can observe this imperialism, this urge to take over [*stremlenie k zakhvatu*] the widest area, in any sector. An example pointed out by Veselovsky is how an epithet may become generalized: if one day poets write 'golden sun', 'golden hair', then on the next they will have 'golden sky', 'golden land' and 'golden blood'. A fact of a similar kind is the tendency of a victorious order [*pobedivshii stroi*] or genre to affect other fields: thus periods when rhythmic prose is common coincide with periods when poetry predominates over prose. ('The Literary Fact', p. 43; emphasis by Tynianov)

Here, the dominant constructive principle seeks to expand over 'the widest area', 'as wide an area as possible' (a similar construction is later used again). Military metaphors are added to this narrative of expansion: the 'victorious order' experiences 'the urge to take over' the rest of literature. The loaded terminology seems to proliferate, as if one term were provoking the next in a game of associations. The result is that a very different mechanism of change is suggested: genres do not simply swap places over time, some floating into the centre and others floating out into the periphery; instead, the dominant genre functions as a point from which all others are restructured. Mikhail Bakhtin would later interpret the novel in a similar way.[12]

Marxist theorists began to write about imperialism, by which they meant the 'struggle for dominance' among advanced capitalist countries, in the early decades of the twentieth century. The earliest Marxist authorities on the concept were Rudolf Hilferding, who had introduced the concept of 'finance capital' in his comprehensive study of 1910,

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[12] See Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-40: 'In the process of becoming the dominant genre, the novel sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness. It draws them ineluctably into its orbit precisely because this orbit coincides with the basic direction of the development of literature as a whole.' (p. 7)

Nikolai Bukharin and, most prominently, Vladimir Lenin, whose pamphlet, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), was the best-known and most authoritative work on the subject in early Soviet Russia. According to Bukharin, for example, in the era of 'finance capital', national economies come to function as massive enterprises, exploiting various protectionist policies, including military aggression, in order to enlarge their markets.[13]

It is possible to make sense of Tynianov's military narrative of exhaustive expansion in the context of these writings. The dominant literary genre, like a dominant imperialist nation, expands over the rest of the territory of literature. Furthermore, the example that Tynianov gives from Veselovskii (the expansion of the epithet 'golden') can be seen as a nod to the economic forces that drive such theories. Nevertheless, Tynianov makes no attempt to follow his borrowed language to its expected conclusion; once again, he merely alludes, through apposite lexical choices, to a particular theory of historical development.

The canon and the mistake

A third concept introduced to model the inequality among literary genres is the notion of a 'canon'. Although this term or derivations of it are used only three times in 'The Literary Fact', Tynianov nevertheless develops the idea to describe an exclusive body of genres that enjoy some sort of special status. He is thereby able to identify as 'mistakes' those works that fall beyond its reach. Thus, the 1820 publication of 'Ruslan and Ludmila' by Aleksandr Pushkin was a decisive event in the history of Russian literature, according to Tynianov, because the work did not meet the then accepted criteria for the genre of the narrative poem [*poema*]; it was consequently perceived by the contemporary reader as a mistake. It follows that literature 'evolves' when the mistake is subsequently incorporated into the canon, becoming the index of 'correctness' by which a new mistake can be identified, and so on.

Tynianov borrows the idea of a mistake-driven process of evolution from evolutionary biology, a very turbulent discipline in the early twentieth century.[14] In doing so, he follows in a long line of thinkers who had sought to expand the application of

[13] This and the previous two sentences paraphrase Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 88-135.

[14] It is suggested in the commentary to Iu. N. Tynianov, *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino*, ed. by E.A. Toddes, A.P. Chudakov and M.O. Chudakova (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 510-11, that Tynianov's interest in biology bears the influence of Lev Zilber, his brother-in-law and a prominent immunologist. The terms 'evolution' and 'mistake' are briefly discussed here.

theories of biological evolution to other fields. The French literary scholar Ferdinand Brunetière, for example, had developed a 'Darwinist' theory of literary evolution in the 1890s, envisaging a struggle for survival among competing literary genres.[15] Similarly, several prominent Russian Marxists had attempted to demonstrate that Darwinism could enrich Marxist theory, an endeavour discouraged by Lenin.[16] Tynianov, however, equates literary genre and biological species less self-consciously, choosing not to theorize the implications of his borrowing.

But, in order to dissect further the ideas of biological origin in 'The Literary Fact', it is necessary to take into account the stage that evolutionary biology had reached by the early 1920s. Below is the relevant passage from Tynianov's article:

> All the revolutionary essence of Pushkin's *poema* 'Ruslan i Lyudmila' lay in the fact that it was a non-*poema* (the same can be said of his 'Prisoner in the Caucasus'). [...] *And again the critics perceived it as an exception to the system, a mistake, and again this was a dislocation of the system*. [...] *Not a regular evolution, but a leap* [skachok]*; not development, but a dislocation*. The genre became unrecognisable, and yet sufficient was preserved in it so that this non-*poema* was still a *poema*. ('The Literary Fact', p. 31; emphasis by Tynianov)

In the space of only a few sentences, Tynianov makes the following three comments: an imagined reader ('the critics perceived') judges literary works according to historically dependent criteria; some literary works are perceived as mistakes in relation to the genres in the canon; and the resulting evolution of literature occurs not gradually but in 'leaps'. These three points can be traced to distinct currents in early twentieth-century evolutionary biology: evolution by natural selection, mutationism, and saltationism.

The latter two terms require some explanation. Until the Evolutionary Synthesis in the late 1930s, many different theories of biological evolution effectively competed with one another. The 'rediscovery' of Mendelian inheritance at the beginning of the twentieth century had led to rapid advances in evolutionary thought, transforming the nineteenth-century battle of Lamarckism and Darwinism. Indeed, the development of genetics had given rise to theories that appeared to undermine Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Thus, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Dutch botanist Hugo de Vries proposed a theory of mutationism according to which genetic mutations override the principle of natural selection. Saltationism is a very closely related theory according to

[15] S.L. Kozlov has examined the idea of 'evolution' in Tynianov, with reference to Brunetière, in 'Literaturnaia evoliutsiia i literaturnaia revoliutsiia: k istorii idei', *Tynianovskil sbornik*, 4 (Riga, 1990), 112-19.
[16] Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 330-69.

which evolution occurs not gradually, as Darwin had argued, but as the result of very large changes from one generation to the next.[17]

The points of convergence and divergence between these and other theories of evolution and the manner in which they have since been synthesized cannot be explored here.[18] But this very short sketch suffices to show that Tynianov assimilated some of the most contentious concepts in the contemporary debate in evolutionary biology, however superficially. The article thus bears the imprint of a particular historical debate within that discipline.

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It has been demonstrated that, in 'The Literary Fact', Tynianov uses at least three distinct metaphors to represent the inequality among literary genres. Furthermore, it has been shown that each of these metaphors implies a different mechanism of change and can be traced to a theory of historical development highly prevalent in early Soviet Russia. Tynianov does not provide a sustained exposition of any of these theories as applied to the history of literature. He merely alludes to them, developing his metaphors in line with their contemporary usage in the social or natural sciences: the immediate context in which each metaphor is used functions as a sort of catalyst, imbuing it with the associations required to conjure forth the edifice of an entire grand narrative. There are thus glimpses in the article of change in the genre system as revolution, imperialist expansion, and genetic mutation.

What is to be made of the coexistence of these narratives, however allusively present, within a single theoretical article? On the one hand, it allows Tynianov to present the turning points of literary history as those at which multiple independent grand narratives coincide, the decisive moments in the history of Russian literature emerging as the points of alignment among their respective trajectories. On the other hand, it can be interpreted as a symptom of the fundamental ambiguity of the process of literary evolution as Tynianov understands it. If he does not identify precisely *why* some literary genres are 'higher' or more 'central' than others, or *why* some genres are included in a 'canon' to the

[17] For an introduction to the various schools in the early twentieth-century debate, see Ernst Mayr, 'Prologue', in *The Evolutionary Synthesis: Perspectives on the Unification of Biology*, ed. by Ernst Mayr and William B. Provine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 1-48. For an evaluation of these theories in the light of later advances in the biological sciences, see Richard Dawkins, 'Universal Darwinism', in *The Philosophy of Biology*, ed. by D. Hull and M. Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 15-35.

[18] For an account of the development of evolutionary biology in early Soviet Russia, see Theodosius Dobzhansky, 'The Birth of the Genetic Theory of Evolution in the Soviet Union in the 1920s', in *The Evolutionary Synthesis,* pp. 229-41.

exclusion of others, – questions that are inescapably social in nature – how can he then present their changing position relative to one another as the principal mechanism of literary evolution? By embedding multiple theories of historical development in the article, and, effectively, suggesting several different principles of genre stratification simultaneously, he fudges the question entirely.

It is productive to examine this ambiguity in the wider context of the development of Russian Formalism in the 1920s. 'The Literary Fact' was published on the eve of a period of great change for the Formalists, when, 'harassed by outside pressures and plagued by an internal sense of inadequacy', they attempted to refashion Formalism as an intellectual project.[19] During this period of crisis, they explored several new methodological avenues, but their efforts to move on from their early focus on immanent 'literariness' ultimately failed to convince their opponents. One of the charges levelled against the Formalists in these years was that their adoption of the terminology of other fields, particularly socioeconomics, constituted an opportunistic strategy of self-representation rather than the result of the logical development of their earlier ideas.[20] In the light of these later developments, 'The Literary Fact' can be seen as an early attempt on Tynianov's part to borrow from discourses that were highly prevalent in the wake of the Russian Revolution, particularly those associated with Marxism. He thus experiments with different theories of historical development by alternating between various masks throughout the article.

In summary, the presence of multiple theories of historical development in 'The Literary Fact' is evidence of the ambiguity of Tynianov's theory of literary evolution in 1924. The patchwork of historical narratives in the article prevents any single principle of genre stratification from predominating, thus obscuring the cause of any change in a genre's position relative to others. It can be concluded that literary phenomena can be hierarchized, and the inequalities among them expressed, according to any number of principles – such as social prestige, commercial success, and popularity, to name only three – but that any such principle will ultimately have been imposed from without. Literature, an arena for the struggles of other orders, does not assign positions in the various hierarchies that constitute it.

[19] Erlich, p. 131.
[20] Galin Tihanov, 'Zametki o dispute formalistov i marksistov 1927-ogo goda', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 50 (2001), 279-86 (trans. by M. Poliakova).

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Fame and Glory in Dante's Commedia: Problematizing Purgatorio XI

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He was buried, but the entire funerary night, in the lit up shop windows, his books, placed in groups of three, kept watch like open-winged angels and seemed, for the one who no longer was, the symbol of his resurrection.

(Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière*)[1]

Anyone who has read the Divine Comedy will find it hard to disagree with Erich Auerbach's observation that Dante 'pits himself against his time in anticipation of earthly fame and beatitude in the hereafter'.[2] Dante's self-representation as a wronged poet, suffering in life while he awaits the highest of deferred gratifications – celebrity and salvation – continues to provoke emotional responses in his readers. But this assessment ignores the problematic fact that lust for fame is a worldly, and therefore un-Christian, desire. While the current status of Dante's soul may lie outside the remit of this discussion, we do know for certain that his bid for fame was a successful one. Dante circulated the Divine Comedy (hereafter referred to with its original title of *Commedia*) as it was being written, in installments of six to eight cantos. The poem was instantly popular, and the fact that it was written in the vernacular also made it accessible to those who did not read Latin and to non-reading oral audiences.[3] Readers' admiration for the poem is even encapsulated in the title as we know it today: the adjective 'Divina' was only added in 1555. Dante's work is on the syllabus of all modern Italian secondary schools and the visual image of the bitter, hook-nosed poet has long entered Italian popular culture. The very fact that we refer to Dante by the diminutive form of his first name, rather than 'Durante Alighieri', indicates that we think of the author as the character presented in his works. As Peter S. Hawkins observes, 'Dante has made it impossible for us not to look at him or read his work as autobiographical.'[4] Dante's entire literary career can be considered from the

[1] *À la recherche du temps perdu,* ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89), 4 vols, III (1988), p. 693. My translation.
[2] *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001 (1929), p. 99.
[3] For a succinct description of the early circulation of the *Commedia* see Peter S. Hawkin's *Dante: A Brief History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 23-26.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 1.

point of view of the elaborate construction of his public image, as demonstrated most recently by Albert Russell Ascoli in his exhaustive account.[5]

A decade before Ascoli's study, Teodolinda Barolini's seminal work, *The Undivine Comedy*, had already questioned our tendency to read Dante on his own terms.[6] Her opening chapter makes a case for a 'detheologized' reading of the *Commedia*, that is, 'a way of reading that attempts to break out of the hermeneutic guidelines that Dante has structured into his poem'.[7] Instead of accepting everything the author says as true, as one would do when reading Holy Scripture, Barolini suggests it can be productive to examine the 'gap' between what Dante preaches and what he practices.[8] The present article aims to advance this line of enquiry by examining the noticeably wide gap between the proclaimed Christian message of Dante's poem and the profound concern with fame and posterity that the poet expresses throughout the narrative, in order to posit that, rather than wanting to be both famous and saved, Dante wants to be famous *despite* wanting to be saved. The *Commedia's* unobscured yearning for worldly recognition creates an irresolvable tension, which is brought into sharp focus by the episode of the encounter with the soul of the illuminator Oderisi da Gubbio in *Purgatorio* XI. Through Oderisi's monologue, the text of

91 Oh vana gloria de l'umane posse!
com' poco verde in su la cima dura,
se non è giunta da l'etati grosse!
94 Credette Cimabue ne la pittura
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
sì che la fama di colui è scura.
97 Così ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido
la gloria de la lingua; e forse è nato
chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà del nido.
100 Non è il mondan romore altro ch'un fiato
di vento, ch'or vien quinci e or vien quindi,
e muta nome perché muta lato.
103 Che voce avrai tu più, se vecchia scindi
da te la carne, che se fossi morto
anzi che tu lasciassi il 'pappo' e 'l 'dindi',
106 pria che passin mill'anni? ch'è più corto
spazio a l'etterno, ch'un muover di ciglia
al cerchio che più tardi in cielo è torto.
[...]
115 La vostra nominanza è color d'erba,
che viene e va, e quei la discolora
per cui ella esce de la terra acerba".

91 Oh, what vainglory in human powers!
How short a time the green lasts on the height
unless some cruder, darker age succeeds.
94 Once, as a painter, Cimabue thought
he took the prize. Now "Giotto" 's on all lips
and Cimabue's fame is quite eclipsed.
97 In verse, as well, a second Guido steals
all glory from the first. And someone's born
who'll thrust, perhaps, both Guidos from the nest.
100 The roar of earthly fame is just a breath
of wind, blowing from here and then from there,
that changes name in changing origin.
103 What more renown will you have if you strip
your flesh in age away than if you died
before you'd left off lisping "Din-dins!", "Penth!"
106 when once a thousand years have passed, a space
that falls far short of all eternity --
an eye blink to the slowest turning sphere.
[...]
115 All your renown is coloured like the grass,
which comes then goes. And He discolours it
who made it first appear from bitter earth.'
(*Purg*. XI, 91-117)

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[5] *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).
[6] *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[7] *Ibid*. p. 17.
[8] *Ibid*. p. 19.

the *Commedia* denounces the very sin of which its narrator is guilty.[9]

Oderisi's indictment of vainglory follows an Augustinian model. It implies a depreciation of the earthly, which is perishable and thus necessarily inferior to the divine, which is eternal. The problems raised by the above monologue with regards to artistic *hubris* have been best examined by Barolini in her chapter 'Re-Presenting What God Presented: the Arachnean Art of the Terrace of Pride'. [10] She reads *Purgatorio* X and XI through an Ovidian intertext and draws parallels between the encounters with the proud and other episodes of the *Commedia*. This allows her to demonstrate the metatextual centrality of Purgatory's terrace of pride and to establish that the poet 'knows that Oderisi's words on the vanity of earthly fame apply to no one as little as to himself'.[11] With regards to lines 103-06, Barolini observes that Oderisi's metonymic reference to young age with his mention of baby talk, and his metaphorical reference to fame through the term 'voice', in fact encourage us to contradict Oderisi's suggestion that Dante's literary efforts are in vain: 'with respect to a divinely inspired poet, one invested with a divinely sanctioned poetic mission, it is important that he live beyond the ability to say "pappo" and "dindi," and it will be important in a thousand years.'[12] This article expands upon this interpretation in two regards: firstly, with regard to Oderisi's references to language, and secondly, with regard to the authority of Oderisi's words.

Oderisi's verbal framing is capital, for it echoes the addresses to the reader in which Dante describes the enterprise of writing the *Commedia*. When reading Oderisi's reference to baby talk, we already know that describing the bottom of Hell is 'no task for tongues still whimpering 'Mum!' and 'Dad!' (*Inf.* XXXII, 9).[13] Though Oderisi uses the term 'voce' to mean fame, the word is usually used in the *Commedia* in its literal sense.[14] As a result, Dante's potential fame is associated with his literary voice. And in the opening lines of *Paradiso* XXV, a canto to which we shall return, we are told that penning the *Commedia* has altered Dante's voice (*Par*. XXV, 7). If the *Commedia* is to bring Dante glory (albeit temporarily), it will therefore not be by chance, as the wind blows, but by merit of his

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[9] All quotations in Italian are from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1966-67). English translations of full verses are taken from *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2012).
[10] *Undivine Comedy*, pp. 122-42.
[11] *Ibid.* p. 134.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Despite statements made in *Inferno* and Dante's treatises, baby talk also has positive connotations in Dante. See Robert Hollander's 'Babytalk in Dante's *Commedia*' *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), pp. 115-29, and, especially, Gary Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).
[14] Cf "voce" in Omberto Bosco's *Enciclopedia dantesca* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970-8), 6 vol.

poetic talent; the 'voce' with which he speaks and writes. We may therefore wonder why Barolini in this context stresses the 'divinely sanctioned' aspect of Dante's poem, when what seems at stake here is his linguistic prowess; Dante not as *scriba Dei* but as 'fabbro del parlar materno' ['craftsman of the the mother tongue'] (*Purg*. XXVI, 117).

This suggestion of lasting a thousand years draws out another central theme with regards to language: that of the vernacular.[15] Dante's position with regard to the fame of vernacular poets is extremely complex, as is best brought to light in the encounters with Guido Guinizzelli in *Purgatorio* XXVI and with Adam in *Paradiso* XXVI. Both these characters, moreover, are named in *Purgatorio* XI (respectively, in lines 97 and 44). *Purgatorio* XXVI is a celebration of vernacular lyric poetry: Dante calls the older Italian poet Guido Guinizzelli his poetic father (97-99) and Guinizzelli in turn praises the troubadour Arnaut Daniel (115-120). While Oderisi's monologue, through the image of the wind, suggests a complete disjunction between fame and merit, Guinizzelli draws a distinction between those who attained celebrity without deserving it and the well-earned glory of gifted poets. The former are dismissed through the same binary structure that Oderisi uses to express the replacing of one thing with another ('l'uno' / 'l'altro' [97]; 'or vien quinci' / 'or vien quindi' [101]): 'di grido in grido pur lui dando pregio' ['proclaiming, on and on, his proven worth'] (*Purg*. XXVI, 125). The latter are praised in terms of their technical skill: Arnaut is a 'fabbro' ['craftsman'] (117). Yet vernacular poetry, even if it is written by a talented poet who deserves to be famous, remains perishable. The fickleness of human language is suggested by the Pilgrim's double-edged compliment to Guinizzelli: 'Li dolci detti vostri, | che, quanto durerà l'uso moderno, | faranno cari ancora i loro incostri' ['That smooth, sweet verse you wrote | will make its very ink most dearly prized | as long as present usage still endures.'] (112-14). Guinizzelli's poetry will be loved, until language changes. By writing in a perishable language one limits one's long-term success, as will be made explicit by Adam in *Paradiso* XXVI, lines 137-38: 'ché l'uso d'i mortali è come fronda | in ramo, che sen va e altra vene' ['With mortal usages, like leaves along | a branch, one goes and then another comes.']. Adam's words can also be linked to Oderisi's through the use of natural imagery (his expression 'come fronda in ramo' echoes lines 92 and 115-17 of *Purgatorio* XI). The vanity of poetic success is thus inextricably linked to the central issue of the mutability of language, which gives us two reasons why Dante's vernacular poem should be forgotten.

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[15] On this see also Herbert Marks, 'Hollowed Names: Vox and Vanitas in the *Purgatorio*', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, No. 110 (1992), 135-78 (pp. 144-45).

Secondly, the very construction of Oderisi's rhetorical question in lines 103-06 seeks to create a certain resistance towards his sermon on behalf of the reader of the *Commedia*. While the tercet formed by lines 106-08 reasonably suggests that human temporality pales before eternity, this context is provided after the question. Dante separates the temporal specification 'pria che passin mill'anni' [before a thousand years have passed] (106) from the initial query 'che voce avrai tu più' [what more renown will you have] (103), both syntactically and through his lineation. The thousand year yardstick is delayed (with an enjambement) until the following tercet, which, in a manuscript that would not have contained punctuation, creates the following question: 'Che voce avrai tu più, se vecchio scindi da te la carne, che se fossi morto anzi che tu lasciassi il 'pappo' e 'l 'dindi'?' [Would you have any more renown if you stripped your flesh in old age than if you died before you'd left off baby talk ?] On the evidence of the tercet comprising 103-05, then, Oderisi is undermined by his own phrasing (as well as his own framing): the difference between dying as an infant and dying as a poet is rendered as both a linguistic and a textual issue. The very existence of the poem containing Oderisi's question undermines his rhetorical preaching, even as it is uttered.

The *Inferno* offers us the best example of the sin denounced by Oderisi in Brunetto Latini, who is encountered among the sodomites.[16] The nature of Brunetto's sin has been the cause of much scholarly debate.[17] Diana Cuthbertson's instructive analysis usefully returns to the text of Genesis and Dante's Medieval context to argue that the sins of the cities of the plain did not consist in homosexuality but in a form of idolatry.[18] With this in mind, she argues that 'Dante's sodomites were worshippers of themselves, preferring their own human immortality and fame to eternal and heavenly life'.[19]

Brunetto may well have indulged in both 'sins', but what makes his character uncomfortably close to Dante's own is his particular concern with his literary afterlife. The Pilgrim says that Brunetto taught him 'come l'uom s'etterna' [how man makes himself eternal] (85) and Brunetto's parting words are: 'Sieti raccomandato il mio Tesoro, | nel qual io vivo ancora, e più non cheggio' ['My Treasury – may that commend itself. | In that, I still live on. I ask no more.'] (119-20). The 'Tesoro' is *Li livres dou Tresor*, which was Brunetto Latini's major work. Eugene Vance points out that in Dante's time there was

[16] The parallel between these episodes is encouraged from a narrative perspective as well as a thematic one: in both Dante must lean down to speak with the sinner, while Virgil remains in the background. For Barolini's reading of Oderisi-Brunetto, see *Undivine Comedy* pp. 136-37.
[17] For a useful review see Deborah Contrada, 'Brunetto's Sin: Ten Years of Criticism (1977-1986)', *Dante: Summa Medioevalis,* 1995, 192-207.
[18] 'Dante, the Yahwist, and the Sins of Sodom', *Italian Culture* 4 (1983), 11-23.
[19] Ibid. p. 12.

nothing inherently sinful about wanting to be read, and moreover, the text was considered as a 'supplement to the vocal word'. He proves this by quoting Thomas Aquinas: 'the use of writing was necessary so that [man] might manifest his conceptions to those who are distant according to place and to those who will come in future time.'[20] In other words, the very point of writing is to make one's thoughts available to readers distant in space and time. Thus, according to Aquinas's definition, every writer – vainglorious or humble – is concerned with posterity. The *Commedia* follows this logic by presenting itself as written for some future audience, as made explicit in the final canto of the *Commedia*: 'e fa la lingua mia tanto possente, | ch'una favilla sol de la tua gloria | possa lasciare a la futura gente' ['and make my tongue sufficient in its powers | that it may leave at least one telling spark | of all your glory to a future race.'] (70-72). It is giving one's earthly afterlife priority over the salvation of one's soul that is sinful.

