

CONFERENCE:
**From the Cradle to the Grave:
Life-Course Models in Literary Genres**

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ABSTRACTS

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“*On the Road* and the Paths of the *Bildungsroman*”

The aim of my paper will be to analyze the different generical strands of the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* present in *On the Road* and how they contribute to a particular portraiture of life in an age marked by youth anxiety and discontent. Special attention will be dedicated to several aspects contributing to the consideration of this novel as a *novel on the move* towards aesthetic and cultural mutation already heralding some of the characteristic concerns of postmodernity. Under this perspective, it is my goal to focus on the foundational axes which provide the basis for Kerouac’s novel, namely those of philosophical and aesthetic nature and which, in their own terms, will shape the form of the novel and which will determinate “the image of a man in the process of becoming”.

My paper will also examine how what initially appeared as instance of internal exile brought about by disinterest and disengagement reflects a much wider and profound quest at the heart of human existence towards the *reconsideration* of the meaning of life as fundamentally conditioned by experience leading up to personal enlightenment.

It is, therefore, essential to view Kerouac’s work under the light of an idealistic / romantic perspective, one which is rooted in the American literary tradition and which re-enacts the nineteenth-century quest to transcend the physical world by expanding the very limits of human experience in the search for a distant true reality. In this respect, my paper will also focus on the subject of consciousness and how this can be linked to the present-day philosophical concept of *awareness of being* at the same time that Kerouac’s longing for mystical revelation is considered as part of aesthetical experience. I will conclude my paper by analyzing the different implications that the idea of ‘end of the trip’ has for the overall meaning of the novel.

Susanne Cuevas, University of Dresden, Germany

“All’s Well That Ends Well? Life Course Models in the Black British *Bildungsroman*”

Black British fiction published since the 1990s typically focuses on processes of identity formation. Novels like Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996), Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), Courttia Newland's *The Scholar* (1997) or Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) track their protagonists' development from childhood, adolescence or, more precisely, from a state of immaturity to maturity in a cultural environment that does not fully accept them. Such writings have been referred to as black British *Bildungsromane* by Mark Stein (1998, 2000), a term which has been taken up by Sommer (2001) and others.

However, in order to read recent black and Asian British literary productions as *Bildungsromane*, several conventions of the genre (laid down for the British *Bildungsroman* by Jerome Buckley 1974:17-18) have to be modified in order to fit the specific situation

which second generation black and Asian British protagonists growing up in Britain in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s find themselves in. While only minor adjustments need to be taken into account in terms of content criteria, generic conventions are affected more substantially – starting from the changed concept of *Bildung* to the often pessimistic ending of the novels. Looking at the protagonists' and their parents' life courses in selected novels, this paper aims to answer two questions: To what extent do these semi-autobiographical novels reflect the socio-economic reality of Blacks and Asians (e.g. single parent families, mixed-race relationships, the growing gender divide in terms of school performance and socio-economic success) and how flexible does the *Bildungsroman* genre need to be to accommodate such diversity.

D.M. de Silva, University of Salzburg, Austria

“Widmerpool and Nick Jenkins: Pattern in Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*”

Anthony Powell’s roman fleuve *A Dance to the Music of Time* offers a biography of the age conceived in terms of pattern: the meetings and partings, the prescribed evolutions of the dance. The narrator, Nick Jenkin moves obscurely through the pattern, the quiet observer of the dancers, the artist as outsider. On the other side, amid the more brilliant figures, is another outsider, the social outcast Widmerpool. I am interested in the way Powell develops the secret significance of the two characters and their patterned movement in relation to each other, not only as a subtle and surprising structural element of the novel but as an illuminating factor in the novelist’s interpretation of life itself.

Milada Franková, Masaryk University Brno, Czech Republic

“Jane Gardam’s *Bildungsroman* Variations“

Traditionally, there have been many different genres of writing lives and they have been modified and developed with the times and fashions, but have never quite disappeared from the literary scene or at least not for long. Thus we can recognise the saga in Margaret Drabble’s and A. S. Byatt’s trilogy and tetralogy, respectively, of late twentieth-century women’s lives. The new re-writings of historical lives, such as Drabble’s *The Red Queen* (2004) or Rose Tremain’s *Music and Silence* (1999) echo the memoir and partly employ the diary genre. Jane Gardam’s early novels describe young lives and may be viewed as *Bildungsromans* while her recent *Old Filth* (2004) combines memories of growing up with the reality of aging in tracing the hero’s life story virtually from the cradle to the grave.

