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Aspects of the female figure from the Victorian Age to Postcolonial literature

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Alessandro Scarsella

Assistant supervisor
Ch. Prof. Marco Fazzini

Graduand
Linda Carraro
Matriculation Number 886942

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To my mother,

and to all the brave women

I have met and I will meet

Contents

Introduction

The representation of the female figure in literature has always aroused the great interest of readers, scholars and critics. In addition to female writers, who are a particularly interesting slice of the literature for those studying the history of literature, there are a whole series of heroines who have marked eras and given a particular cut to the novels in which they are the protagonists or simply belong. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse different novels, belonging to different historical periods, in order to highlight the traits that the female figure assumes within them. The four novels chosen are "Adam Bede" by G. Eliot, "Dubliners" by "J. Joyce", "1984" by G. Orwell and "Purple Hibiscus" by C. N. Adichie. The reason for choosing these novels is first of all a choice of "pleasure": they are in fact books that I have had the opportunity and pleasure of reading during my career of studies and which have remained particularly impressed by the way in which the author represents the figure of the woman. Beyond the pleasure in reading these novels, the desire to deepen the themes and stylistic choices took over, always taking into account the historical context which obviously influences the author's choices. The dissertation is therefore subdivided into four chapters each consisting of three paragraphs, where the first paragraph explains the historical context in which the novel is set and the influences it has had on the plots, the second one explains the characteristics of the female figure chosen for each novel and in the third one the salient features and the parts of the novel in which these characteristics emerge. This thesis does not claim to be a compendium on the characteristics of the female figure, a topic that has already been analysed in depth by other scholars of comparative literature, but to provide a starting point in analysing four pivotal novels from Victorian to postcolonial literature and to offer food for thought that can be developed in future research. In order to explain my choice, I would like to take up the words of the scholar Katrak (2006: 16), who states that:

There are several reasons why the arena of female sexuality is often mystified in third world societies. Sexuality is not named as such although many concerns clearly involve matters of sexual control over female bodies and fertility. Female sexuality is often represented in elevated terms in terms of glorification of motherhood, or it is demoted to objectifying the female body.

Since this dissertation also deals with female sexuality and how it is considered according to the point of view of the historical period in which the novel is set, it is necessary to analyse also this aspect. The four women analysed in this dissertation, as we will see, have many points in common but differ in the way they deal with the obstacles that life throws at them. This is important because some will succumb to the morality of the time, while others will challenge the rules in the name of their values and the search for freedom and independence. Since its inception, literature has always associated heroic deeds with male characters. From a certain point on, when women writers also began to publish their works, the female characters became deserving of such feats. This dissertation wants to demonstrate that not only female writers have given prominence to the female figure, but that this has also been brought to the fore by male writers, so the "heroes without fear" is no longer just the man who appears for example in the novels of W. Scott, but also an ordinary woman, like i.e. Hetty Sorrel described by G. Eliot. All the four figures analysed in the four novels find themselves facing life's challenges and difficulties with enormous courage and strength, thus not limiting themselves to accepting what morality and society would have decided for them, but on the contrary, challenging a world in which they would be been destined to succumb. This is the case, for example, of Julia, the protagonist of the novel "1984" by G. Orwell, who first secretly and then more and more openly becomes the bearer of a strong criticism against the regime, aware of the consequences that this choice of hers would have brought. As will be seen in the course of this research dissertation, I have not limited myself to describing these heroines as cornerstones of

justice and moderation, but I have also highlighted the aspects that contrast with the morality of the time. This is the case, for example, of Kambili Achicke, the protagonist of C. N. Adichie's novel, who despite being wealthy in a rather modern era presents almost the same challenges that Hetty Sorrel had to face centuries earlier. This does not mean that the two women face problems in the same way but, as we will see, it will be society that will lead them to make important choices in order to at least survive. Another aspect that will be extensively analysed in this work is the relationship between these women and their male co-protagonists. As it will be demonstrated, for some they will be the cause of situations that will put them in difficulty, for others they will become allies who may not prove to be allies in the end, and for still others a sort of impetus for change. Change is precisely the common thread that will bind the four heroines and that will unite them in the search for their identity and their place in the world.

I.   Female figures and society in the novel "Adam Bede" by G. Eliot

I.1.   Victorian Novel: Features and Technical Devices

> *The stone*
> *by which he was seated, bore, in large characters, an intimation that*
> *it was just seventy miles from that spot to London. The name*
> *awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind. London! –*
> *That great*
> *place! – nobody – not even Mr. Bumble could ever find him there!*
> *He had often heard the old men in the workhouse, too, say that there*
> *were ways of living in that vast city, which those who had been bred*
> *up in country parts had no idea of. It was the very place for a*
> *homeless boy, who must die in the streets unless someone helped*
> *him.*
> *Oliver Twist*, chapter 8

This passage has been chosen as epigraph because it reflects so many typical nineteenth-century attitudes toward city and life. For as long as there has been a London, perhaps for as long as there has been any city anywhere, city life has exerted an inexorable, irresistible attraction upon the surrounding countryside, which has become of great importance in the realistic novels of the Victorian Age. One of the most succinct yet poignant statements of realism was made by the major Victorian novelist George Eliot (1819–1880), the latter being the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans. As Levine (2001: 2) states, "although from her first stories forward, she wrote about the church and clergy with a compassionate knowingness, she built a powerful case against Christianity; and while she constantly celebrated the value of childhood experience, traditional community, and traditional family structures, she almost bitterly portrayed the failures of community and family". Eliot was involved in the philosophical and scientific debates of the period. In her work there was a beginning, a middle and an end, a small group of characters taken from different social levels and all stories ended with a marriage or a death so the reader knew the story was complete. She was an innovator because her novels were based on

characters and her language was based on two levels, colloquial and accepted. To break the stereotypical conventions of the time, George Eliot peeped in the psychological aspects of characters and wrote about real-life matters. Her works are appreciated for intense descriptions and minute details of ordinary lives. She also depicted the particularities of the rural setting in her works. Moreover, her status as a translator gave Eliot a chance to unveil the religious, social, and philosophical beliefs of the German tradition to the English readers. This German influence can be vividly seen in the art of Eliot. Although she was not an overwhelmingly religious figure, she maintained a belief that religion provides a system of morality and ethics for society. When she began to question religious ideas, her father refused to stay with her. Therefore, Eliot moved to live with her brother. However, within some time, she reconciled with her father. Until his death in 1849, she lived respectfully and silently with him. She was also infamous for various emotional attachments during her literary career. For example, she lived with Chapman for some time, though he was married. She had also developed intimacy with Herbert Spencer who was the sub-editor of The Economist. Later on, Evans met Lewes in 1851. Although Lewes was married to Agnes Jervis, Jervis had an adulterous affair with Leigh Hunt. Therefore, Lewes and Evans decided to live together as husband and wife in 1854. They visited Germany for a research purpose and lived there for some time. In 1859, Evans published her first-ever novel "Adam Bede". The novel is a piece of realism with an aesthetic sense taken from Dutch visual representations. It blends human sympathy with moral integrity. The novel also contains Evans' biographical experiences, as she acquired the dialect of Adam from the conversation of her uncles with Evans' father. The novel brought Evans also instant success and fame. However, the audience was curious about the authorship behind the remarkable literary piece. Even fake authorship was also claimed by Joseph Liggins. Due to the public questioning, Marian Evans was forced to reveal her identity behind the pen name. This revelation