Critical readings of the encounter with Brunetto are split as to whether the episode is ironic, or filled with pathos and sincere admiration for the old master.[21] It is important therefore to recall the vision of him presented at the end of *Inferno* XV:

Poi si rivolse, e parve di coloro che corrono a Verona il drappo verde per la campagna; e parve di costoro quelli che vince, non colui che perde.	Around he swung. To me he seemed like one who, in the fields around Verona, runs for that fine prize, a length of green festoon. He seemed to be the one that wins, not loses. (121-24)

Brunetto is in Hell, and he looks like a winner. This is the ambiguity that is present in all those infernal characters who embody ideas that are attractive to the Poet. As John Freccero has observed, when interpreting a character of the *Inferno* one can constantly swing back and forth between a sympathetic reading, if one focuses on the character's words, and a censorious reading, if one focuses on the sinner's collocation.[22] Furthermore,

> [b]y the time that the descent is concluded, virtually every purely human value that one would care to affirm has been undermined. The master negation, however, is of Dante himself. Many of his encounters are with his own most cherished opinions [...].[23]

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[20] 'The Differing Seed: Dante's Brunetto Latini' in *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 230-55 (pp. 234-35).
[21] See for instance Massimo Verdicchio, 'Re-Reading Brunetto Latini and Inferno XV', *Quaderni d'italianistica* 21, 1 (2000), 61-81 (p. 67), and Antonio Carrannante, 'Implicazioni dantesche: Brunetto Latini (*Inf.* XV), *L'Alighieri* 36, 5 (1995), 79-102 (p. 97).
[22] Barolini associates the latter with theologized readings and calls it 'the collocation fallacy', *Undivine Comedy*, p. 15.
[23] *The Poetics of Conversion,* ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 107.

And one of Dante's 'cherished opinions' is that poetic glory remains of crucial importance even after death, even when one is barred from Heaven. This is the belief that lies behind *Inferno* IV.

Perhaps Oderisi's most direct reference to fame is in his dismissal of 'nominanza', which he says will fade like discoloured grass. [24] The same word appears only once more in the *Commedia*. It is used in *Inferno* IV, when Virgil explains to the Pilgrim the privileged position of the illustrious pagans, who live together in a castle in Limbo: 'L'onrata nominanza | che di lor suona sù ne la tua vita, | grazïa acquista in ciel che sì li avanza' ['The honour of their name | rings clear for those, like you, who live above, | and here gains favour out of Heaven's grace.'] (76-78). The fate of the 'bella scola' (the 'fair school', as these pagan thinkers are collectively classified) contradicts the extract of Ecclesiastes, which, as is well established, constitutes a Biblical intertext for Oderisi's monologue. According to Ecclesiastes II, 16, 'there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.' The classical authors in the *Commedia*, however, do not die as fools; their great works have a direct impact on their eschatological fate. The fact that they are still read, and thus remembered, earns them favourable treatment. Unlike the other inhabitants of Dante's Limbo, the illustrious pagans have a source of light and they are given an amenable abode: a castle, surrounded by protective walls, a stream and vegetation.[25] Dante's *Inferno* therefore flouts both the Bible and Oderisi's statements.

As Barolini has noted, Brunetto's belief in a literary afterlife is eventually validated through the encounter with Cacciaguida (the Pilgrim's ancestor) in *Paradiso* through the coinage 'infuturarsi' ['to infuture oneself'] in which he echoes Brunetto's 'etternarsi' ['to eternalize oneself']. The *Paradiso* therefore ignores the Christian model of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio,* according to which believing in literary afterlife is merely a form of vanity.[26] Moreover, the Pilgrim himself recasts Brunetto's words when he tells Cacciaguida that while, on the one hand, he fears persecution from those he will criticise in his poem, on the other hand, if he chooses to flatter rather than tell the truth, he will not be read in the future: 's'io al vero son timido amico, | temo di perder viver tra coloro | che questo tempo chiameranno antico' ['if I prove a timid friend to truth | I shall, I fear, forego my life among | those souls who'll count as ancient our own time.'] (*Par.* XVII, 118-20). Dante's

[24] Cf "nominanza" in *Enciclopedia dantesca*.
[25] On the uniqueness of Dante's depiction of Limbo, see Amicalcare A. Iannucci's 'Dante's Limbo : At the Margins of Orthodoxy', in *Dante and the Unorthodox : The Aesthetics of Trangression* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), pp. 63-82.
[26] *Undivine Comedy*, p.140.

substantive use of the verb 'viver' [living] echoes Brunetto's 'nel qual io vivo ancora' [in which I still live]. This parallel with the vainglorious sinner would have been avoided if the emphasis had been placed on the poem: 'I fear that my work will not be read'. 'Temo di perder viver', however, clearly tells us that Dante, like Brunetto, believes that his work, provided it is worthy, will allow him to live on.

Cacciaguida's response to the Pilgrim is, like Guinizzelli and Adam's words, in dialogue with Oderisi through semantic echoes:

tutta tua visïon fa manifesta;	make plain what in your vision you have seen,
e lascia pur grattar dov'è la rogna.	and let them scratch wherever they may itch.
Ché se la voce tua sarà molesta	For if at first your voice tastes odious,
nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento	still it will offer, as digestion works,
lascerà poi, quando sarà digesta.	life-giving nutriment to those who eat.
Questo tuo grido farà come vento,	The words you shout will be like blasts of wind
che le più alte cime percuote;	that strike the very summit of the trees;
e ciò non fa d'onor poco argomento.	And this will bring no small degree of fame.
	(*Par.* XVII, 128-35)

Cacciaguida repeats Oderisi's three key nouns 'voce', 'grido' and 'vento', but gives them the opposite meaning.[27] Dante's 'voce' [voice] will not be forgotten in time, on the contrary, in time it will turn into nourishment. The 'grido' [cry] is not a synonym for transient fame but for Dante's powerful literary voice, and the 'vento' [wind], finally, does not wander randomly as the wind of Ecclesiastes I, 6, but is produced and directed by Dante.[28] In the *Commedia*, moreover, the word 'onor' [honour] is a semantic tag for the virtuous pagans of Limbo.

Cacciaguida's instructions are part of an overall strategy that consists of having blessed souls tell the poet to write the *Commedia*, thus suggesting that Dante is not pursuing fame but only fulfilling his duty. He is not writing for himself, but 'in pro del mondo che mal vive' ['to aid the world that lives all wrong'] (*Purg.* XXXII, 103). In such a context, not writing would have been the greater sin.[29] By defining himself a 'scribe' rather than a creator (*Purg.* XXIV, 52-54), Dante puts himself in the humble position of one serving God. The *Commedia* in this respect posits David 'the humble psalmist' (*Purg.* X, 65) as a model for Dante, as observed by Barolini in her 1984 work *Dante's Poets* and recently further explored by Giuseppe Ledda.[30] Suggesting that he is divinely sanctioned

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[27] 'Cime' also echoes Oderisi's 'cima'.
[28] Herbert Marks has also remarked that Cacciaguida 'transfigures' Oderisi's speech. 'Vox and Vanitas', pp. 167-68.
[29] As has been suggested by Bruno Nardi in 'Dante profeta', *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1949), pp. 336-416 (p. 337).
[30] *Dante's Poets: Textuality and truth in the* Comedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 275-77; 'La danza e il canto dell' "umile salmista": David nella *Commedia* di Dante' in *La figure de David entre*

allows Dante to eschew charges of *hubris*. Indeed, the *contrapasso* of the terrace of pride (the penitent souls have to carry boulders on their backs) will eventually be turned on its head in *Paradiso* through the metaphor that Dante uses to describe the effort involved in composing his poem: 'Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema | e l'omero mortal che se ne carca, | nol biasmerebbe se sott'esso trema' ['Yet no one if they've gauged that weighty theme – | and seen what mortal shoulders bear the load – | would criticize such trembling backing-out.'] (*Par*. XXIII, 64-66). This tour de force breaks the mould established in *Purgatorio* of a proud life followed by the punishment of bearing a weight and looking down humbly in the afterlife. Dante, by describing his work of art as a humbling burden rather than a source of pride, implies that the act of writing a Christian poem is a form of penitence, which therefore ultimately allows him to look upwards, to God.

This virtuous picture of Dante, progressing from being a poet with earthly concerns to being a divinely sanctioned composer of a new 'tëodia' [God song] (*Par*. XXV, 73), is however not entirely convincing. Such a 'theologized' reading is too easily contradicted: Dante is no 'humble psalmist'. Firstly, because he is an extremely proud character – indeed pride is the only sin to which the Pilgrim explicitly confesses (*Purg*. XIII, 136-38). Secondly, the *Commedia* is biographical in a way that the Psalms are not. The presence of Cacciaguida and Beatrice speaks volumes with regards to the extreme subjectivity of Dante's depiction of Heaven. Dante is not only singing God, he is also singing his city, his ancestry and the woman he loved. No other penitent could adopt Dante's verses as his or her own because they are passionately personal.[31] Finally, the two occasions on which the Poet openly yearns for the laurel wreath are found in the *Paradiso*, which is in itself controversial. If Dante at this stage of his journey had truly converted himself into a *scriba Dei*, he would not express such worldly desires. Let us therefore conclude with a consideration of the occasions in which Dante invokes the crown of poetic glory.

The first reference is found in the opening canto of *Paradiso*: 'l'amato alloro' [the beloved laurel] (I, 15). This formulation is extremely powerful thanks to its internal rhyming, its position at the end of the line, and its rarity within the text: 'alloro' is only used here and 'amato' is not a frequent adjective.[32] But it is the context of the second reference that is most striking. It lies at the heart of Dante's final theological examination,

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profane et sacré dans l'Europe des siècles XIVe-XVIe, ed. by E. Boillet and S. Cavicchioli (Geneva: Droz, 2013) (forthcoming).

[31] Dante had already begun to make the poetic 'I' biographical in his *stilnovo* phase as has been noted by Carlo Giunta in *Versi a un destinatario: saggio sulla poesia italiana del Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), p. 390.