With extended references to a variety of other life writings in contemporary British fiction, such as those suggested above, the paper will examine Gardam’s *Old Filth* as yet another variation of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Fragmented, equivocal, disturbing, it is in tune with the postmodern shift in the patterns of thought and structures, encapsulating the life of the protagonist and an era.

Ellen Grünkemeier, Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany

“Reflections on HIV/AIDS in Private and in Public: Edwin Cameron’s *Witness to AIDS* (2005)”

In his memoir *Witness to AIDS* (2005), the South African Supreme Court of Appeals judge Edwin Cameron gives a personal insight into living with HIV/AIDS. Taking on the role of a witness, as the title of the book already suggests, he offers his experience, knowledge and, in particular, his body as evidence. He describes his own story of symptoms, diagnosis, pain, medical treatments and survival. However, the text does not commit to conventions of the genre ‘autobiography’ since it cuts across the border between private and public. Not only does Edwin Cameron look inward at his own body and life but also outward: he gives testimony to what is going on around him. He analyses how his personal experiences are multiplied in epidemic proportions and how HIV/AIDS is treated in South Africa. In doing so he does not only write about himself but also relates the stories of others with whom he is linked by the somatic fact of being HIV-positive or living with AIDS. Some joint chapters are written by Edwin Cameron and Nathan Geffen of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a South African AIDS activist organisation founded in 1998 which campaigns for treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS. In analogy to his position as a judge, Edwin Cameron tries to remain honest and objective when writing his memoir and therefore provides the reader with different perspectives, narratives, arguments, facts, law and court decisions. That is why this text also reads like a political statement in which complex issues concerning the epidemiology and virology of HIV/AIDS, patent laws and intellectual property rights, the reaction of the South African government (or lack thereof) are addressed and criticised. Edwin Cameron’s pioneering decision to disclose his health status in public has not yet been followed by other public office bearers in South Africa, as he had hoped. Still, his unconventional account of HIV/AIDS is a good starting point to break the taboo and the culture of silence around the virus in South Africa.

Stephan Karschay, University of Passau, Germany

“‘(Pre-)Destined to Fail’: Atavism and Character Development in Late Victorian Fiction”

In the nineteenth century, the term *atavism* was used to describe the tendency of certain physical traits which were perceptible in distant ancestors to reappear unpredictably in the individual, albeit without featuring in that individual’s immediate parents. The nascent discourses of criminology and sexology classed atavism under the rubric of degeneration regarding criminals and sexual deviants as animalistic throw-backs to an earlier evolutionary stage. By the time of the Victorian fin de siècle, atavism and degeneration had become stock terms which were perpetually negotiated in both the specialised and popular discourses as well as in the literature of the period.

At one point in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/91), the eponymous aesthete ponders that “man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead.” (Chapter 11) This paper presents and investigates a number of literary texts (by Oscar Wilde, Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Hardy and others) which deal in one way or other with the unsettling phenomenon of atavism. It focuses on the question in how far individuals have only limited scope to exercise their own free wills, dependent as they are on their genetic make-up which has been bequeathed to them by their familial forebears. The central concern to be considered and negotiated in this paper is the question in how far some late Victorian literary protagonists

can actually determine and affect the course of their lives. Is it possible that – even though the genre of the novel is centrally concerned with character development – the phenomenon of atavism deprives several fin-de-siècle heroes and heroines of the possibility to change, develop and, indeed, ‘evolve’? May it even be that many tragic characters do not bring about their fatal undoing through any deeds of their own but because of the genetic pool they sprang from? I would like to answer these questions through both a detailed reading of individual works and recourse to non-literary texts from the professionalized fields of sexology, criminology and pathology.