shocked the public due to her immoral relationship with Lewes. However, it did not affect her career. Finally, the couple was accepted in 1877 when they both met Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, who was a great admirer of Eliot's writing. Critic Levine writes (2001: 3) that "the scandals and personal crises were transformed in the novels in ways that have left their mark on the history of English fiction.". Yet, if Eliot's imaginary characters and situations were created in order to illustrate general problems, that is, to give rise to such passages of generalization as the ones at the head of this essay, the triumph of Eliot's realism consists of the balance it achieves between the generalizing teachable moments and the exquisitely fine-grained depiction of characters and situations in all their distinctiveness. For all that they may be taken as cases, the happenings and people, even the minor people, never devolve into stick figures or contrived episodes delivering portable lessons with crude efficiency. Eliot's fiction could not differ more profoundly from the pedantic tales of Hannah More or the fictional Illustrations of Political Economy by Harriet Martineau. Part of the difference resides in the fact that Eliot nearly always enjoins mercy and compassion, showing fallible characters committing errors but reminding us that our own fallibility makes it incumbent on us to sympathize, not condemn. Part of the difference resides simply in the depth of Eliot's investment in her characters and situations, the great lengths she goes to in delineating and particularizing them. Part resides in the sinuous complexity of her prose style, which exhibits both the willingness and the capacity to make fine distinctions and to weigh the components of each statement with scrupulous care, in frequently elaborate complex sentence structures. Only such a style seems capable of grasping "the mysterious complexity of our life" and of fostering those "divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy." It is not too much to say that, in Eliot, style is ethics. In the same way, Carroll argues (1971: 3) that "the reading-public followed the fortunes of George Eliot's characters as if they were real people, measuring their

consistency against standards which were in the last resort religious", where the target of Eliot's criticism were the heroines of such novels who epitomised virtue, beauty and perfection. These protagonists were occupied with trivial concerns like dance balls, riding expeditions or flower-shows. The plots of such novels involved these beautiful and virtuous heroines making their way up on the social ladder through marriage. They had ample of suitors who attempted to court them unsuccessfully until the perfect heroines settled for the perfect men. I her essay "Silly Novels by silly novelists", Eliot affirms that "the heroine is not a heiress – that rank and wealth are the only things in which she is deficient; but she infallibly gets into high society, she has the triumph of refusing many matches and securing the best, and she wears some family jewels or other as a sort of crown of righteousness at the end". The social and political life of provincial England found place in the works of George Eliot. She began with "Adam Bede" and her very first novel contained an ordinary carpenter as the eponymous hero. This was a classic example of an ordinary character in a realist novel. A realist should not attempt to present characters as flawless and should not try to "straighten their noses", "brighten their wit" or rectify their dispositions". She believed that humans in real are imperfect and literature should depict them as such. The tendency in Eliot's novels to reflect the society and political state of the Victorian period make her a true realist. Eliot advocated serious writing as opposed to unreal, romanticised narratives. It is significant to remember that George Eliot was not proposing a complete objectivity in representing the world because this was an unattainable feat. In fact, she herself admitted that such an attempt would be too ambitious and was beyond the scope of literature, or any art. She knew that the attempts of literature to hold a mirror to society were bound to be defective. She acknowledged that in such an attempt, "the outlines will sometimes be disturbed". Reality when reproduced in novels will be faint and not as clear as the real world. But she emphasized that it is nonetheless the responsibility of a novelist to keep the plot,

characters and themes as close to the real world as possible. One of the chief differences between the good characters and the evil characters is their commitment to working hard. Most of the characters in Adam Bede are hard-working peasants who spend their days labouring on farms, in mills, or in shops. Those characters are generally characterized by gentle intelligence and simple habits. They do their best not to harm others, and they produce goods others can use and value. As Auster (1970 :107) points out, "physical setting in Adam Bede is used in several other ways than that suggested by the emblematic general sketch at the opening of the second chapter. Most often, however, as before, the descriptions of environment or allusions to it tend to perform the at least triple function of establishing setting and atmosphere, building up a sense of the distinctness of the locale, and advancing the action". By contrast, those few malingerers in the novel are generally evil as well as lazy. The strongest example of laziness is Captain Donnithorne, who often complains that he has nothing to do, and whose boredom may well have contributed significantly to Hetty's downfall. If Captain Donnithorne had been busy sowing fields, he might not have engaged in his illicit and unwise affair. Those who work hard take pride in their work, and they do not harm others because they are careful and meticulous and do not have time for idle self-indulgence.

I.2. Realism and analysis of the character of Hetty Sorrel

"O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce
And evil turn to good…"
- *Paradise Lost, XII, 469-471*

George Eliot's first experience in writing a novel reflects the inclusiveness of her mind, her attempt to make her ideas "thoroughly incarnate," to the point that we may wish to

argue that the creative process is hindered by the novelist's intellectual approach. In this novel there is not a balance between the humanistic ethic which is expressed through Feuerbach's religion of the heart, and Utilitarianism, which is given back through Adam's moral earnestness and didacticism. Hetty's character can be defined as egoistic and morally weak. She has a heart "as hard as a pebble'' (Eliot: 133), and she is not interested in people around her unless there is something to gain. ''Hetty's hardness is that of childish or at best adolescent egocentricity: all people and events have value or significance only as they imping upon the narrow circle of her own life; failing that, they are of no importance.'' (Creeger: 228). She does not care for the ordinary people around her, and she is always on ''holiday [and] in dreams of pleasure.'' (Eliot: 319). It is in this scenario that Hetty's tragedy becomes the medium by which Adam and Arthur grow through suffering. In the process of growth through suffering, the realistic characterization given by the author plays an important role. Realism as an aim of the novel results from her religious inquiries, and first became Eliot's aim when she gave up religious dogmas and embraced Feuerbach's religion of humanity. Realism is also part of the narrative technique and serves as a dramatic means of arriving at the psychological truth of the character. Particularly, the character of Hetty Sorrel is one of the most controversial one in the literature of late XIX century. The figure of a non-married woman having a child out of marriage might be considered as scandalous for that historical period, becoming the symbol of a revolutionary idea of the female role in the society. As a critic like Knoepfelmacher (1968: 117) affirms, "it is in her characterization [...] that George Eliot seriously infringes on the artistic 'quality of truthfulness' that she maintains to superbly through most of the novel". It is in this context that the myth of the chaste and unreachable woman painted by literary movements like the Italian *"Dolce Stilnovo"* is crushed anticipating the emancipated female role that will be described by the literature starting from end of XIX century as it is in novels such as *"Little Women"* by L.M. Alcott