[32] The only other use of 'amato' in the *Commedia* is in *Inferno* V, 103. The feminine form is used once in Virgil's exposition of love (*Purg*. XVIII, 33) and the plural feminine form is used once in *Par*. XXIII, 1.

which will earn him the right to access the Empyrean. The devout Pilgrim has successfully defined faith, when the Narrator announces:

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra, sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro, vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra del bello ovile ov'io dormi' agnello, nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra; con altra voce omai, con altro vello ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte del mio battesmo prenderò 'l cappello;	If ever it should happen that this sacred work, to which both Earth and Heaven have set their hands, (making me over many years grow gaunt) might overcome the cruelty that locks me out from where I slept, a lamb in that fine fold, the enemy of wolves that war on it, with altered fleece, with altered voice, I shall return as poet, taking, at my fount of baptism, the laurel for my crown. (XXV, 1-9)

While the phrase 'Heaven and Earth' suggests that Dante is a *scriba Dei* by recognising a dual authorship, it is still Dante who is the poet; he is the one who has grown gaunt from the great effort of writing. Moreover, as Daniele Mattalia observes, Dante is audacious enough to say 'prenderò': 'he will "take" (he does not say receive), just as in *Par.*, I, 25-26, he will "crown himself" with the sacred laurel leaves!'[33]

These opening verses are often cited because they are the only occasion in which Dante claims for himself the title of 'poeta'. It is however useful to read further in *Paradiso* XXV to the Pilgrim's definition of hope: '"Spene", diss'io, "è uno attender certo | de la gloria futura' ['"Hope is sure expectation," I declared | "of glory that will come.'] (67-68). 'Gloria' is the first word of the *Paradiso*: 'La gloria di colui che tutto move' [Glory, from Him who moves all things that are'], and is here intended as the technical term for blessedness. But by opening the canto with a reference to literary recognition, Dante is also allowing the verses to resonate with the earthly meaning of the word 'gloria', as used in the phrase 'la gloria de la lingua' [poetic glory]. The phrase 'attender certo de la gloria futura' ['expectation of glory that will come'] can therefore be read both in its religious sense, that is, the awaiting of beatitude in Heaven, and in its literary sense, that is, the poet's conviction of his future success. The dual significance of the word 'gloria' here encapsulates the double-sided – and conflicted – nature of Dante's endeavor.[34]

As we have seen in this article, Dante knows that vernacular language is perishable and that the Bible tells us that worldly renown is vain. But he still hopes to enjoy two kinds of glory and two kinds of immortality. The tension created by the character of Brunetto is

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[33] 1960 commentary from Dartmouth Dante Project <http://dante.dartmouth.edu> [accessed 12/6/2013]. My translation.

[34] Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gragnolati find it useful to consider Wittgenstein's image of the 'Duck-Rabbit' when addressing the multi-stable nature of language in *Paradiso*. See 'Dante After Wittgenstein: "Aspetto", Language, and Subjectivity from *Convivio* to *Paradiso*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna; Manuele Gragnolati; Jürgen Trabant,(London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 223-47 (p. 228).

the same as that created by the reckless Ulysses, who yearns to ‘divenir del mondo esperto | e de li vizi umani e del valore’ [‘understand how this world works, | and know of human vices, worth and valour’] (*Inf.* XXVI, 98-99). Both infernal characters share with the Poet a humanist desire at odds with Christian doctrine: Ulysses has a hubristic lust for knowledge and Brunetto is more concerned with his literary afterlife on earth than with the Christian hereafter.[35] To use a mathematical term, writing in praise of God and writing for personal recognition are asymptotes: these aims have the same shape (‘un attender certo de la gloria futura’), but they cannot converge. The desire for salvation and the desire for celebrity should not be considered complimentary: they exist in contradiction. It is therefore astounding that Dante chose to make this worldly desire so manifest in his great Christian poem.

Oderisi’s words come at the heart of the *Commedia* and sound an important warning to all those who believe that they can achieve eternal fame through their artistic talent. The *Commedia*, however, continuously defies this warning, from its opening cantos in which Virgil is presented as one ‘di cui la fama ancora nel mondo dura | e durerà quanto ‘l mondo lontana’ [‘whose fame endures undimmed throughout the world, | and shall endure as still that world moves onwards’] (*Inf.* II, 59-60), all the way to the *Paradiso*’s references to ‘coloro | che questo tempo chiameranno antico’ [‘those souls who’ll count as ancient our own time’] (*Par.* XVII, 119-20). This tension evades theologized readings, which would require a virtuous Dante, as much as it does secular readings such as our opening statement by Auerbach, which does not see anything problematic about writing in anticipation of earthly fame and beatitude in the hereafter. Dante’s double inclination is irresolvable. It shows us how aware he was, despite his Christian frame of reference, of the rich potential offered by literary afterlife. This awareness might account, too, for modern readers’ affinity with the Medieval poet: in our secular age, it is easier to believe in the afterlife pursued by Brunetto.

[35] For a reading of Ulysses and Brunetto as challenging heteronormativity, see Gary Cestaro’s ‘Is Ulysses Queer? The Subject of Greek Love in *Inferno* XV and XXVI’ in *Dante’s Plurilingualism*, pp. 179-92.

Rising to Fame:
C.P. Cavafy's Journey to Worldwide Recognition

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In 2008, the Oxford World's Classics series published a collected edition of C.P. Cavafy's poems.[1] This publishing event represents Cavafy's privileged status within the contemporary canon but masks the long and contested history of his rise to worldwide recognition. Cavafy was first known as a literary curiosity of the Greek diaspora who aspired to national significance from the margins of Alexandria, but only secured a central place in mainstream Greek literary life after many years of fluctuating cultural reception. In parallel, Cavafy's readership slowly expanded across Europe and the rest of the globe, culminating in his establishment at the end of the century as the most well-known and celebrated writer of Greek origin worldwide. This article explores some key moments in those two rising trajectories, by focusing on a number of examples from the Anglophone world, while also considering the poet's place in the Greek context.

Cavafy's residence in Alexandria facilitated his gradual ascension to the pedestal of the world literature canon. During the interwar period, a mixed circle of European artists, authors, and intellectuals in the city were attracted to his unique poetic voice and impressed by his extraordinary personality to such an extent as to become his ardent supporters and admirers.[2] As a result, from the 1920s onwards, Cavafy became increasingly famous outside the world of Greek letters. Changing aesthetic criteria, cultural trends and translations did not impact upon his influence on foreign writers;[3] acknowledging this success, W.H. Auden praised Cavafy's 'unique tone of voice' as

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[1] C.P. Cavafy, *The Collected Poems* trans. by Evangelos Sachperoglou, ed. by Anthony Hirst, intro. by Peter Mackridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[2] Zisimos Lorentzatos gives a brief account of Alexandria through the ages and concentrates on Cavafy's time, when the city was a crossroads for commerce and other financial activities which brought with them social and cultural growth. Referring to the interwar period he writes: 'The war of 1914-18 multiplied Cavafy's personal contacts with foreigner journalists or authors who resided there temporarily' ('Introduction' to G. Saregiannis, *Scholia ston Kavafi* (Athens: Ikaros, 1973), p. 26).

[3] For Cavafy's reception in various countries and his influence on poets of different style and cultural register see N. Vagenas, ed., *Sinomilontas me ton Kavafi. Anthologia xenon kavafogenon poiimaton* (Thessaloniki: Kentro Ellinikis Glossas, 2000).

inherently translatable,[4] and Joseph Brodsky saw his didactic and unembellished poetic diction as resistant to the corrupting effect of transference into another language.[5]

However, as often happens with the cumulative processes that secure a privileged place for a writer in the literary hierarchy, Cavafy's critical acclaim and subsequent popularity were not solely related to his creative achievement. Contradicting George Seferis's claim that 'outside his poetry, Cavafy does not exist',[6] the poet's reception departed from a strictly textual appreciation to include fictionalizations of his mercurial persona, as well as a growing preoccupation with his unusual character and eccentric lifestyle. In addition to his writing, the poet's image was appropriated by other authors, critics, artists and institutions. This cultivated a mythology around his name and, in turn, came to influence the way that his poetry was read and evaluated.

By shifting attention from the work of art to the agents involved in the construction of Cavafy's fame, this article considers the paratextual production of Cavafy's personality as a major—albeit not always systematically examined—part of his cultural and textual reception. The field of celebrity studies is relevant here, because of its sensitivity to image projection, imagined relationships, and audience consumption.[7] The need to address the contribution of social networks and affiliations to the circulation of a work of art, partially through the value attached to its creator, builds on the supposition that celebrity is as much about attribution as it is about achievement. Rather than encouraging a retreat from the poetry, an analysis of the conditions within which the privileged status of the poet is generated provides a different strategy for returning to it. According to Pierre Bourdieu, an understanding of the social context, 'far from reducing or destroying it, in fact intensifies the literary experience'. Additionally, it serves

> to abolish the singularity of the 'creator' in favour of the relations which made the world intelligible, only better to rediscover it, at the end of the task of reconstructing the space in which the author finds himself encompassed and included as a point.[8]

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[4] W.H. Auden, 'Introduction', in *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, trans. by Rae Dalven (New York: Harvest, 1961), pp. xv-xxiii (p. xvii).
[5] Joseph Brodsky, 'On Cavafy's Side', review of *Cavafy's Alexandria: Study of a Myth in Progress*, by Edmund Keeley, *The New York Review of Books*, 17 February 1977, 32.
[6] Giorgos Seferis, *Dokimes*, 3rd edn (Athens: Ikaros, 1974), I, 362 [«έξω από τα ποιήματά του ο Καβάφης δεν υπάρχει»]. And in a slightly different but suggestive phrasing: 'Outside his poems Cavafy is of little interest' (I, 344) [«έξω από τα ποιήματα του ο Καβάφης πολύ λίγο ενδιαφέρει»].
[7] See Ulinka Rublack, 'Celebrity as Concept: An Early Modern Perspective', *Cultural and Social History*, 8 (2011), 399-403 (399). According to Rublack 'celebrity studies examine who projects what images and also explore the imagined relationship audiences establish as consumers of celebrity figures'.
[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (London: Polity Press, 1996), p. xix.

In the context of Bourdieu's thought, the author as creator becomes a 'point' of insight into the consumption and production of symbolic goods at a specific time and a specific place. Authorial 'singularity' plays a role similar to the one certain critics ascribe to celebrity status: that of directing attention to the person as a means to better understand the power and complexity of 'the mechanisms by which…fame is generated and spread'.[9]

The discussion is therefore focused on the formation of literary canons in relation to the cultural milieu within which both the artist's symbolic presence and the work's dissemination of meaning function simultaneously. Viewing Cavafy's work and the position he occupies in the cultural field as complementary refocuses the spotlight on the singularity of his persona as a means to address more effectively the literary appropriations and cultural projections from which it emerged.

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As set out in Robert Liddell's article 'Cavafy', first published in 1945, the poet was already a widely discussed controversial figure in Alexandria's social and intellectual life during the decade following his death:

> He is quarrelled over, commented and discussed in a way that would have delighted him. Who is not writing about Cavafy? Even those who know no Greek have opinions about him, which they are not unwilling to publish. There is a Cavafy legend; he encouraged it himself. Many people will give you imitations of him, some will recite scandal about him, others will draw caricatures of him on the back of a menu or a cigarette-box. Waiters in Greek restaurants will often add their descriptions of him.[10]

Liddell's lively account foregrounds a truism: Cavafy himself contributed greatly and in many ways to his own hype. A master of cultural politics, he remained conscious of the public's intrusive curiosity and thirst for literary gossip, and readily cultivated the grounds for intriguing commentaries on his temperamental behaviour and unconventional habits.

The artist's anxiety in relation to image-making also figured as a recurrent theme in those of Cavafy's poems that deal with the issues of reception and literary recognition. The poem, 'Hidden Things', was written in 1908 when he was not yet widely known.[11] In it, he

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[9] Simon Morgan, 'Celebrity: Academic 'pseudo-event' or a useful concept for historians?', *Cultural and Social History*, 8 (2011), 95-114 (98).

[10] Robert Liddell, 'Cavafy' in *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile*, ed. by Robin Fedden (London: Poetry London, 1945), pp. 100-07.

[11] On this issue see C. Th. Dimaras, *Istoria tis Ellinikis Logotechnias*, 6th edn (Athens: Ikaros, 1975), pp. 455-56, and Ch. L. Karaoglou, *I Athinaïki Kritiki kai o Kavafis* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1985), pp. 19-20.

cautions the reader against attempts to uncover the private life of the person hidden behind the words:

> From all I did and all I said
> let no one try to find out who I was.
> An obstacle was often there
> to stop me when I'd begin to speak.
> From my most unnoticed actions
> my most veiled writing—
> from these alone will I be understood.
> But maybe it isn't worth so much concern,
> so much effort to discover who I really am.
> Later, in a more perfect society,
> Someone else made just like me
> Is certain to appear and act freely.[12]

At the same time as the poem describes the futility of seeking to unveil the truth about the writer from his most explicit writings, it also draws the reader into a paradoxical game of interpreting intentions. The first person narration creates the impression of confiding a secret, while the content militates against taking heed of poetic intimations which, the reader has been warned, are not be trusted as genuine.