Martin Löschnigg, University of Graz, Austria

“Short Story Cycles as Media of Life Writing in Contemporary Canadian Literature”

Short stories and short story cycles in particular occupy a prominent position in contemporary Canadian literature. Interestingly, many of these story cycles render lives or significant periods in the lives of the protagonists. In my paper, I shall analyse the structural (fragmentation vs. coherence) as well as the epistemological implications which result from the choice of the story cycle as a medium of life-writing. In particular, I shall concentrate on story cycles by Alice Munro (*Lives of Girls and Women*, 1971; *Who Do You Think You Are?*, 1978; *The View From Castle Rock*, 2006) and Margaret Atwood (*Moral Disorders*, 2007). Even if the individual stories in these collections are closely linked thematically as well as by their settings, and also of course by the fact that they share the same narrator/protagonist, the effect is that of a fragmentation rather than the fictional coherence of a novel. Thus, Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women* appears as a disrupted *Bildungsroman* in that it renders the growing awareness of the protagonist, Dell Jordan, not in terms of a continuous narrative, but in terms of a series of linked stories. The narrative dynamics which result from this choice of genre are clearly different from the chronological continuity which would characterise a novel written in Munro’s moderately modernist mode. Similarly, in *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro presents episodes from the life of the first-person narrator in terms of a series of passages between individual stages in life, emphasising discontinuity and transition in the life of her protagonist not least by choosing the form of the story cycle rather than the novel. Atwood’s *Moral Disorders* consists of eleven interconnected stories that span six decades in the life of her protagonist, a Canadian woman whose life is portrayed in relation to her parents, friends, siblings, an English teacher, and even a concentration-camp survivor. Emphasising that “[I]n the end, we’ll all become stories”, Atwood’s narrator points to a narrativist view of the life experience which seems to have found its congenial expression in the author’s chosen medium.

David Malcolm, University of Gdańsk, Poland

“The Short or the Long of It: How Can Short Stories Do Human Life?”

Much discussion of the short story stresses its elliptical and fragmentary manner of presenting human experience. Terry Eagleton argues that while the realist novel is above all a “cognitive form concerned to map the causal processes underlying events and resolve them into some intelligible pattern, the short story, by contrast, can yield us some single bizarre occurrence of epiphany or terror whose impact would merely be blunted by lengthy realist elaboration.” In an interview in 1976, V. S. Pritchett talked of the “glancing view” of the short story which “allows us to isolate certain things in present day life.” Indeed, the short story’s fragmentary quality is seen by Frank O’Connor as a feature that allows short fiction to give voice particularly to the isolated and marginalized.

Clearly many pieces of short fiction are fragmentary, presenting a single brief, highly significant episode in a life or lives. Classic short stories by Maupassant, Chekhov, Joyce, Mansfield, Hemingway, and Rhys all illustrate this. In more recent times, the work of Joyce Carol Oates, Raymond Carver, William Trevor, and Bernard MacLaverty, among many others, comprehends human life in a similar way. Thus, it can be argued that the short story offers a model of the human life-course which privileges the single moment, rather than the longer duration. Such single moments have echoes beyond themselves and may imply further, unnarrated actions, but the short story text itself can be seen as inherently reductive. Bernard Bergonzi, for example, has commented that the “modern short story writer is bound to see the world in a certain way” and that it will “filter down experience to the prime elements of defeat and alienation.”

This paper considers how two major short-story writers have worked within the limits of the short story vis-à-vis human existence, and yet have also pushed against those boundaries. John McGahern’s short stories “Korea” and “Oldfashioned” are discussed. The latter is an attempt to present a much broader view of protagonists and community than is usual in short fiction. Julian Maclaren-Ross’s short stories “The Hell of a Time” and “My Father Was Born in Havana” are also considered. Once again, the latter text can be seen as an attempt to recast the model of human life traditional to short fiction.

Aparajita Nanda, University of California at Berkeley, USA

“Writing the Self in ‘Heterotopic’ Spaces: Reading *Woman at Point Zero*”

Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* relates the life of an Egyptian prostitute, Firdaus, awaiting capital punishment for murdering a pimp. Interestingly, she has no qualms of conscience for her act; her stolid silence is her only answer to the world. Firdaus’s story, a bildungsroman, as it unfolds moves from a turbulent childhood to an abusive and severely exploited adulthood. It implicates in its trajectory not only parents and relatives but also the institutions of legal justice and societal norms. Narration of this tragic story, however, is given over to a concerned psychologist who visits Firdaus in prison and to whom Firdaus ultimately opens up.