in the figure of jo March or *"Portrait of a Lady"* in the figure of Isabel Archer. Other Eliot's contemporary writers wrote about this topic, it is the case i.e. of the novel *"The Scarlett Letter"*[1] by N. Hawthorne, but the representation given by Eliot is supposed to be innovative and realistic, depicted through the eyes and sensibility of the eyes of a female writer. "Hetty represents the opposite moral pole, she is the natural, instinctive self-seeking its own pleasure, the quintessence of the golden world of pastoral, nature in all its 'self-engrossed loveliness'" (Carroll, 1992: 76), in a pastoral context where the daily life is based on hard work and devotion to values like simplicity and honesty towards any peers. In order to analyse the character of Hetty, it is important to focus on three main points. Firstly, the context of the plot has to be analysed to set the character in the right historical frame. The novel is set in a pastoral background, where "all the characters are so true, and so natural, and so racy that we love to hear them talk for the sake of talking "(Carroll, 80). This is the so called *"Realism"* which affects the novel, where the characters are painted while doing their normal country activities, like working in the dairy or spinning, as if it was one of the Dutch paintings that impressed so much the author during her trip to Germany with G. Lewis. As Auster (1970: 103) affirms, Eliot "uses these descriptions to provide a rich and credible setting for the narrative and to bring out the distinctiveness, the individual character of the setting. It is felt to be not only an authentic place in which people live, but a particular place to which the characters are bound by ties almost of instinct, of family tradition, community coherence, memory, work, residence, and affection. Finally, George Eliot uses landscape to define, reinforce, and foreshadow the events of the plot and the moral situation", and in a similar way the critic affirms that "two other elements contributing to the impression of realism, which George Eliot clearly wishes to maintain, may be mentioned here: the full, fairly exact,

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[1] Ed. 2015, Penguin Classics

and persistent location in time and the precise location in space". Eliot's Realism is also described by Byatt and Warren (1990: 368) as "the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite substantial reality. The thorough acceptance of this doctrine would remould our life, and he who teaches its application to any one department of human activity with such power as Mr. Ruskin's, is a prophet for his generation". Taking inspiration from these scenes of life, Eliot gives the reader back "a world in which time is regulated by the natural cycles of the day and the seasons (McDonagh in Levine: 43), where naturalistic details and long descriptions let the reader enter the life of every single character. In Adam Bede the novelist tries to combine realism, in its approach to the psychological truth of character, with religious determinism, which corresponds to the division within the novel between good, idealized characters, such as Adam and Dinah (when their virtues come out to be flaws in their psychological growth, but whose moral earnestness serves as an example for the weak characters), and the weak characters, such as Arthur and Hetty (whose sin can be redeemed through a religious conversion). As Creeger (1970: 87) states, "The ways in which George Eliot goes about defining the symbolic relationship are occasionally clumsy, particularly for modern literary sensibilities with their strict demand that an author never intrudes into his work". It is the case i.e. of the relationship between Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris, a contrast of personalities that connects the two characters along the entire novel, even more than the relationship between Hetty and Adam. Through the behaviours of Hetty and Dinah, the reader can build their personalities and assemble the pieces to give them their own characterization, as if they came out of the book and began to really live. As Byatt (1991: 76) alleges in his critical essay, "human thought, as well as human passions as her proper subjects – ideas, such as thoughts on 'progress', on the nature of 'culture', on the growth and decay of society and societies, are as much actors

in her work as the men and women who contemplate the ideas, partially understand them, or unknowingly exhibit them.", as if the core of the novel were the aim of representing the frame in which the episode of the infanticide is like a red spot in a context of white souls. As Greiner affirms (Anderson & Shaw, 2016 :106), particularly "infanticide in Adam Bede thematizes the relation between (female) artist and her literary offspring, along with its (mostly male) lineage". Secondly, it is important to analyse the gender question. Hetty is a young girl, she is under the legal protection of the Poysers who treat like a daughter. Anyway, as Gates (1998: 24) states in her treatise:

> As descriptions of Hetty indicate, and as the reference to "tall red sorrel" implies, Hetty is the landscape (in the same way that Adam is the workshop), in all its swellings and beauty, and in its receptivity to whatever generic interpretation any "reader" (or narrator) may place upon it. Hetty thus becomes the beautiful object of a romance whose shaping subject is Arthur Donnithorne. He endows her face and body with meaning and identity, making her a Psyche to his Eros, an Arethusa to his Alpheus.

It seems clear that Hetty becomes the symbol of seduction, anticipating the vision of the female figure who will be used by the literary movements of late XIX like *"Decadents"* and *"Symbolism"*. As stated by Carroll (1971: 88) "Adam Bede has the difficulty, as it is commonly considered, of a prominent moral, too often an impediment to the natural development of a story", where the moral is strongly affected by the behaviour of Hetty as it is clear since the first chapters of the novel. Because of her emphasis on community as the ground on which ethics come into being, and into meaning, George Eliot maintains an awareness of the need to deal with difference and variety not only in individuals but, also, in their moral attitudes. Therefore, the juxtaposition of differing approaches to morality suggests the dangers of demanding coherence, and promotes, instead, the need

for an ethics that can not only accommodate, but can benefit from the variety of moral strengths to be found in any community, even if this requires a constant, productive tension between them. As affirmed by Bennett (1948: 114), "In this first novel the gap between the artist and the thinker is too often perceptible", and she adds "Their validity for the reader, even their interest, depends upon his discovering them for himself as he watches the interplay of character and event". A third aspect worth considering is that most recent critics have seen George Eliot as 'sacrificing' Hetty, and would see her apparent marginalization in the narrative as evidence that she becomes for Eliot and for the Hayslope community, a "scapegoat". The ambivalence of the authorial narrator's tone, now sympathetic, now judgemental, is read as evidence of unresolved tensions in the author's life and in the novel's thinking about the ethical issues it raises. As stated by Levine (2001: 13)) "The power of much of her writing is in her representation of the profound failures of the middle-class society whose values she sought to revivify, and most particularly of the costs of self-restraint, the unjust limitation imposed on remarkable characters, usually, but not exclusively, women". The novelist shows by Hetty's trial and conversion how this trial affects the lives of a small group of persons emotionally involved in it. The story reaches its climax at the moment of Hetty's confession of her guilt to Dinah and her conversion. Hetty's final rescue is part of George Eliot's ethic and aesthetic belief that the novelist should not draw a sharp line between what is moral and immoral, and adds to the religious tone of the novel, answering to Dinah's methodist belief in love and sympathy. If the book is well structured formally, with its contrasting imageries, it does not thoroughly convey, to the modern critic, the novelist's world view. The division between the good and the bad characters does not agree with George Eliot's ethic and aesthetic concept of morality and art. This division raises the criticism about the ending of the novel as a wish-fulfilling end, since in accordance with the moral determinism of the novel, Hetty is not permitted to be a part