During his lifetime, Cavafy chose to publish his work privately and carefully controlled its reception. Along with his alleged temperamental behaviour and distrustful character, his own reticence augmented the intrigue of his self-constructed persona in the public sphere, rather than limiting his influence to specific literary areas.[13] Over the years, a web of promotions and publications was spun around Cavafy's work, with no shortage of biographical conjectures and fictionalized depictions evolving around his personality.[14] These appeared as the self-fulfilling prophecy of a poet who thought of himself as 'ultra-modern', bound to be 'further appreciated by future generations', and who exhibited great

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[12] C.P. Cavafy, 'Hidden Things,' in *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems,* trans. by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. by G. Savvidis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[13] Many of Cavafy's visitors and acquaintances were men of letters, who commented on the strong impression Cavafy made on them, and produced accounts of his extraordinary personality. A characteristic case is Giannis Saregiannis who gave a vivid depiction of the poet's temperament and manners: 'When with people he did not know very well, he was cautious, excessively polite, and inquisitive; if the discussion was serious, he expressed his views but with reservation [...] He supplement the art of public relations with a kind of wise compliment [..] He was a true maitre [...] He surprised us with his gestures, with the richness of his thought and its expression [...] He was driven away by his own speech [...] only then he let go of his armor, his reservations, the fear of facing the consequences, the tyranny of vagueness, and his obsession to please everybody and be liked by all [...] He was himself a very egocentric man. Nothing attracted him spontaneously to the souls of others, he had no such curiosity [...] He was only seeking inspiring themes and compliments [...] He developed a rare diplomatic mastery' (*Scholia ston Kavafi*, pp. 38-49).

[14] See, for example, the following works (respectively, a critical portrait, a biography, and a novel): Timos Malanos, *O poiitis K. P. Kavafis* (Athens: Difros, 1957), Robert Liddell, *Cavafy: A Critical Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1974), Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandrian Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962). For more information, see D. Daskalopoulos, *Vivliografia K. P. Kavafi* (Thessaloniki: Kentro Ellinikis Glossas, 2003) and the web site <http://www.kavafis.gr/> [accessed 17 October 2013].

concern about the construction of his public image at the moments when he seemed to be most protective of it.[15]

In 1919, E.M. Forster was the first influential foreign author to write about Cavafy with an eye on a British audience. The focus of his critical essays was divided between an emphasis on the poet's personality and an evaluation of his work. Forster portrayed Cavafy as 'a Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe' speaking in sentences 'full of parentheses that never get mixed, and of reservations that really do reserve'.[16] This image was accompanied by a reading of his poetry through the lens of a liberal political ideology, which presented Cavafy's artistic and personal 'otherness' as socially promising and politically enabling.

Forster assigned to Cavafy the role of artist-as-prophet, inaccessible to the masses but ideologically essential to the progress of civilization. By doing so, he was the first of a series of European modernists to present Cavafy's literary treatment of ancient Greece, the Hellenistic era, Byzantium, and Rome as fertile ground for those seeking new directions in literary innovation through a revision of established tradition. For Forster, Cavafy was a refreshing alternative to 'the tyranny of Classicism' through his poetry's disdain for 'Pericles and Aspasia and Themistocles and all those bores'.[17] In his essays, Cavafy became the Greek-Alexandrian antidote to the Grand Hellenic narrative, which would alleviate the burden of Classicism in England.

Apart from the British author's genuine appreciation of Cavafy and his work, Forster's contribution to the poet's fame was also indirectly related to his own status as cultural promoter. The discovery of an unusual artist in a faraway country and the presentation of this discovery to an unknowing audience as path-breaking and original was a way for the discoverer to act as mediator. Bourdieu's conceptualization of the 'power of consecration' is exemplified by Forster's power to legitimize Cavafy as a poet worthy of international attention.[18] This provides an additional argument against the understanding of literary influence as a one-sided relationship. By simultaneously reflecting on the

[15] C.P. Cavafy, 'Sur Le Poète C.P. Cavafy' (1930) in *Ta Peza 1882-1931* (Athina: Ikaros, 2003), p. 313.
[16] E.M. Forster, 'The Poetry of C.P. Cavafy' in *The Mind and Art of C.P. Cavafy* (Athens: Harvey, 1983), pp. 13-18.
[17] Forster, 'The Poetry of C.P. Cavafy', p. 16.
[18] Pierre Bourdieu, referring to the notion of 'consecration', writes: 'The ideology of creation, which makes the author the first and last source of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the 'creator' by trading in the 'sacred' and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting it, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work' ('The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods' in *The Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 74-111 (p. 76)).

promoted artist's aspirations and the promoter's personal project, the bond between the appropriated and the appropriator benefits both parties involved.

Following Forster and 'inheriting' the Cavafy of his critical essays, Lawrence Durrell crafted a fictional character based on the poet in his novel *The Alexandria Quartet*. This cemented Cavafy's image as a hallmark of Alexandria, enhanced his legendary status, and added a new dimension to his idealization. Through his novel Durrell appealed to a readership's familiarity with the historical person to which his Cavafy character corresponded. Darley, the *Quartet's* protagonist, upholds an active interest in the poet, which motivates him to seek out 'the new Cavafy manuscript' in order to 'get a look at the handwriting of the old poet'.[19] He also appears to be translating Cavafy's poetry and lecturing on it during a well-attended event in Alexandria described as a cultural 'blood bank' for 'a dignified semi-circle of society ladies'.[20] The fictional exploitation of archival material, lectures, and translations can be seen as a form of literary 'Cavafology', which mirrors the actual circulation of the poet's work and image in the Alexandrian cultural milieu. Durrell transformed Cavafy from a historical subject into a fictional hero, portraying him as 'the old man' whose spirit was 'impregnating' the streets of Alexandria.[21] The poet's verse provided the medium through which the intertwined identities of the city and its inhabitants were extensively explored, enriching the romanticized narration of the *Quartet's* post-imperial adventure. The poet was coopted to reinforce the literary value of depictions of exotic space and his presence became, in turn, imprinted with the qualities of the in-between, the mysterious, and the elusive.

Durrell and Forster modeled Cavafy according to their own ambitions and literary needs for different reasons. But both chose to favour poems with historical or philosophical themes over more explicitly erotic ones. Their choice determined, to a certain extent, the grounds on which Cavafy's reputation was founded during the period of high modernism. For most of his foreign admirers, Cavafy was at that time an Alexandrian with a cosmopolitan touch, a cultural figure without national boundaries, rather than a Greek poet or a writer of poetry associated with homosexuality.

In an altogether different social context, the moral climate was better suited to allowing different aspects of the poet's work to shine through: at a crucial moment for identity building, Cavafy became an important figure for the post-Stonewall riots gay liberation movement in the States. A generation of artists and poets focused on Cavafy's

[19] Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet* (London: Faber, 1962) pp. 357-358.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 31.
[21] *Idem*..

erotic poetry as an expression of homosexual desire and experience. As Mark Doty notes, gay writers who adapted Cavafy's 'Days of...' series of sensual poems from the sixties onwards were attempting to create their own tradition: 'Practically every gay and lesbian writer in English has a poem called 'Days-of-Something-or-Other.' We want to claim our allegiances; we want to stand in a line. Lineation is lineage!'[22] 'Lineage' here is not so much a sense of temporal succession as it is a conscious linking of one artist's voice and position to another's. In this way, an individual artist becomes a point uniting voices in history and a movement looking to create a collective identity.

Anglophone reception of Cavafy in both Britain and the States ran uninterrupted from the 1920s onward, but frequently surpassed the literary sphere. David Hockney's etchings and Duane Michals' photography were seminal instances of the appropriation of Cavafy's work and image in extra-literary areas. In 1994, Cavafy's poem 'Ithaca' was recited at Jackie Kennedy Onassis's funeral. The publicity and live coverage of the funeral created unprecedented demand for the poet's work. In response, Verso Books announced in the *New York Magazine* the distribution of free copies of the poem to Cavafy-hungry readers as 'a bookseller's homage to Cavafy, Tempelsman, Mrs. Onassis, Forster, Durrell et al'. The publishing house was placing itself within a genealogy of 'longtime Cavafy enthusiasts (along with E.M. Forster, Lawrence Durrell, W.H. Auden, and T.S. Eliot)',[23] thus forming a continuum of English speaking authors and agents with their own cultural version of Cavafy.

Under similar circumstances almost a decade later, Cavafy's 'Waiting for the Barbarians' was recited at Edward Said's funeral as a tribute to the critic's long time admiration of the poet. The reading received extensive media coverage. It was the same poem that had lent not only its title but also 'one aspect of its sociopolitical dynamic' to Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee's 1980 novel and subsequently to Philip Glass's 2008 opera of the same name.[24] Not only had Cavafy's work been revived through translations and read in different languages, but cultural currency was accumulating under his name as his value was affirmed through a diverse set of practices and through the mediation of individuals who were themselves celebrities with a strong public presence.

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[22] Mark Doty, *Outside the Lines: Talking with Contemporary Gay Poets*, ed. by Christopher Hennessy (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 87.

[23] Letter by Peter Soter, Verso Books, Manhattan, to New York Magazine, *New York Magazine*, 20 June 1994.

[24] Derek Attridge, 'Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of the Canon', in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century 'British' Literary Canons*, ed. by Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 212-38 (p. 215).

The reality of the social and extra-literary agents involved in constructing literary reputation is forcefully encapsulated in the memoir of James Merrill, the American poet and ardent admirer of Cavafy. In a note concerning Kimon Friar's career as a translator of Greek poetry into English, Merrill casts an outsider's eye over the production of the modern Greek literary scene:

> Once the first 'definitive' anthology had appeared, full of big names like Cavafy and Sikelianos, Seferis and Elytis, he [Kimon Friar] couldn't resist undertaking the thirty-thousand-line Odyssey of Kazantzakis. That alone took seven or eight years. Looking up dazed from the task, he saw a new generation of poets. They clamored like dogs round a stag at bay. How could they dream of international renown without being read in English, and who could they trust to bring this about if not Kimon? Critical articles, further anthologies, medals and honors from a government keenly aware of the steps leading to those two Nobel prizes [...][25]

Merrill underlines the political dimension of the Nobel prizes awarded to Elytis and Seferis and by extension addresses the broader politics involved in prestigious prizes and international awards. His pragmatic view exposes the social factors that play a significant role in the literary game. For him, poetic influence is a process requiring a willing and entrusted promoter, the mediation of translation, the desirability of institutional recognition, and the connection of all the above to national strategies for artistic achievement. The dynamism of the phrase 'new generation of poets' is undermined by their cynical comparison to 'clamoring dogs' gathering around the American translator. Merrill's disenchanted perspective diagnoses the ways in which a small country clings to its most cherished literary voices. But it also highlights his participation in the patronising tendencies exhibited by other literary institutions when confronted with a marginal literature's efforts to gain standing on the international scene.