My paper seeks to read Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* as a life-course model, autobiographical in intent that by juxtaposition of the two voices, the protagonist’s and the author’s, as they interrelate and interpret each other create meaning in and through shifting positionalities. Firdaus becomes the author’s writing self that operates within and along spatial modalities. In the act of portraying “I” (the woman at point zero, at the spiritual nadir of life) one encounters the other selves that challenge the traditional structures of patriarchy and gendered space. The author is conceived as “heterotopia” that not only inhabits this spatio-temporal zone but in its movements ruptures any gendered form of absolute and restrictive notions of space. Saadawi’s narrative moves from the “iron-barred windows and [...] overall harshness of surroundings” of the “place” of the prison cell, transforming it into an operational “space” in which the subject is produced from and within a multiplicity of liaisons that demand a traversal along and through, what Gérard Genette calls an “enlargement by contiguity [where] the vertical axis of the metaphoric relationship” is deepened by a “horizontal axis established by the metonymic trajectory.” In the simultaneous intermeshing of these two axes lie the constituted nature of subjectivity and its role in the production of meaning. The layout of the author’s writing self becomes a mental landscape of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, wherein Saadawi belongs and becomes Firdaus emanating from and receding into a shared “space” searching for common ground in a world of continuing oppression and rejection.

Julia Novak, University of Vienna, Austria

“Clara Schumann – A Life in Letters and Notes”

Clara Wieck Schumann was one of the leading concert pianists of the nineteenth century. Born in 1819 in Leipzig, she received her musical training from her father, Friedrich Wieck. At an early age she began her successful concert tours through Europe, and soon she equaled the likes of Liszt and Chopin in terms of masterly performance and public attention. When she married Robert Schumann in 1840, he was still an obscure composer while Clara was already a world-famous virtuosa. Unfortunately, she had no means of recording her playing in those days, and since she was not equally prolific as a composer, her name and achievements have become widely unknown today. Thus, Clara Wieck Schumann has been granted a five-page entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* while the entry on Robert Schumann stretches over 57 pages in the same work. During the last few decades, however, a scholarly interest in Clara Wieck Schumann has awoken, which has resulted in a number of publications on her life and work. Among them there are some novels, or 'literary biographies', each of which draws a very personalised, subjective portrait of the pianist. One of the most recent literary accounts of Clara Schumann's life is *Clara*, the latest novel by award-winning Scottish author Janice Galloway. In writing *Clara*, Galloway has of course drawn heavily on historical source texts such as letters or diary entries, as well as on biographies of Clara Schumann and on fictional texts, which is why her novel can be called a 'rewriting' of Clara's life. This paper is concerned with the complex workings of intertextuality in Galloway's novel as well as with the way the medium of music has had a bearing on the rewriting of her heroine's life – as music is integrated in the novel in various ways. Aspects such as narrative perspective and the inclusion of specific biographical material shall be discussed in contrast to other literary biographies of the artist.

Beata Piątek, The Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

“Never Let Me Go – a Dystopia or a Morality Tale?”

According to Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* was not meant to be a science-fiction novel; the fact that his narrator and protagonists are clones bred to be used as donors was to be merely a pretext for the discussion of the universal themes of the human being facing old age and mortality. But the readers are struck by the austerity of the novel; the setting, the plot, the characters are strikingly bland and incomplete. Ishiguro's fictional world provides the reader with a “shock of dysrecognition”, to use Philip K. Dick's phrase, which he coined to define science fiction. The present paper will examine the technical aspects of the novel which Ishiguro employed to produce a “dystopia with a difference”. I will be interested in the ways the author uses ellipsis, understatement and euphemism in order to construct an alienating and threatening reality even though he does not portray any mechanisms of oppression or coercion. Instead he places the distorted life cycle at the centre of his narrative and leaves the details of coercion to the readers' imagination. What he achieves in the end is a deeply moral tale, a novel that defies the popular critical lamentations of amorality of contemporary fiction.