of the fictional world of Hayslope. As such, she remains an outcast. The novel answers to a moral bias, directly stated by the novelist's addresses to the reader, which is part of the novelist's moral earnestness. The novel seems to present a positivist sociological approach rather than a moral dilemma. As Levine (2001: 41) states, "the early novels tend to produce a split between this bucolic background of local and customary knowledge and habit, and, on the other hand, a world in which individuals have psychological complexity and are capable of economic and social progression", in fact Like Hetty's story illustrates the moral truth of sin and so she is the character of Arthur. He too is a man of weak moral fibre, yields to temptations as a result, he also becomes the miserable, wretched and repugnant character. So, both Hetty and Arthur suffer from the deep spiritual anguish because they lack morality in life. By portraying those characters, Eliot wants to suggest that who have moral weakness is followed by such punishment and pain. Actually, George Eliot wants to show the dark consequences of pagan Hellenistic tradition, chiefly, represented by Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne.

I.3. Hetty Sorrel and her female "alter-ego": Dinah Morris

> *"Dinah Morris bears so many indications of being a reflection of facts well known to the author – and the phenomena of Methodism, from the frequency with which their existence is referred to in her pages, appear to be so familiar to her, - that I hesitate to do anything but thankfully accept her portrait."*[2]
>
> *Henry James*

In George Eliot's Adam Bede, Eliot creates two characters Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris that are complete opposites. Throughout the novel Eliot paints a picture of Hetty as a vain, selfish, materialistic, evasive young woman, who causes a lot of pain in order to please herself. Dinah on the other hand is godly, pious, moral, angelic and faultless. In the beginning, the reader despises the sinner Hetty, and adores the saint Dinah, however as

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[2] H. James, in "Atlantic Monthly", 18 (Oct. 1866), as quoted in V. Cunningham, op. cit., p. 147

the novel progresses, Dinah's perfection becomes too much of a good thing, while her character remains the same, and she still has all of her Saintly attributes, the reader begins to feel that Dinah is not a person, but a personification of the perfect woman. As Hetty grows as a person as a result of her trials, she becomes less of a sinner, and while she does not move completely Sainthood, the reader, and Eliot see her, as more of a victim. Dinah Morris is a major character in George Eliot's novel Adam Bede. She is a Methodist lay preacher, modelled on Eliot's aunt Elizabeth Evans. She is a cousin by marriage of Hetty Sorrel and she is deeply religious, a follower of Wesleyan Methodism. She lives to comfort others, including Adam Bede's mother when her husband is drowned. She offers to help Hetty if she is ever in need. When Hetty commits her crime and cannot own up to it, Dinah's presence allows Hetty to face what she has done and ask for forgiveness. Though she is an attractive woman, she seems to show no signs of self-consciousness while she preaches. In fact, she is sometimes considered to be Eliot's most confident female character. As stated by Carroll (1992: 76), "the two women are juxtaposed and contrasted in the novel in various ways, some stylised, some less obvious; and it is worth recalling that their meeting in the prison was the episode that prompted George Eliot to write the novel in the first place". "Dinah", Jon Singleton points out (2011: 241), "displays the same egocentric arbitrariness while searching for God's leading regarding Seth's and Adam's marriage suits" and this kind "narrative strand is reintroduced at regular intervals throughout the novel, making the problem of discerning God's will for the individual life leap in great arcs over the mundane acts of lovemaking, kowtowing, and the guilt-hunting that lie in its shadow". Dinah is never judgmental toward others. When Dinah falls in love with Adam, she finally wants something from life for herself specifically, that is to be with Adam. Even then, Dinah cannot accept a life of happiness for herself until she believes that it is God's will, but she comes to trust her own heart when it comes to her desires. By marrying Adam, Dinah gives up her independence and

freedom, a change that is difficult for her to make. As Carroll (1992: 76) clearly explains, "in conventional terms, they represent nature and grace, Madonna and Magdalene". The example is extremely striking, underlining once again how the two personalities contrast and differ along the whole novel. Dinah is a categorically good woman. She is completely dedicated to doing the Lord's work. Wherever she encounters suffering, she alleviates it, and she has spent her whole life in deeds of charity. Dinah's is not an abstract piety, in fact she preaches what she believes and she practices what she preaches. Through long experience she has discovered how to comfort people and bring them to God, and in the course of the novel she has a good effect on everyone she comes in contact with. Dinah is also entirely humble; she sees herself as the servant of God's people. She is a working woman, and no task is too mean for her. She visits afflicted people in prisons and in their simple cottages, and she shares their hard life with them. She is absolutely unselfish. She never allows any thought of her own comfort to interfere with the performance of her duty, and she looks upon her own desires as temptations which must be resisted. She always places God before man, and other people before herself. And finally, she is totally benevolent. Dinah never does anything which is not likely to have good effects. She harbours no dislikes and treats everyone with respect and sympathy. No one in the novel disapproves of her, she is universally praised, even reverenced, by all who know her. Comparing Hetty and Dinah, Knoepflmacher (1968: 118) notices that "Dinah, capable of 'presentiment', always cares for the lot of her fellow men; Hetty remains so 'unmindful' and 'unconscious' of others that, in her instinct to survive, she rids herself of her own child as soon as it is born", underlining how the two women are at the opposite poles of behaviour and personality. In the mid-1800s, the advent of Anglican sisterhood, the reinstatement of the female diaconate, and the increased work for bible women and district visitors provided women in England with new opportunities to participate in the ministry of different Christian denominations. Although Eliot's novel deals specifically