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In Greece, Cavafy's reception had followed quite a differed course, from which the poet emerged as a hotly contested phenomenon. His appearance on the Athenian literary scene at a relatively mature age initiated a sort of crisis: from the early twenties, throughout the thirties, and after the poet's death in 1933, the reactions to his work often oscillated between cautious appreciation and rejection. Greece's predominant modernist group, 'the Generation of the Thirties', used poetic diction that was at odds with the prosaic form and

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[25] James Merrill, *A Different Person: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1993) p. 27.

universalism of Cavafy's work in an attempt to create a new collective identity and national mythology associated with fresh beginnings and innovation. [26] The poet's spatial and poetic distance from the literary scene of mainland Greece was perceived negatively through its apparent indifference to national cultural rejuvenation. Giorgos Theotokas, a prominent member of the group, compared him to a 'meteor' travelling alone and thus most likely to fade out and die before making any impact.[27]

This reaction has been understood as a dismissal of Cavafy's 'mixed language' by fervent supporters of the 'demotic' and as an ideological defence of the 'idolatry of the ancients' (to which Cavafy did not subscribe).[28] However, it would be an omission not to consider the cultural politics at play. Cavafy was an imposing presence to the young poets competing for a central place in the Greek literary canon. For his part, Cavafy viewed the Athenian poets as 'romantics' whose 'lyrical exultations' had nothing in common with his own measured verse.[29] Confronted with a series of deprecating, and even aggressive, early reviews of his work, his reactions remained deliberate and cautious, intensifying his mystique and enriching the discourse on his art.[30]

Despite these early tribulations, the initial cautiousness and hostility of the Athenian establishment started to swiftly subside at the same time as Cavafy was gaining recognition abroad. The vast production of scholarship on his work and its prominence in the Greek educational curriculum established the poet as 'high art' worthy of the attention of the most prestigious academic and educational circles. Invested with a glory partly 'imported' from abroad, Cavafy was now enjoying a growing internal reputation, which placed him firmly in the national canon.[31] His emblematic status for the broader public survives until the present day, and has appeared with renewed force during the current financial crisis. In Greece and internationally, social media and journalism have frequently alluded to his poetry in order to recount the country's misadventures.[32] Angst, anger, and

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[26] 'Cavafy is an end and avant-garde is a beginning. Two contrasting and incongruous worlds. The only influence Cavafy exerted on a lively new generation is a negative influence [...] Mr Cavafy is the culmination of the death impulse in Greek poetry' (Giorgos Theotokas, *Eleuthero Pneuma* (Athens: Ermis, 1973), pp. 65-67).
[27] Giorgos Theotokas, *Eleuthero Pneuma,* p. 65.
[28] Liddell, 'Cavafy', p. 101.
[29] Dimitris Daskalopoulos and Maria Stasinopoulou, *O Vios kai to Ergo tou K. P. Kavafi* (Athens: Metaixmio, 2013), pp. 157-158.
[30] For a detailed account of such reactions see Ch. L. Karaoglou, *I Athinaïki Kritiki kai o Kavafis*.
[31] For Cavafy's strong presence in successive generations of Greek poets see D. Daskalopoulos, ed., *Ellinika Kavafogeni Poiimata (1909-2001)* (Patra: Panepistimio Patron, 2003).
[32] In the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, the former editor-in-chief Theo Sommer, criticizing the handling of the Greek crisis, quoted in whole Cavafy's poem 'In a large Greek colony, 200 B. C.', urging his readers to benefit from its reading. (Von Theo Sommer, 'Griechenland nach den Kürzungen—ein Gedicht', *Zeit Online*, 17

occasionally hope, have been expressed by employing his poetry to criticise everyday reality, seek explanations, or find solace. The poet's work has been invoked as a means to comment on the harsh reality facing the Greek people, a use that brings aesthetic utterances into the realm of the ideological. Similarly to the manner in which Cavafy became iconic for the gay liberation in the sixties, Cavafy's image has been manipulated to mobilise political action: for communication, for protesting, for declarations of solidarity.

The public's cultural familiarity with Cavafy has been used not only to process traumatic political events but also to lend authority to corporate or social institutions. For example, the poet's image was printed on Greek lottery tickets to celebrate the anniversary of his birth. Furthermore, in October 2013, the Onassis foundation launched a project that published fragmented verses alongside an illustration of the poet on Athenian public transport. The verses were deliberately selected for topical relevance but created controversy by their isolation from their original poetic context.[33] Such selective use of Cavafy is common practice and indicates widespread recognition of his work, whereas, at the same time, affirms the cultural power of a nation's investment in, and reinforcement of, its most symbolic figures. In this respect, Cavafy is comparable to James Joyce, whose work and life is inherently associated with his position as an 'outsider' and an exile but who is also a celebrated figure for Irish mainstream culture, especially in education and the tourist industry.[34] Claiming a 'genius' as one's own evokes a sense of national pride that is unaffected by whether a work is read in a dedicated manner by the entire population or not. Cultural impact may even gain precedence over poetry itself. For both the Greek and Irish mainstream, the work of art may be secondary to the power exerted on national mythology by the cultural influence of their most famous artists.

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By locating the production of Cavafy's image within both the Greek and the Anglophone context, this article has provided a comparative overview of Cavafy's rise from the margins of Hellenism to the epicentre of the international literary scene. From symbol of liberalism to Alexandrian eccentric, and from gay icon to national Greek poet, the diversity of

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September 2013, <http://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2013-09/griechenland-kavafis-austeritaet> [accessed 17 October 2013]).

33 'What happens when Cavafy enters the means of mass transport', *Onassis Cultural Centre*, 4 November 2013, <http://www.sgt.gr/en/programme/event/1588> [accessed 10 November 2013].

34 See, for example, John Nash, *James Joyce and the Act of Reception: Reading, Ireland, Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Cavafy's depictions rejects any notion of a single, legitimised cultural perspective that is limited to an impenetrable field of literary value. Instead, Cavafy's rise to fame exposes literary tradition in its national variations, as an area where great works and charismatic personalities coexist in terms of institutional recognition and public approval.

Cavafy's productivity as a subject for a discussion of literary celebrity is underlined by the recent transcultural events and celebrations which took place in his honour in 2013. The eightieth anniversary of Cavafy's death and the hundred and fiftieth of his birth saw academic symposiums, poetry readings, theatrical performances, recitals and concerts, radio and television programs, special issues of magazines and journals, books on the poet's life and work, as well as many other cultural events and activities in Greece and abroad. The 'Cavafy Year' acts as a further reminder of the range of social relationships and institutional mechanisms involved in the construction of literary reputation—a concept naturalized to the extent that it conceals its processes of production.

This extra-literary environment, resting on the symbolic capital that Bourdieu defines as 'a degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, or honour [...] founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition,'[35] might be seen as a factor distracting readers from the poetic work itself. But Cavafy's figuration through systems of cultural exchange does not imply that the voice of the author has altogether vanished without leaving a trace. Unexpected readings, unconventional uses, and even conflicting views of the poet's art and image illuminate the cultural politics at play behind the construction of an authorial persona in a variety of different contexts on the international literary scene. But they also give new momentum to interpretation. By making Cavafy's poetry accessible to vast communities of readers, the powerful discursive practices employed in legitimizing his fame on a large scale continue to provide the grounds for varied cultural re-readings and re-writings of his work.

The canonical poet is a sub-category of a famous personality, which underlines both the impossibility of examining the public interest directed toward him independently of the oeuvre and the insufficiency of addressing the work while disregarding the poet's position as a culturally symbolic figure. Even in instances when 'fame' is not explicitly addressed, it is an essential concept to consider in discussions of the construction and circulation of authorial singularity and achievement. Up to the present day, Cavafy's status is constantly producing symbolic value, mostly because of the diversity of its reception and the openness of its transformations. As a celebrity he reminds us of the contradictions

[35] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 7.

inherent to literary works, and calls for a reexamination of the social practices applied in consuming works of art.

Rewriting Classical Myths: the Case of Penelope

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The *Odyssey* is the classic par excellence of Western literature. Every epoch that needs to validate its roots comes back to Ulysses, whose story has been rewritten endless times and brought back to life by as many authors. James Joyce, Constantine Cavafy and Derek Walcott are just some of the best-known re-tellers of the Homeric poem. The *Odyssey*'s plot is particularly well suited to reproduction and retelling in different times and different cultural contexts. To its linear story – a man wandering over land and sea for many years and his fight to re-conquer his kingdom and his wife – a variety of subplots can be added, for example digressions on the characters encountered by Ulysses in his adventures, or parentheses on life in Ithaca in the absence of the King.

The twentieth century is perhaps the time during which the most interesting developments involving the *Odyssey*, its plot and its symbols, take place. Authors of rewrites are attracted by non-dominant characters, by what has not been said by the canon, by marginal stories and consequences taken for granted; sometimes the new versions they produce even enter the canon and become 'modern classics', as is the case with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Among all the characters of the *Odyssey* who undergo such rewriting, one in particular stands out in modern times for her strong contrast with the image assigned to her by tradition, and as a particularly fruitful example of the metamorphosis of Homeric character: Penelope.

The figure of Penelope traditionally remained in the wings of what have generally been considered the much more important adventures of Ulysses, but over the past fifty years, this female figure has gradually become the protagonist of novels, short stories and poems within Western literature.[1] After introducing the core problematics which arise in relation to the character of Penelope, over the course of this article I will show how this character is transformed from the Homeric text to modern rewrites, restricting the cases

[1] Among many rewrites, and excluding those I will investigate in the course of this paper, some of the best-known in terms of diffusion and critical reception are: Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005); Silvana La Spina, *Penelope* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1998); Annie Leclerc, *Toi Pénélope* (Arles: Ed. Actes Sud, 2001); Giorgio Manganelli, 'Di Circe e di Penelope', in *Ti ucciderò mia capitale* (Milan: Adelphi, 2011) and Augusto Monterroso, 'La tela de Penelope, o quién engaña a quién', in *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1971). Other works not entirely dedicated to Penelope nevertheless give an important role to her figure in their plots, for example Antonio Spinosa, *Ulisse* (Milan, Piemme 1997) or Stefano Benni, *Achille piè veloce* (Milan: Feltrinelli 2003).

investigated to two Italian examples that strongly underline the divergence from the classical version and that are here brought together for the first time: Bianca Tarozzi's *Variazioni sul tema di Penelope* (1989) and Luigi Malerba's *Itaca per sempre* (1997).[2] There are at least three reasons for choosing an Italian corpus. First of all, Italy and Italian literature both have a very close relationship with the myth of Ulysses: among the different routes posited for Ulysses' navigation, one long-standing hypothesis is that the stages of his journey are recognizable in Italian territories (and indeed, many Italian landscapes still appear to be under the influence of the legend of Ulysses: promontories, stretches of coasts and beaches are named after characters in the *Odyssey*). The multiform aspects of the figure of Ulysses, especially his thirst for 'canoscenza', have never ceased to attract Italian writers, poets and philosophers. Dante's presentation of the adventurer in the *Divina Commedia*[3] begins an Italian tradition that sees Ulysses as a predecessor of Cristopher Columbus and will culminate in the Romantic vision of Ulysses as a tragic hero, in which Foscolo mirrors himself.[4] Secondly, Italian literary scholarship still needs to give full recognition to literary works on Penelope: though scholars like Pietro Boitani and Maurizio Bettini have provided valuable works on Ulysses, and even on the Sirens and Circe,[5] there has been no comprehensive study of the figure of Penelope. Since Penelope emerges so clearly in Italian literature across the centuries,[6] a study of Italian 'Penelope' texts alone is necessary and worthwhile, especially if it aims not just at filling bibliographical gaps, but at creating new meanings that – from and through literary texts – question the wider horizons of philosophy and anthropology. Finally, two major methodological contributions to the study of the myth of Penelope come from Italian scholars: Adriana Cavarero's *In spite of Plato* (1990) and Monica Farnetti's *Non così per Penelope* (2007).[7]

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[2] *Variation on the theme of Penelope* and *Itaca forever* have never been translated into English; all translations from these texts are therefore my own.
[3] See Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia. Vol. 1 Inferno*, ed. by Natalino Sapegno (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1955), XXVI (pp. 290-302).
[4] Ugo Foscolo, 'A Zacinto', in *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Ugo Foscolo. Vol I, Poesie e Carmi*, ed. by Francesco Pagliai, Gianfranco Folena, Mario Scotti, 2nd edn (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1985), p. 95.
[5] Pietro Boitani, *Sulle orme di Ulisse*, 2nd edn (Bologna: Il mulino, 2007); Pietro Boitani, *L'ombra di Ulisse: figure di un mito*, 2nd edn (Bologna: Il mulino, 2012); Maurizio Bettini and Carlo Brillante, *Il mito di Elena* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002); Maurizio Bettini and Luigi Spina, *Il mito delle sirene* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007); Maurizio Bettini and Cristiana Franco, *Il mito di Circe* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010).
[6] Even before the twentieth century it is possible to trace some Italian examples of literary works with Penelope as their protagonist, for example: Gianbattista Della Porta, 'La Penelope, tragicomedia', in *Teatro. Vol. 1. Le tragedie*, ed by Raffaele Sirri (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1978), pp. 31-176 and Giuseppe Salio Padovano, *La Penelope, tragedia* (Padova: stampata presso Giuseppe Comino, 1724).
[7] An English edition of Cavarero's work is available. See Adriana Cavarero *In spite of Plato: a feminist rewriting of ancient philosophy*, trans. by Serena Anderlini (Cambridge: Polity, 1995). Farnetti's contribution (*Not so for Penelope*) has never been translated into English.