Glyn Pursglove, University of Swansea, Great Britain

“The Life of the Artist, As Conceived By Giorgio Vasari”

It has been said that Giorgio Vasari “invented Renaissance Art” (Patricia Lee Rubin). Certainly *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, Pittori et Scultori Italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (1550, revised 1568) created a narrative of “the life cycle of the arts” (to quote Rubin again) with which all later accounts have had to negotiate. Vasari's vision of that life cycle is, more than once, couched in terms of the individual human life cycle. His account of the arts in Italy is divided into three phases. Introducing the second of these, he writes of how “having taken these three arts from the nurse, and having passed the age of childhood, there follows the second period...”. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the pattern of the individual artist's life should also be of major interest to Vasari. He displays a particular interest in the childhood of artists, in how their genius is first exhibited and recognised; he is fascinated by the element of self-fashioning involved in the life of the artist; how natural parents have often to be fought against and left behind if the artist is to be true to the gifts of Nature. In some cases, circumstances rob the child of his natural parents and it is in the life of art that he establishes a new name and lineage. So, for example, young Piero Buonnaccorsi was born to parents living in great poverty “and while quite little he was abandoned by his parents” (Vasari tells us that at one point he was suckled by a goat) “having art as his sole legitimate mother whom he always honoured”. Young Piero eventually worked with a “mediocre” (the word is Vasari's) Florentine painter called Vaga, who introduced him to other artists “and in this way the boy became known thenceforward as Perino del Vaga”. Given the fluidity of the concept of biography during the Renaissance, Vasari's concept of the ‘ideal’ artistic life needs to be measured against the literary patterns he drew on (such as those provided by Pliny's chapters on artists in *The Natural History*, Villani's *De origine civitatis Florentiae*, Plutarch's *Lives* and Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*, as well as the writings of Boccaccio) as much as against the ‘objective’ facts regarding the lives of his subjects. Just as he creates a ‘myth’ of the evolution of Italian greatness in the arts, so Vasari creates a literary ‘myth’ of the life cycle of the ideal artist. This paper seeks to delineate that second ‘myth’.

Klaus Richter, University of Salzburg, Austria

“Biology of Aging – Just a Few Facts”

The development of a fertilized egg to a full grown organism is regulated by a precisely tuned genetic program. The aging of an organism although quite complex is by no means regulated by a comparable program. That aging is indeed a very complex process is underscored by the fact that there are presently more than 300 theories on aging. Among these the most prominent is the free radical theory of aging initially proposed by Harman in 1956:

During normal respiration oxygen free radicals are formed which damage important molecules of the cell like DNA, lipids and proteins. This way oxidative stress is brought about causing aging and eventually death.

A second very important theory was proposed by Hayflick called the theory of replicative senescence: All genes are located on structures called chromosomes whose ends are sealed by so called telomeres. Every time a cell divides a tiny bit of a telomere is lost and after a number of divisions the telomeres are too short making further cell-divisions impossible.

A completely different theory was termed the inflamm-aging theory by Franceschi: It is based on the fact that most of the important age-associated diseases have an inflammatory background in common. Prominent among these are atherosclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, arthrosis, arthritis and cardiovascular diseases. Inflammatory reactions are controlled by

specific proteins called cytokines (pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines) and it was observed that the levels of anti-inflammatory cytokines are increased in centenarians compared to young people.

Finally it has to be mentioned that these theories are frequently connected with each other: Inflammatory processes are considerably influenced by oxidative stress. And last but not least, aging also depends on the genetic background.

Joanna Rostek, University of Passau, Germany

**“Life Course as a Ship’s Course:
Wavering Biographies in Contemporary Sea Voyage Narratives”**

According to the German philosopher and founding father of metaphorology, Hans Blumenberg, the sea voyage and the shipwreck constitute “absolute metaphors” which allow mankind to come to terms with an omnipresent and disturbingly incomprehensible reality (cf. *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer*, 1979). Concurrently, however, literary descriptions of sea voyages not only serve to reveal deeper truths about human existence in general, but they also focus on individual characters undergoing a process of maturation during their journey. The sea passage thus turns into an exceptional stage in human life; a stage marked by the character’s temporal dissociation from ‘normal’ life which he or she can only resume as an altered person at the end of the journey. As ancient canonical texts such as Homer’s *Odyssey* or the Anglo-Saxon poem “The Seafarer” exemplify, a topographic journey across the high seas is always a psychological life-journey, too.