with women and Methodist ministry, these new roles for women within Christianity forced clergymen and the hierarchies of all Christian denominations to grapple with issues related to authority over such women and the distinction between the "natural caretaking activities of a woman and pastoral ministry. As a matter of fact, Knoepflmacher (1968: 122) states that "In the rural world of Adam Bede, Hetty's resistance to the love represented by Dinah's 'higher nature' epitomizes the novelist's fear of the indifference of the natural order", this statement is representative of the confusion created by the meeting of the two different personalities. The novel's conclusion, in which Dinah moves from a full-time ministry to part-time ministerial activities, is a historically accurate representation of the imposed limitations on Methodist women ministers during the time frame of the novel, which is the first decade of the XIX century. Discussion about women and Christin ministry was important on the debate of the age, and Eliot was aware of the issue. As stated by Bennett (1948: 109), "there is a distasteful over-carefulness about Dinah's idiom. The consciousness of virtue, hard to distinguish from self-righteousness, that Dinah's speeches betray is an obstacle to sympathy […] but it is not George Eliot's intention to burden Dinah with self-conscious virtue." In fact, Dinah is not represented as a perfect character defect less, but rather as a figure who mediates and aims to bring peace where there is uneasiness. Given this evidence of Eliot's awareness of works which questioned women's role in Christianity, and given her continued interest in theological debates, it is possible to understand why within the novel Eliot includes a discussion on whether women can be called to a full-time, independent ministerial vocation. An example is given by Davis (2017: 247), stating that "the task of Adam Bede, as he returns more or less to normal again through the love of Dinah, is still to retain within the recovery of the realm of what is firmly safe the previous perspective of the traumatically wild and painfully dangerous, and then, as George Eliot herself most strives to do, to recreate the one truth from within the perspective of the other", painting Dinah like a sort of

peacemaker who brings the characters back to the stillness of a peaceful life. Another aspect worth considering to fully understand the position of Dinah Morris in the novel is the position between her religiosity and the ethic of sympathy. Readers are often troubled that the agnostic George Eliot, whose early life illustrates the Victorian loss of faith, should have taken seriously in her writings many characters of the devoutly evangelistic type she presumably rejected. There have been numerous attempts to "explain" such characters' presence in the novels, to account for the seeming disparity between the author's religion outside her works and that inside of them. As Auster (1970: 105) states, "the deliberate arrangement of the novel should be remembered here, for what follows the description of the setting and the survey of the villagers collected on the Green is Dinah's sermon, which is a fervent Christian appeal to the pleasantly complacent people of Hayslope to remember the uncertainty of their position in this life". In this perspective, the preacher Dinah brings an awareness of the transience of existence to reach the other characters of the novel, and becomes the symbol of the achievement of that sympathy that Eliot has made his own and which is particularly important in this novel. The type of faith which Dinah preaches is particularly suited to the standard of behaviour operative in the novel. George Eliot makes the Methodist preacher functional by fusing Dinah's form of Methodism with the humanistic secular ethic dictating the development of the main character. Another important aspect worth considering to understand the character of Dinah Morris is the analysis of the different attractive powers owned by Hetty and Dinah. At a certain point in the novel, Dinah and Hetty are both fully described: both women are distractingly pretty, but Dinah distracts attention from the body and Hetty distracts attention from the soul. Dinah elevates; Hetty debases. As frail preacher and rosy farm girl, Dinah and Hetty are exaggerated antithetical types. Dinah may go out among rough men without incurring any disapproval from the narrator, and Hetty cannot go out even among the most refined gentry. It is only after Eliot fixes in our minds the virtue of the

one and the wickedness of the other that she will temper her own commentary on each and humanize them both. As Carroll (1971: 76) points out, "Dinah's radical challenge is expressed at greatest length in her sermon to the unresponsive onlookers in Hayslope at the beginning of the novel. She brings the cross into Arcadia and beseeches her congregation to see the world differently in consequence.", and as the reader might understand there is a clear description on how Dinah's faith was strong and represented her role in the society, and Carroll also states (1971: 76) "With her belief in visible manifestations of Jesus, which is common among the Methodists', says the narrator, she appeals to them to see afresh: 'see where our blessed Lord stands and weeps, and stretches out his arms towards you", in this passage we can see the asceticism that characterizes Dinah, as opposed to Hetty who easily gives in to carnal passions. After the infanticide accomplished by Hetty, she increasingly acquires the air of the delicate Romantic heroine. The narrator, who had spared no sarcasm in her earlier descriptions, is now moved to pity, as she emotionally declares "My heart bleeds for her as I see her." The identification of Dinah and Hetty is made explicit during the process of trying to identify the criminal, and even if Eliot devotes most of the novel to contrasting Hetty and Dinah, only to bring them into an embrace, Dinah only acquires power in the presence of the lost soul. On the other hand, Hetty, who will not confess, needs Dinah for spiritual survival. At the heart of Adam Bede is the quickening of Hetty's weak spirit and the fortification of Dinah's weak body, as each beauty imparts to the other her characteristic strengths. The two women cling to one another in the scene for the sake of which the novel was written. Reading Adam Bede, a consideration can be done, which is that Hetty and Dinah are the two faces of the nineteenth century's Janus-faced woman, until Eliot produces beauty out of the synthesis of the healthy (but fatal, murderous) Medusa and the virtuous (but sickly, vulnerable) angel. Adam Bede, who loves first one woman and then the other, stands in for the reader. The narrator takes every opportunity to ask us to identify with Adam's feelings,

motivations, and actions, however misguided they may be. Admirable as he is, we are often told that he behaves typically of men in general when he misreads beauty. Through Adam, therefore, Eliot educates the reader. misreads beauty. Through Adam, therefore, Eliot educates the reader. Dinah is Eliot's response to the Victorian angel. Like Hawthorne, Eliot persuades us that a healthy heroine can be more virtuous than a frail one because she has a body strong enough for purposeful labour (an ideology for the middle class). Dinah is no angel because she works; Hetty's flawed character is expressed by fantasies of idleness when her strength is needed on the farm. Her end is fitting: Hetty cannot stand on her own feet. Even as the fashions and ideals of the Victorian Age promoted feminine frailty, even as debility was a sign of beauty, absence of spirit or bloom was unlovely. Women were caught in the ambivalence contained in the idealized images of femininity, such as the images of the caged pet and the flower: beauty had to be fragile as the flower even as it required the bloom of health. By playing modern and discarded values off against one another, Eliot may depend upon her readers' discomfort with some of the choices that modernization made on their behalf. Were people ready to give up the spirituality that the delicate ideal embodied? Eliot transfigures the healthy rustic and the frail beauty before our eyes, giving us a healthy angel, a benign Medusa. By story's end, Adam and Dinah satisfy an 1859 readership as the industrious couple that was `strong enough` to meet the needs of changing times. But Eliot is not entirely satisfied with the compromises that the conventions of realism forced upon her novel. Having to choose between healthy sexuality and the freedom of asexuality as criteria for beauty, Eliot - not without some hesitation -chooses health. Eliot had been deliberate in her effort to lead the reader to believe that Dinah should be free to preach. By novel's end, Adam and Dinah agree that women should attend to matters of the spirit indoors. While Eliot tried to create a delicate woman, who could both go out and not die to prove her virtue, she ends by concluding that some unspecified harm does indeed come of a woman's going