In the light of their theories, the aim of this study is to focus solely on the character of Penelope and to show how this figure is re-interpreted in modern times, where she moves from the straightforward example of faithfulness and chastity assigned by the canon to a more complex representation of feminine wisdom. Through the use of the en-gendered symbol Penelope, the classic is thus permeated with a new meaning and moves towards a productive representation of feminine diversity.

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In the *Odyssey*, Penelope is the wife of Ulysses, king of Ithaca, who is away from home for twenty years: for ten years he is involved in the Trojan war, and for the rest he is forced to wander across the sea, because the god Poseidon impedes his homecoming. During this long absence, the palace of Ithaca is occupied by the Suitors, young local aristocrats who try to conquer Penelope and take possession of Ulysses' holdings. Penelope – unaware of her husband's destiny – invents a trick to delay giving a response to the Suitors' requests: she says that she will marry one of them as soon as she finishes weaving a shroud for her father-in-law Laertes. But she unravels each night what she has woven during the day, thus postponing the completion of her task. After four years the Suitors discover the trickery, but luckily Ulysses comes back home in time to defeat them all and to reconquer his kingdom and his wife.

This short summary makes clear how easily Penelope might be considered a symbol of faithfulness, chastity and patience. To this end the scholar Woodhouse wrote in 1930:

> Certainly Penelopeia does not in the world's imagination stand on a level with either Kirke or Kalypso, much less does she vie with 'Fayre Helen, floure of beauty excellent'. [...] For in truth nothing much could be made of the figure of Penelopeia in the Romance of the *Odyssey*, without disturbing the centre of gravity of the poem. The subject of the poem is the Man.[8]

Woodhouse can be taken as the last champion of a stereotyped view of Penelope that lasted at least until the 1950s. Recent critics and contemporary rewrites have strongly criticized and undermined his interpretation;[9] nevertheless, Penelope might be considered the

[8] William John Woodhouse, *The composition of Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), pp. 201-03.
[9] A complete survey of all the contributions showing the centrality of Penelope in the *Odyssey* would exceed the specific aim of this paper, but the most important monographs of the last twenty years are: Marylin A. Katz, *Penelope's Renown. Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991); Nancy Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics* (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994); Ioanna Papadopolou-Belmehdi, *Le chant de Pénélope* (Paris: Belin,

worst-treated woman in mythology, not only because of her fame as a 'boring housewife', but also because many characters in the *Odyssey* – Telemachus, Agamemnon, Athena, and the Ithacans, to name but a few – address her at times with unfounded reproaches and cruel words. Telemachus banishes her from the place where men reason and talk, he commands her to leave the hall and to weave her web:

> So, mother,
> go back to your quarters. Tend to your own task,
> the distaff and the loom, and keep the women
> working hard as well. As for giving orders,
> men will see to that, but I most of all:
> I hold the reins of power in this house.[10]

Moreover, the Ithacans themselves do not acknowledge her as a heroic character: hearing music coming from the palace, and unaware of the rejoicing for Ulysses's return, they think that she has eventually married a suitor, and proclaim, disparagingly: 'That callous woman, too faithless to keep her lord and master's house to the bitter end'.[11] Penelope has in fact done the exact opposite, but neither the Ithacans nor the myth itself do her justice: her figure continues to be linked to a concept of fidelity, despite a lack of references to this effect within the text. Indeed, in the Homeric text, Penelope is never mentioned as faithful (the attribute never appears in connection with her name), but as 'wise' (*periphron* and *echephron* are her usual epithets). Undeniably, the concept of wisdom for a woman of the Homeric period includes the attribute of fidelity. However, whether or not Penelope was faithful, I prefer to focus on other intriguing features of her wisdom and, regarding her fidelity, I will simply mention here that not all the variants of the myth agree on this point: for example there is one version – mainly reported by Servius – which says that Penelope lay with all the Suitors and from that orgy the god Pan (that in ancient Greek means 'all') was generated.[12]

1994) and Richard Heitman, *Taking her seriously. Penelope and the plot of Homer's Odyssey* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). In these works Woodhouse's words are refuted once and for all, based on the role assigned to Penelope as a modifying agent of the plot (Katz and Felson-Rubin), her feminine deceits considered as narrative strategies (Papadopoulou-Belmehdi) and the specific focus on the tragic aspect of her character (Heitman).

[10] Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Robert Fagles, (London: Penguin, 2006), I, 356-59 (p. 89).

[11] *Odyssey*, XXIII. 149-51.

[12] See Servius, *Servianorum in Vergilii Carmina Commentariorum*, ed. by Edward Kennard Rand et al., (Lancaster: American Philological Association, 1946), II, 44 (p.329). 'Cum Ithacam post errores fuisset reversus, invenisse Pana fertur in penatibus suis, qui dicitur ex Penelope et procis omnibus natus, sicut ipsum nomen Pan videtur declarare'. 'It is narrated that when Ulysses went back to Ithaca after his wonderings, he found among his household deities Pan, who is said to be born from Penelope and all the Suitors, as Pan's name itself declares'. My translation.

Moreover, Penelope has some qualities traditionally considered masculine, such as cunning, an uncommon virtue for women of ancient literature, who were expected to be beautiful, fertile and often naïve. Among all the mythological women 'beautiful as goddesses', she is wise, and she singlehandedly runs a microcosm made up of men. She is queen of the palace, she cleverly rejects the Suitors, she prays to the gods; yet in spite of all these qualities and strengths, she is predominantly remembered only as Ulysses' wife. Acceding to this narrow interpretation is another great sacrifice required of the character; a sacrifice that would go on for centuries: 'I amount to [...] an edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with', says the Penelope created by Margaret Atwood.[13]

It is evident through all this that for a modern and productive reading of Penelope, a feminist perspective is inevitable and desired. Penelope is the first wise woman in Western literature, and once her wisdom and cunning are acknowledged, Penelope becomes a symbol filled with gendered meaning that can no longer be overlooked, either by those dealing with literature or indeed those working with anthropology and women's rights. In the last decades of the twentieth century, writers and scholars began to consider Penelope in a different light from that assigned to her by the patriarchal tradition and, more or less consciously, created feminine figures with a new perception of their wishes and their pains. Rewrites and feminist theories do not move at the same pace; nevertheless, it is possible to trace a tendency that leads writers to create Penelopes who are increasingly independent and wise, along with the spread of new feminist theories.

An important contribution to the rehabilitation of Penelope in a new feminist guise is provided by the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero. She was part of the feminist group 'Diotima', a philosophical community for women formed in Verona in 1983, whose aims were to further develop the reflection on sexual difference raised in the works of Luce Irigaray.[14] Cavarero wrote a sort of manifesto for the group, in which she expanded on Irigaray's discussion on language, in particular asking how it is possible for women to define themselves if the language in which they are supposed to do so is masculine-connoted.[15] In 1990, in her book *In spite of Plato. A feminist rewriting of ancient philosophy*, Cavarero integrated her reflections on sexual difference with questions

[13] Atwood, p. 2.
[14] For an introduction to the theory of sexual difference, see Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1984); Luce Irigaray, *Je, tous, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990).
[15] The article was published in 1987 as the second essay of the book *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale*. See Adriana Cavarero and others, *Diotima: il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, 3rd edn (Milan: La Tartaruga, 2003).

relating to the symbolic representation of the individual in the society. Borrowing figures from Plato and from Western tradition, she demonstrated that they could be reshaped as new feminine figures in order to properly represent sexual diversity. Penelope is presented as the first figure to undergo this process of 'restoration'. Cavarero analyses Penelope's actions: by weaving and unraveling, Penelope creates her very own temporality, which is untouchable by events. While Ulysses lives out his many adventures on the sea, and while her Suitors are guzzling in the hall, Penelope stays away from History. She lives her own story made up of small, private and familiar events, represented by her weaving in the company of other women.

At the same time, Penelope is also a figure who negates her own actions. If she only wove, she would be seen to accept the specific job assigned to women by men; but Penelope unravels during the night what she weaves during the day, in this way rebelling against the symbolic order imposed on all women by patriarchal traditions:

> Penelope's time cannot be touched by events, precisely because it cannot be reduced to either one of the two tempos that are alien to it: the tempo of men's actions and the tempo of wifely domestic production. [...] Penelope seeks refuge neither in lack of action nor in the self-denial that comes from prolonged waiting. She weaves and unweaves and in so doing she delineates an impenetrable space where she belongs to herself, while she prolongs the frustration of the disappointed usurpers.[16]

The loom is therefore much more than a feminine domestic tool: it is an opportunity for Penelope to take the floor, it is her voice when she is forbidden to speak, as when Telemachus banishes her from the hall. At the end of her chapter on Penelope, Cavarero imagines what may have happened to the character, after Ulysses' last departure, poetically suggesting that she continues to weave with the other women, talking and thinking about a reality made up of thoughts and bodies, leaving the sea and death outside her room.

The idea of feminine wisdom expressed by a defined space (Penelope's room) and time (the gap between weaving and unweaving) matches not only Irigaray's thought, but also other Italian discourses on Penelope. The 'impenetrable space where she belongs to herself' described by Cavarero is in fact the same one that is presented by Bianca Tarozzi, poet and academic, in her poem *Variazioni sul tema di Penelope* (1989).[17] Tarozzi underlines the distances that separate the woman from the open sea, imagining her abandoned once more by her husband, who has left for another 'last journey'.

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[16] Adriana Cavarero *In spite of Plato: a feminist rewriting of ancient philosophy*, pp. 16-17.
[17] Bianca Tarozzi, *Nessuno vince il leone: variazioni e racconti in versi* (Venice: Arsenale, 1989), p. 21.

Ora discesa
sulla riva, dal mare risuonante
sente voci lontane, antichi
naufraghi,
fantasmi che la vogliono afferrare:
tutte le guerre che non ha perduto
né vinto,
tutti gli amori che non ha vissuto
il dolore e il furore degli eroi,
che non le spetta:
scempio,
dolce urlare del vento
dentro l'anima.

Ritorna sui suoi passi.
L'esperienza
del limite per lei
è l'acqua incollerita della riva –
per Ulisse lo schianto
e la fine tremenda
contro gli scogli, verso la leggenda.

Now, down
on the seashore, in the echoing sea
she hears distant voices, ancient
castaways,
ghosts who strive to grasp her:
all the wars that she has neither lost
nor won,
all the loves that she has not lived
the grief and the fury of the heroes,
to which she has no claim:
destruction,
sweet howling of the wind
within her soul.