This universal aspect of the sea voyage metaphor can certainly serve to explain the noticeable popularity of sea-voyage narratives in contemporary British fiction. But are novels such as William Golding’s *Rites of Passage* (1980), Candia McWilliams’s *Debatable Land* (1994), or Yann Martel’s *The Life of Pi* (2002) only replicas of an age-old blueprint? Or do they add a new – possibly ‘postmodern’ – quality to Blaise Pascal’s famous dictum “Vous êtes embarqué”? It is this position – one between tradition and innovation – of the contemporary sea-voyage narrative and its consequences for the conceptions of the human life course which I would intend to analyse in my proposed paper. My analysis would proceed from the assumption that contemporary sea-voyage narratives rework the maritime imagery in order to ponder on the (ir)relevance and (un)stability of individual biographies. They use the age-old metaphor of life as a sea passage as a frame, while at the same time undermining the very idea that a life can be grasped, structured, ordered, and described at all. Thus, the human life course becomes as unpredictable and unstable as a ship’s course on rough seas.

Christopher Smith, Norwich, Great Britain

“Tess of the D’Urbervilles: A Woman’s Pure Tragedy in a World of Men”

“A blighted one” is the answer Abraham receives when he enquires of his sister what manner of a planet they are destined to live upon. Even at this first stage on her path of misfortunes, Tess has no illusions; she is always uneasy when she dreams, suspecting that happiness is not for her. For hers is a life condemned before she is born. To her short-lived son she gives the name of Sorrow; a local clergyman – the first of a succession of clergymen who might better have held their peace – tells her the history of her family and thus maps out a course backward and forward, that leads from bad to worse. In the context of literary tradition that had set much store by the benefits of discovering one’s true self, Tess no more finds strength in such investigations than in the surging natural life of her Wessex or her own physical abundance. The narrative of her endeavours to rise above her situation, with partial successes

being followed by new departures whose promise only disappoints is the reverse of so many stories (and biographies) that optimistically trace the paths of progress from penury to prosperity. Clare, the focus of attention for a good part of the novel, more conventionally embarks on a career, which provides a contrasting movement. Thomas Hardy's own life, which is woven into *Tess* by countless details, might well be seen as a record of personal attainment, but he never shook off deep-seated pessimism. The rural novel is often a comfortable genre, but *Tess* disturbs, despite its lovingly depicted setting, and Tess's fall from grace, which her companions and even her mother urge her not to see as more than a passing misfortune, becomes the defining fact of her life. What gives *Tess* much of its strength is the artfully maintained tension between the rival claims of the ancient form of tragedy and of the more modern novel of personal development.

Gerd Stratmann, University of Dresden, Germany

“Ghostly Mothers, Haunted Daughters – Gothic Life-Cycle Variations in Contemporary British Fiction”

One obvious gambit to integrate life-cycle concepts into the structure of a novel is to develop a suggestive generational constellation of characters – a mother-and-daughter constellation, for instance, which could naturally demonstrate both the continuity and the change, both the blossoming and the decay, both the identifications and the separations which are defining elements of a life cycle. Such structural strategy has proved, in the course of several centuries of novel-writing, to be a most meaningful and frequently most sentimental device. This also implies that postmodern fiction has done everything possible to subvert, to deconstruct and ironically undermine the expectations a reader would associate with the ‘romantic’ mother-and-daughter blueprint. Authors like Hilary Mantel and Michèle Roberts have, by parodistic, psychiatric or ‘neo-gothic’ approaches, highlighted the more nightmarish aspects of the cycle – obsessive mothers who refuse to be ‘replaced’, haunted daughters remaining under the evil spell of their maternal *doppelgänger*, fatal repetition instead of organic cyclical growth. As my paper is going to illustrate, one of the ironies of these novels lies in the fact that their authors, while ostensibly denigrating or discarding the life-cycle model, still heavily rely on its structural effects.