out to preach. In order to characterize the character of Dinah, it is important what Carroll (1971: 81) writes about her, that is "the tolerance with which an author who is able to conceive the character of Dinah Morris, and to sympathize with her religious character – a type which many worthy people, no doubt, would be disposed to brand as utterly irreligious, is one of the finest things in the novel, and affords a very good illustration of the tendency of the author to beat down all external differences, and bring into the light the grand points of genuine resemblance", as if to signify that Dinah symbolizes the redemption from which Hetty runs away throughout the novel but which in the end she is forced to accept to atone for her sins and to avoid being executed. Authors like Anderson and Shaw (2016: 106) state that "For some Hetty's rescue, as morally problematic, is akin to the narrator's problematic moralizing, most noticeably in chapter fifteen's juxtaposition of (bad) Hetty and her (good) cousin Dinah: each is antithetical to realism, betraying the novelist's too heavy hand in controlling outcomes and directing judgement", suggesting that probably the clear difference between Hetty and Dinah may have undermined the realism that characterizes the novel. However, this is the only "disapproval" that critics move towards Eliot's realism, which, as mentioned before, is characterized by an attention to details and characterization of the characters unique in the genre. Summarizing what has been analysed in this chapter, we have two different types of women in Adam Bede. The virtuous one gets her reward in the form of an excellent husband and (probably) happy family life in accordance with the "divine will " and the other one who is too light hearted and immature becomes a convict and we do not hear about her any more. It seems that celebrating a family as a steady unit worth of praise was one of the messages that gets to the reader via this novel besides its artistic qualities. The heroines are compared to flowers and pets which emphasizes the fragile nature of women. However, it seems that we cannot claim that the female characters would awaken more sympathies within the reader than the male characters do. But it might seem that

they play more important roles in the plot as a whole. None of the females is seen in black and white perspective and that they are interrelated with male characters if novel can be observed. Another aspect to consider is that the difference between Dinah and Hetty is the feature that makes the novel so appealing to the reader. This contrast is in fact the point around which the whole novel revolves. If it is true that Hetty, as we have seen, represents the instinctive and irrational part of the human being, so much so that she gets to commit a crime due to the lack of reflection on a gesture she made even if not intentionally, Dinah represents the rational part. and reflective of the human being, the one that allows you to make considerations about your actions and not give in to instinct. From this point of view, it can be said that the characterization proposed by Eliot also has the purpose of making the reader reflect on his own existential condition, giving not only an interpretation of the society of the time, but also a morality that is suitable for all ages.

II. Female figures and society in the novel "Dubliners" by J. Joyce

II.1 The novel and its context: Dublin represented as a paralysed city

> *"This never was my town,*
> *I was not born or bred*
> *Nor schooled here and she will not*
> *Have me alive or dead*
> *But yet she holds my mind*
> *With her seedy elegance,*
> *With her gentle veils of rain*
> *And all her ghosts that walk*
> *And all that hide behind*
> *Her Georgian facades -*
> *The catcalls and the pain,*
> *The glamour of her squalor,*
> *The bravado of her talk."[3]*

James Joyce's novel "Dubliners" is one of the masterpieces of the modern age. The novel is not simple a volume of fifteen stories about Dubliners, but it is above all a novel about Dublin and about Ireland itself. In Dubliners Joyce sets Dublin on the literary map and on the world stage. He creates a panorama of the city by presenting a series of portraits of the Dubliners in which Dublin contributes to the dehumanizing experience of modern life. The capital affords not only an insight into the writer's personal experiences, but a picture of aspects of the social life of the city, whose descriptions function as mere scene-setting for the events of the novel. Joyce was in fact sure that his stories presented a kind of 'moral history' of Ireland, showing the life of the average Dubliner for what it was, with all its degradation, frustration and monotony. The protagonists of the book are inhabitants of Dublin, whose stories of daily life are told. According to Daiches (1960: 66) "The short stories that make up this book have certain common features in aim and technique; they are realistic in a certain sense, and they have a quite extraordinary evenness of tone and texture, the style being that neutral medium which, without in itself

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[3] *Dublin*, By L. McNeice

showing any signs of emotion or excitement, conveys with quiet adequacy the given story in its proper atmosphere and with its proper implications". Despite the banality of the subject, the book wants to focus its attention on two aspects, common to all the stories: the theme of "paralysis" and the theme of "escape". The first is mainly a moral paralysis, in particular "prominent among the different forms of paralysis portrayed in Dubliners is that of political life" as described by Fairhall (1993: 43). Another definition of paralysis is given by Gifford (1982: 29) who alleges that:

> Since in 1904 the term paralysis was frequently used in medical parlance (and by Joyce) to mean 'general paralysis of the insane, 'i.e., paresis, syphilis of the central nervous system. It is possible to demonstrate that in rewriting the story […] Joyce not only added the word 'paralysis' but also worked the symptoms of paresis into the boy-narrator's recall of the priest's appearance and manner.

The flight of certain characters in the book is a consequence of paralysis, when the protagonists understand their condition. Escape, however, is doomed to always fail. For example, in the story of Eveline, which will be analysed further in the third paragraph of this chapter, the tale opens in "medias res". Eveline is in fact looking out of her window observing what happens outside, and she sees a musician playing a barrel organ and this sound reminds her of a song she heard before her mother's death. The girl then begins to remember her childhood: she thinks of her father, who often mistreated her but who was also good to her on several occasions, she remembers her mother and her missing brother Ernest and feels frustrated by her humble job as a saleswoman in a department store, where her boss makes fun of her and puts her in a bad light, which is why she won't miss her job when she leaves. In fact, she decided to leave with her boyfriend, a sailor named Frank, for Buenos Aires. Before leaving, she holds two letters in her hand, one for Harry, her brother still alive, and the other for her father, and she lets herself be taken by doubts, not being sure that she wants to leave the family nest to go to Buenos Aires. The memory

of her mother's monotonous and sad life prompts her to leave: once she arrives with Frank at the port, while their ship is about to leave, Eveline is again seized by indecision and, in the end, thinking about the promise made to her mother on her deathbed to keep the family together, she remains motionless and not follows her boyfriend, with a mask of indifference on his face. Frank, who is now on the ship, unsuccessfully yells at her to follow him and ends up leaving without her. Unlike Joyce who left Dublin from 'North Wall' harbour with Nora Barnacle, Eveline's frozen action is the first sign that she has not made a decision, she has no way of escape but instead remains fixed in a circle of indecision: she will hover in mindless repetition, on her own, in a paralyzed and paralyzing Dublin. As Beja alleges (1973: 102:

> In Dubliners, the meaning of movement is further complicated by the thematic import of that symbolic paralysis which Joyce himself referred to, an arrest imposed from within, not by the 'nets' of external circumstance, but by a deficiency of impulse and power. The idea of a moral paralysis is expressed sometimes directly in terms of physical arrest, even in the actual paralysis of the priest father Flynn, whose condition is emphasized by its appearance at the beginning of the book and is reflected in the behaviour of Father Purdon, in the penultimate story 'observed to be struggling up into the pulpit as if he were partially paralyzed

giving to the book an autobiographical vein as the "paralysis" had been experienced by the writer when he found himself leaving Dublin at the beginning of the XX century. As stated also by Fairhall (1993: 66) "this picture of Dublin can be criticized as less than the whole truth, as can the opposite picture drawn in Dubliners. But it did not register. As a consequence, Joyce's one-sided presentation of turn-of-the-century Dublin became, for most of his non-Irish readers, the Dublin – or the only one that mattered", presenting a city that in some respects was adapting to the modernity that was advancing, but that for others was still tied to old traditions that had become rooted in the course of history.