She retraces her steps.
The experience
of the limit is for her
the angry water on the seashore –
for Ulysses is the crash
and the terrific end
against the cliff, toward the legend.[18]

The different attitudes of the two characters toward life are illustrated through their respective relationships with the sea. It is congenial to Ulysses, and the hero wants to compete with this limit to become a legend. For Penelope, on the other hand, the seashore as a limit is the frontier of a world that does not belong to her, the world of men's heroic deeds. Penelope's space is her palace and her room, where she belongs to herself. Moreover, Penelope's abstention from travelling is explicable because she embodies the house itself. According to the feminist writer Monica Farnetti, Penelope (like many other women settled in their homes, a common occurrence in Western literature) guards the essence of the house, the sense of belonging to a place that travellers are continuously searching for around the world. In this way, female non-travelling assumes a new significance. Women are seen as the guardians of identity, they doubt neither themselves nor their origins. They do not need to travel around because they have never lost their identities:

> Se si viaggia per cercare se stessi e la propria origine, città, patria o madreterra, e se Penelope e le sue simili invece non viaggiano, non sarà perché niente offusca per loro il rapporto con l'origine, la matrice, la dimora? Perché il fatto di essere nate dello stesso sesso della madre almeno in questo le garantisce? Perché sono già là, alla famosa "meta che

[18] Tarozzi, p.21. My translation.

> viaggia accanto al viaggiatore", e possono così risparmiarsi il mito e la fatica, la gloria e l'epopea, la dannazione e l'avventura?[19]

Cavarero's and Farnetti's works provide the theoretical background needed to perform a modern analysis of the 'wise' Penelope, whose non-travelling – as in Tarozzi's poem – can now no longer be seen merely as a mundane counterpart to the much more fascinating and dangerous adventures of Ulysses. Moreover, Tarozzi's poem perfectly exemplifies the need for modern, and in this case feminine, rewrites of past texts. As Adrienne Rich notes in her article 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', 'we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us'.[20] The source text – the *Odyssey* – already carries *in nuce* the elements that make Penelope a symbol of gender diversity. But tradition following the Homeric text has been too concerned with glorifying Ulysses' trickeries to pay enough attention to the character of Penelope and, consequently, confines the woman to the limited description of a faithful wife. Tarozzi breaks the hold of tradition by giving an alternative reading of Penelope's features – like her staying at home – and in doing so she achieves the sense of writing as re-vision: 'the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival'.[21]

Another Penelope that agrees with the *Odyssey* in its representation of her as a wise woman plays the central role in Luigi Malerba's 1997 *Itaca per sempre*. The novel tells the fortunes of Ulysses after his stay in the Phaeacian's kingdom, once he lands on the island of Ithaca and disguises himself as a beggar. In contrast to Homer's version, in which Penelope only recognizes Ulysses after he has recounted to her the secret in the making of their bed – a secret shared only by themselves – Malerba's Penelope recognizes him as soon as he enters the palace. In Malerba's new treatment of the classical myth, although Penelope immediately recognizes the beggar as her husband, she wants to punish him for taking so long to return and in particular for not having trusted her enough to reveal his identity to her immediately on his arrival. Penelope is the only one who can really

[19] 'If travelling is a way to find oneself and one's origins, city, country or motherland, and if Penelope and those like her do not travel, might this not be because nothing interferes with their relationship with their origins, their matrix, their homeland? Because the fact that they are born of the same sex as their mothers affords them at least this protection? Because they are already there, at the famous "destination which travels alongside the traveler" and they can thus save themselves the myth and the effort, the glory and the eternal fame, the damnation and the adventure?' Monica Farnetti, 'Non così per Penelope', in *Il globale e l'intimo: luoghi del non ritorno*, ed. by Liana Borghi and Uta Treder (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2007), pp. 47-58 (p. 51). My translation.

[20] Adrienne Rich, When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision, *College English*, 34 (1972), 18-30 (p. 15).

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

recognize Ulysses, but she decides to play along with Ulysses' game of hiding his identity from her, and turns it into a competition. Throughout the text the protagonist is a very vindictive Penelope: 'Ho imparato a destreggiarmi anch'io alla maniera di Ulisse e aspetto con lo sguardo fisso all'orizzonte l'ora della vendetta come premio per la mia pazienza'.[22]

The writer creates a dual narration in which the voices of Ulysses and Penelope are interwoven and narrate the same events from two different perspectives. Finally, after centuries of silence, Penelope speaks and her voice is not timorous at all. Malerba's Penelope is stronger than Ulysses: her perspective queries the myth and she calls into question even the well-established epithets associated with Ulysses' name: 'Ma quanto è ingenuo l'astutissimo Ulisse', she remarks in reference to his vain attempts at disguise.[23] Penelope is presented as a heterogeneous and modern woman who, rather than embodying a single characteristic, like the Homeric warriors, is a multifaceted character: she is thoughtful, vengeful, competitive, astute and psychologically strong – a female version of the original Ulysses. Malerba gives voice to this strong character who, aware of her suffering, even puts forward the idea that women might have the right to commit adultery and travel exactly like men:

> Non capisco con quanta presunzione Ulisse abbia sospettato della mia fedeltà. Non mi ha forse ripetutamente tradito durante i suoi viaggi? È forse meno doloroso per una donna il tradimento del suo uomo di quanto non sia doloroso per un uomo il tradimento della sua donna? Chi ha stabilito che una donna debba soffrire e perdonare? [...] E perché mai, ho pensato, non dovrei fare anch'io qualche bel viaggio? Quando avranno finito il primo poema chiederò a Ulisse di portarmi in Egitto. Mi dicono meraviglie di questo paese e io da quando mi sono sposata non sono mai uscita da Itaca, come da una prigione. Per caso solo gli uomini hanno diritto a viaggiare?[24]

Unlike Tarozzi's Penelope, who stays on the seashore, Malerba's Penelope wishes to travel. Nevertheless, this does not make her doubt herself. The topical binarism 'travelling versus staying at home' assumes here a new meaning after the discourse of Tarozzi and Farnetti: once home and roots are correctly acknowledged as the anchor of our identity, travelling can produce something positive. This is why it is only when Penelope's story reaches the

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[22] 'I have learnt to get by on my own like Ulysses, and with my eyes fixed on the horizon I wait for the hour of my revenge as a reward for my patience'. Luigi Malerba, *Itaca per sempre* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), p. 29. My translation.

[23] 'How naive the very cunning Ulysses is'. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[24] 'I can't understand how presumptuously Ulysses suspected me of disloyalty. Didn't he cheat on me during his voyages? Is her husband's infidelity perhaps less painful for a woman than his wife's for a man? Who says that a woman has to forbear and to forgive? [...] And whyever, I thought, should I not go on a nice trip too? When they have finished the first poem I will ask Ulysses to take me to Egypt. They say it's a wonderful country and since my wedding I have never left Ithaca, it has become my prison. Who has decreed that only men have the right to travel?' *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 175.

'traditional' ending – that is after Ulysses' expected homecoming - that Malerba's Penelope decides to travel.

Malerba plays with the myth and it is fair to wonder if *Itaca per sempre* is merely a *divertissement littéraire*. The desire to amuse is definitely present, but there is something that goes beyond this in his presentation of Penelope as a key character. By overturning the epithets and making Ulysses a weak man and Penelope a strong woman, Malerba shows his desire to subvert the roles attested by the canon. Malerba himself writes in the post scriptum of his novel that Penelope is 'un carattere sicuramente meno passivo di quanto la lettura superficiale dell'Odissea ci possa indurre a credere e che ha accreditato una idea errata e un po' noiosa di questo sublime personaggio'.[25]

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There are many variations of the myth of Penelope, and several Italian authors have played with this myth to create modern and deviant Penelopes who do not conform to the chaste woman in the canon.[26] Tarozzi's Penelope on the edge of the seashore is the guardian of the feminine essence, Malerba's Penelope punishes her husband's misbehavior with cunning. Such modern rewrites of myth vindicate women who in past texts have suffered from male usurpation. At the same time they show us why classics endure: because of their potential to be universal, modernity can reappropriate them for its own ends, in the process ensuring that their fame continues.

In modern times, Ulysses is often seen as a man in the grips of an identity crisis, an anti-hero who can no longer endure glory and endless success (as in *Capitano Ulisse* by Alberto Savinio, published in 1934). He is de-heroicised, deprived of his glory and fame, a man who makes mistakes, who has doubts and who weeps. In *Itaca per sempre*, even the language of the hero is affected by his perplexities and anxieties: from the first pages of the novel his sentences are characterized by negations ('non ho mai trovato… non riconosco… non riconosco… non mi sono mai fidato… non so… non so') and question marks (thirteen

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[25] 'Definitely not such a passive character as a superficial reading of the Odyssey might lead us to believe, inducing us to see this sublime protagonist in an erroneous and even boring light'. Ibid., pp. 184-85. It would be instructive to investigate how conscious Malerba was of creating a Penelope that fits in with other feminist writers. While I am convinced that Bianca Tarozzi read the philosophers of sexual difference, for Malerba this issue deserves further investigation. Nevertheless, it is remarkable to see how two different authors, one male and one female, with two different contexts, represent a wise, independent and strong Penelope within a ten year gap.

[26] For example, among many others, in 2003 Stefano Benni invented a South American dancer, Penelope-Pilar, in his *Achille piè veloce* (Milan: Feltrinelli 2003). Clearly not only contemporary Italian literature produces Penelopes who distance themselves from the canonical one. Among non-Italian rewrites, maybe the most resolute Penelope of the last decades is the protagonist of the above-mentioned Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005).

in his first speech alone), indirect questions ('mi sono domandato… e mi domando… chissà se qualcuno raccoglierà… chissà se potrò contare…') and self-directed ones ('da dove viene? da dove vengono? dove mi trovo?').[27] Ulysses even doubts his past glories under the Trojan walls:

> La chiamo vittoria ma chissà se si può chiamare con questa parola la distruzione di una città e i fatti atroci che sono avvenuti sotto le sue mura e che io stesso ho raccontato cento volte come eventi gloriosi durante le soste lungo il mio ritorno.[28]

Therefore, Penelope's metamorphosis within Italian rewrites of the *Odyssey* is part of a broader process of transforming mythological characters: they take on twentieth-century tragedies and problems, they doubt their identities, or create new ones that reflect modern – in this case, feminist – thought.

As the rewrites analysed here have shown, to study the figure of Penelope today means to take into consideration the gender implications inherent in her myth. In contemporary rewrites it is very unusual to find a silent Penelope: little by little, she is released from the need to objectify her words and conceits into symbols, as in the *Odyssey* where she has to stay at her loom and is forbidden to speak. The many Penelopes of modernity express themselves freely. She speaks, she writes (as had already happened in the first century B.C., when Ovid's Penelope wrote a letter to Ulysses)[29] and she even sings, with Molly Bloom's soprano voice. Penelope's word becomes a song, and once more the source of this song is in the *Odyssey* itself, for 'Penelope's song' is already described in book XXIV, when Agamemnon launches the tradition of rewrites on Penelope, saying from the underworld:

> The fame of her great virtue will never die.
> The immortal gods will lift a song for all mankind,
> a glorious song in praise of self-possessed Penelope.[30]

It will be a sexed voice, achieved with a struggle through the centuries and only recently imbued with meaning. A feminine song, which benefits from an autonomous subjectivity,

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[27] 'I have never found…I do not recognize…I have never trusted…I don't know…. […] I was wondering…and I wonder…who knows if someone collects….who knows if I can count on…. […] Where is he from? Where are they from? Where am I?' Malerba, pp. 7-10.
[28] 'I call it victory but who knows if it is possible to give this name to the destruction of a city and to the atrocities which took place outside its walls, atrocities which I myself have recounted as glorious events a hundred times, during the pauses in my journey homeward'. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[29] Ovid, *Heroides*, trans. by Harold Isbell, (London: Penguin, 1990), I (pp. 1-9).
[30] *Odyssey*, XXIV. 192-98.

orchestrated by many authors who – more or less consciously – finally give voice to Penelope and her fame.