Gulshan Taneja, University of Delhi

“Wilde’s Less Greek: Ellmann’s Tragedy”

There is a sense in which literary genres have evolved in direct imitation of recognizable facets of human life and living: the endless grief and gentle sorrow, the tragic ironies and major disasters, great triumphs and little joys. Such moments in human existence have led to the perfection of corresponding genres, from lyric to tragedy, or from dramatic monologues to Homeric/Milonic epics. The formlessness of the Theatre of the Absurd echoed the then contemporary view of life and became one of the more recent examples of life demanding suitable art forms to express itself. Aristotle, we might recall, told us that literature is an imitation of the contours of life.

Ironically, narration of life, imagined or real-in creativity or in (auto-)biographical reconstruction - often goes back to time-honoured genres of literature and borrows from them the principles of design and form to impose meaningful patterns upon real or imagined specific lives.

Many admirers of Richard Ellmann have noted that the celebrated biographer of Oscar Wilde did take liberties, however miniscule, in his analysis of Wilde's life. His tone and focus, both for emphasis and otherwise, have been, ever so gently, faulted. I think Ellmann's objective was as much to be scholarly correct as to write a biography that would leave an impact upon the readers, the kind of impact that we normally associate with finer examples of creative writing. So we go to *Oscar Wilde* not merely for facts and interpretation of those facts, but to be involved in the life of a hero, in the sense in which Carlyle used the word. The book's architectonic aesthetics offer a clue to Ellman's intention as well as skill.

I would like to suggest that Ellmann knowingly, deliberately, and painstakingly plotted his book to mimic the contours of a tragedy. That Wilde's life would easily lend itself to such a treatment is one thing; that Ellmann so planned the book and made choices and took liberties to achieve the intended effect, is another. The economy of form and design of the book reflects the time-honoured principles of the genre in question. Ellmann focuses on such elements as settings, moments of conflicts, motivations, and other 'characters'. The authorial tone often takes on the role of a chorus that guides the reader to a predetermined authorial goal. It is a readerly text. The end result is a work of scholarship as well as a work of art in the tradition of Attic tragedy. An examination of the book's structure provides ample evidence for such a treatment of the book, for example, the five-part division with sub-headings such as "Exaltations," "Disgrace," "Exile", etc. The chapters end for dramatic effect, incidents are grouped together for similar reasons, and often a single incident is allowed to overshadow an entire section with such an end in view: "Ross waited in the corridor of the Bankruptcy Court [. . .] so that when Wilde went by, handcuffed and with bowed head, he could 'gravely raise his hat to me'" [Ellmann, *Wilde*, Penguin, (1987) 1988, p. 461]. Tragic irony at its most effective is at work when Ellmann describes after Wilde's release from prison, his encounters in Paris with Ian Mitchell, the scientist, Nellie Melba, the opera singer, Carson, Whistler and many others.

That Wilde's life offered itself as material for Tragedy, Ellmann never doubted for a moment. Wilde's "sense of doom had been present since his childhood. He believed in his unlucky stars as much as his lucky one. [. . .] Wilde needed less Greek than he had to know that overreaching would attract nemesis." [Ellmann, p. 441]

It is my contention that Ellmann boldly and deliberately chose a literary generic model, and imparted a non-fictional life the intensity and creative energy of a literary construct without faulting the authenticity of a biographical subject, and, in the process, created an innovative life course model.

Petya Tsoneva Ivanova, University of Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria

"The Discourse of Homelessness in *Courrier sud*"

Antoine de Saint Exupéry writes *Courrier sud*, his first and most introspective novel, while at Cap Juby, exposed to the magnetic radiation of the desert that extracts memories and dreams from the intimate space of the solitary writer, whence the fluidity of the narrative which produces the metamorphic fabric of a visionary text, constantly mediating between memory, dream and reality.