Fairhall (1993: 67) states also that "Joyce had no artistic use for the Anglo-Irish and little use for Dublin's lower classes. Yet his Dublin and Fitzpatrik's do not cancel each other out, any more than they sum up Dublin between them. On the contrary, they intersect in interesting ways, as when Maria in 'clay' rides on the city's fine tram system or when the characters in 'Two Gallants' walk past a series of Ascendancy landmarks", significantly representing restrictive routines and the repetitive, mundane details of everyday life mark the lives of Joyce's Dubliners and trap them in circles of frustration, restraint, and violence. Routine affects characters who face difficult predicaments, but it also affects characters who have little open conflict in their lives. As Beja (1973: 102) alleges:

> In Dubliners, the meaning of movement is further complicated by the thematic import of that symbolic paralysis which Joyce himself referred to, an arrest imposed from within, not by the 'nets' of external circumstance, but by a deficiency of impulse and power. The idea of a moral paralysis is expressed sometimes directly in terms of physical arrest, even in the actual paralysis of the priest Father Flynn, whose condition is emphasized by its appearance at the beginning of the book and is reflected in the behaviour of Father Purdon, in the penultimate story 'observed to be struggling up into the pulpit' as if he were partially paralyzed.

The characters in Dubliners may be citizens of the Irish capital, but many of them long for escape and adventure in other countries. Such longings, however, are never actually realized by the stories' protagonists. More often than offering a literal escape from a physical place, the stories tell of opportunities to escape from smaller, more personal restraints. In this case, the novel also talks about how the inhabitants of Dublin were linked to the city. This was in fact for them the good and the bad of the time: the good because, despite the many difficulties, somehow, they could not leave it perhaps because it provided so many positive ties, the bad because every time the Dubliners tried to leave

it, they came in swallowed up again. In developing this theme, it is interesting to consider what Beja (1973: 103) writes in his essay about "moral paralysis, and so:

> It should be no surprise to discover in a book developing the theme of moral paralysis a fundamental structure of movements and stasis, a system of significant motions, countermotions, and arrests, involving every story, making one consecutive narrative of the surge and subsidence of life in Dublin. In the development of the tendency to eastward movement among the characters of Dubliners, and in its successive modifications, throughout the book, something of such a system is manifest. It may be characterized briefly as an eastward trend, at first vague, quickly becoming dominant, then wavering, weakening, and at least reversed.

According to Norris (2003), "Declining to take the narrative voice at its own valuation, or the valuation traditionally accorded to anonymous narrator, does not, however, become a mechanistic program applied to each story with similar results", this means that beyond the narrative voice that is known to be part of the omniscient narrator technique, each story in the collection is a point of view on Dublin society and history. Another aspect worth considering to analyse the novel further is the vision of sexuality at the time. It is in fact in stories like "Araby", where a young boy falls in love with his neighbour's sister, Mangan. The disappointing evening excursion of the boy to the "Arabia" bazaar is underlined, to be able to express his intent, or the short story "Boarding House", where the protagonist is forced to marry the daughter of his landlady by force, and not by love. The two stories are an example of how the relationship between men and women and marriage were seen at the time, that is, bonds without any feeling other than giving a role and a place in society to the individual, who most of the at times felt as if he/she had to make certain decisions, unfortunately not seeing other escape routes. This theme is dealt with in depth by Boysen (2008: 13), who well describes what marriage and love represented at Joyce's time:

> For Joyce, brought up a Catholic at the end of the nineteenth century in Ireland, the issue was very much a live one and it is striking that Joyce, at those times in his life when he made the clearest declarations of personal and artistic self-definition, allied himself to contemporary rational rejections of marriage. The most obvious gesture was his departure from Ireland with Nora on 8 October 1904 to live together in a free-love-style unmarried union for the next 27 years. Joyce's rejection of marital conventionality has been taken for granted by most critics and passed over, so that much more attention has been given to the symbolic overtones of his 'exile', to its role in the construction of a mythologized artistic personality. The immediate issue of sexual politics was nevertheless an important one. Before setting up the irregular union, Joyce's sexual life was by no means conventional. Perhaps the ideal marriage, in terms of social and economic security as well as sexual conformity, would have been with one of the daughters of the Sheeny household, whose social gatherings are recorded in the 'Epiphanies' and Stephen Hero."

The quotation above is very important to understand why Joyce has seasoned the novel with this particular conception of love and marriage, and it can be said that there is much autobiographical in this work. Another very important passage which is present in Boysen's article and useful to understand Joyce's conception is the following one (2008: 15):

> The church system failed, in his view, in that it did not recognize his full biological humanity, as he wrote to lady Gregory: 'there is no heresy or no philosophy which is so abhorrent to my church as a human being'. But what was a human being? Joyce's letter goes on to give some indication of what is meant. 'Accordingly,', he continues, 'I am going to Paris. I intend to study medicine at the University of Paris… Evidently it was not so much a career that he hoped to gain from his studies as a knowledge of himself from medicine that it was impossible for him to acquire

from theology. Though his study of medicine was short (Ellmann plays down Joyce's interest in the subject and emphasizes the literary contacts that he hoped to make in Paris) it was an important part of his self-image to which he referred in later years. He included this trip, for instance, in the account of his life that he sent to The Egoist in 1916 to help with their publicizing of his work.

It is therefore also the failure of the "Church" system that in Joyce's mind influences and is reflected in his works, and gives life to all the recurring themes in Dubliners. Speaking about the short stories that compose the novel, Daiches (1960: 67) affirms that "a purely 'formal' analysis of any of these stories would be useful – in fact, indispensable- in an endeavour to assess their value as literature, but such an analysis is only the first step in a process; it is not in itself able to tell us why that particular arrangement of incident and description constitutes a totality which has more value than a mere symmetrical pattern or intriguing design". To do this, the reader must go beyond the simple story and know the historical context within which the novel develops, in order to understand the cultural implications and the behaviour of the characters. Critic Ghiselin (in Beja, 1973: 101) gives his own very interesting interpretation of the way in which the stories in Dubliners are narrated. He affirms in fact that:

> During the past six or eight years a significant body of critics, among them Caroline Gordon, Allen Tate, and W.Y. Tindall, have published their understanding that the naturalism of Dubliners is complicated by systematic use of symbols, which establish relationships between superficially disparate elements in the stories. Discussion of 'The Dead', for example, has made it obvious that the immobility of snowy statues in that story is symbolically one with the spiritual condition of Gabriel Conroy turned to the wintry window at the very end of Dubliners and with the deathly arrest of paralysis announced on the first page of the book. In the light of this insight other elements of the same pattern, such as the stillness of the girl frozen fear

at the end of the fourth story, virtually declare themselves. Such images, significantly disposed, give a firm symbolic texture and pattern to the individual stories of Dubliners and enhance the integrity of the work as a whole.