The image of home is a powerful refractor of the life patterns presented in the novel. It splits in the twinned perspectives of the two protagonists and unfolds in two possible configurations of human existence - sedentary travelling (Geneviève) and nomadic travelling (Bernis). The former represents dwelling (being) as a form of travelling, the latter exemplifies travelling as 'becoming'. Each one of the protagonists is a prisoner to his/her self and wishes for otherness – the trace of the 'other' summons Geneviève to the outside and for a moment she is poised to become a traveller. However, she can only exist in a context of permanence and stability and

cannot take the step outside. On the contrary, Bernis's domestic space is the outside. He 'dwells' in the turbulent space of movement that perpetuates the traveller's élan towards infinity. He wishes for fixity in the fluidity of the traveller's space yet the narrowness of immobility, when reinscribed in the dynamics of travel, becomes incarcerating and oppressive. Both Geneviève and Bernis experience homelessness as a wish to take flight in the unknown. Saint Exupéry represents human self as crucified between the inside and the outside, travel and non-travel. Both protagonists destroy that part of their selves which weaves the inner axis of their identity – the image of the other. Both regain their autonomy and take the decisive step back into the inside and forward into the unknown.

The plot in *Courrier sud* is 'thin' and brings the two protagonists to the forefront. Yet it thickens with tragedy and heroic death, coincidences and pathos that overshadow life's ordinary experiences. What 'cracks' a way out of the idealized schematic representation of reality is the flexible narrative perspective.

The discourse constantly moves from first-person narration to third-person narration through free indirect discourse which combines the voice of the omniscient narrator with the characters' own voices. Thus narration acquires a particular emotional rhythm of departure and arrival, of extreme detachment that creates the effect of the 'observing eye' while the empathic insight of the 'I' internalizes the narrative perspective to the point of dispersion into the characters' own voices and thoughts. The mixture of inner and outer life, of close and distant perspectives, of invisibility and omnipresence of the narrator produces numerous thresholds of obscurity the crossing of which is problematic and opens up cracks and fissures in the narrative world.

Courrier sud projects a bipolar universe where the gravitational fields of self and other, feminine and masculine, past and present, settling and wandering counteract within the distance of a touch yet this approximation does not bring ultimate reconciliation. On the contrary, it steps up the tension between them and prolongs the moment of their pull back and expansion in opposite directions.

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“Novels of Ageing: Representations of Male and Female (Anti-)Ageing in British Women's Fiction from 1975 until the Present”

Reflecting its importance in today's society, “aging” has become a prime topic in the works of imagination, especially in the works of female fiction writers such as Anita Brookner, Penelope Lively, Iris Murdoch, Nina Bawden, Mary Wesley or Margaret Forster. They lay the focus on withering female and male characters and respectively on age-related phenomena, as for example, the loss of youth, vitality or the recurring and intense process of re-considering one's past and re-arranging one's future. By examining these phenomena and the varying narrative strategies related with them (i.e. how different narrative strategies help to construct the image of aging), this paper aims at portraying female and male aging and at showing how writers crack the frames of stereotyping the old and make the broad audience more sensitive to that marginalized group. In order to draw a present-day portrait of aging women and men, a selection of 30 novels by British female fiction writers will be taken into consideration.

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“Giving Birth. Motherhood – a Controversial Concept in Recent British Fiction”

While up to the end of the 19th century motherhood was seen by Church and society as the unavoidable, natural task of the female sex, the New Women started to question whether this was the only option for females to lead a meaningful life, demanding also professional and political possibilities. Additionally, the development and spreading of birth control methods in the early 20th century put women in the position to control the number of their children. Ever since then, motherhood, now an optional choice has become hotly debated, both in public discourse and private lives. No wonder, it has also become a prominent topic in recent British fiction. Some authors accentuate the dangers involved: Doris Lessing in “To Room Nineteen” and *The Fifth Child* highlights the restrictions motherhood could mean to women’s personal development, while working-class authors like Livi Michael (*All the Dark Air*) and Agnes Owens (*A Working Mother*) drastically describes the drudgery of child-bearing and –rearing in a deprived environment. Other authors like Anne Enright (*Making Babies*) and Rachel Cusk (*A Life’s Work*), by contrast, praise the pleasures of late and unexpected motherhood for intellectual women. Even some male authors like Bernard McLaverty (*Gracenotes*) and Toby Litt (*Ghost Story*) have probed the contradictory emotions triggered by pregnancy, pleasure and depression, with astonishing empathy. In my paper I will explore the various concepts at conflict in these texts as reflections of the positions held in society at large and discuss the various narrative means by which they are represented.