From these words we can see the strong symbolic meaning that Joyce attributes to the composition of the characters, as if they wanted to symbolize the vices or virtues that have characterized the human being since ancient times and not only in modernity. Analysing the stories, what Daiches (1960: 69) alleges in his essay is clearer, as he affirms that "Very different are the conclusions of the stories. A series of events is recognized as having constituted a totality, a 'significant experience', in virtue of its clos, not of its opening. The conclusions of these stories are level and precise, the last lines denoting a genuine climax of realization (if told in the first person) or in the pattern of the objective situation (if told in the third), therefore, depending on how the story is narrated, the characters and settings take on a different symbolic meaning. As Beja (1973: 60) states in his essay, "Dubliners may be recommended to the large class of readers to whom the drab makes an appeal, for it is admirably written. Mr. Joyce avoids exaggerations. He leaves the conviction that his people are as he describes them. Shunning the emphatic, Mr. Joyce is less concerned with the episode than with the mood which it suggests", meaning that in the short stories that make up the collection, the reader is able to grasp the habits and customs of Dublin of the time.

II.2.   The features of the Modern Novel present in "Dubliners"

> *Who killed James Joyce?*
> *I, said the commentator,*
> *I killed James Joyce*
> *For my graduation[4]*

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[4] Kavanagh, P, *Collected Poems* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1964) p. 117

In this paragraph the main point is to understand what is meant by the expression "modern novel". According to Levin (in Beja, 1973: 83):

> The history of the realistic novel shows that fiction tends toward autobiography. The increasing demands for social and psychological detail that are made upon the novelist can only be satisfied out of his own experience. The forces which make him an outsider focus his observation upon himself. He becomes his own hero, and begins to crowd his other characters into the background. The back ground takes on a new importance for its influence on his own character. The theme of his novel is the formation of character; its habitual pattern is that of apprenticeship or education; and it falls into that category which has been distinguished, by German criticism at least, as the Bildungsroman".

From this quotation it is clear that the modern novel brings together both the characteristics of the realistic novel and those of the Bildungsroman. Given that it is mentioned, it is good to open a parenthesis on what the Bildungsroman is. One of the most complete definitions is given by Ng (2020) who states that:

> In English, the Bildungsroman is usually referred to as the 'novel of formation' or the 'novel of education'. Whilst not exactly misleading, these two renditions would seem to lay stress on the external social factors and institutions that mould an individual into her final form. In fact, the very concept of Bildung draws attention to the limitations of formal education – schools and classrooms might be the site of learning, but the individual acquires her most important lessons outside of any pedagogical framework. As we see in the case of the caterpillar, the key moment of maturation is not when it emerges as a butterfly but when it decides it is ready to enter the chrysalis.

Given for granted the definitions given so far and in order to fully understand this novel in particular and its characteristics, it is important to establish what is meant by "modern

novel". As it is known, the novel was published in 1914, therefore in the middle of the World War I, but "a major era of the experimental arts in Britain", as Bradbury states (1993:67). Despite the difficult period, Bradbury (1993:67) alleges that "Europe was full of titanic stirrings and snortings – a new art coming into flower to celebrate or announce a 'new age", even if full of many difficulties for arts and politics. According to Bradbury (1993: 75), "the stories of Dubliners, offered to publishers in 1905, were rejected for indelicacy and possible libel. Set in gallery in 1912, they were again suppressed, and did not appear until 1914, when modernist small press culture began to emerge, and the artist could declare his claim to an experimental modern vision". The modern era was a detachment from the Victorian fathers, where people started to behave and think different from the previous historical and literary period. When the moderns took it up, the novel had long been a form of realism. Its main goal had been to create the illusion of real life in action. Moreover, modernity put the priorities and preferences of the modern moment into a perpetual state of change. In the past, traditional social, religious, and scientific frameworks might have given reality a certain backing – enough consensus to make "human experience" seem regular and knowable. But modernity had replaced them with change, and replaced consensus with questions. As stated by Beja (1973: 60):

Dubliners may be recommended to the large class of readers to whom the drab makes an appeal, for it is admirably written. Mr. Joyce avoid exaggeration. He leaves the conviction that his people are as he describes them. Shunning the empathic, Mr. Joyce is less concerned with the episode than with the mood which it suggests. Perhaps for this reason he is more successful with his shorter stories. When he writes at greater length the issue seems trivial, and the connecting thread becomes so tenuous as to be scarcely perceptible. The reader's difficulty will be enhanced if he is ignorant of Dublin customs; if he does not know, for instance, that a 'curate is a man who brings strong waters.

In the novel "The Dubliners" the author wants to show the fall of moral values, linked to Dublin's religion, politics and culture. All the inhabitants of Dublin are "spiritually weak", they are afraid of the other inhabitants and are in some way slaves to their culture, their family and political life but above all their religious life. In reality, what Joyce is keen to show is not so much this situation of weakness as the way in which it reveals itself to the "victims" of this moral "paralysis", as it is called by the author. So, becoming aware of this situation is precisely the turning point of any story: knowing yourself is the basis of morality, if not morality itself. In any case, even if Joyce's objective seems predominantly moral, Joyce never behaves like an educator giving instructions on how to overcome this situation, indeed the main theme of the work is the impossibility of getting out of this condition of "paralysis. ". Ergo the "escape" from this situation and the consequent failure of this escape is another theme of the work. The style of "Dubliners" is realistic: the description of natural landscapes is concise but detailed, there is an abundance of details, even non-essential ones, which do not properly have a descriptive purpose but often a deeper meaning, strongly symbolic. For example, the accurate description of the priest's house in the short story "The Sisters" symbolizes both the physical and moral incapacity of Father Flynn. This means that, as in Gustave Flaubert or Émile Zola, realism and naturalism are combined with symbolic traits, and this is noticeable not only in the fact that external details often have a double meaning, but also in the use of the epiphany, a technique used by Joyce in which an insignificant detail or a gesture, or even a trivial situation leads a character to a spiritual vision with which he understands himself and his surroundings. Joyce thought that his function as a writer was to take the reader beyond the usual aspects of life, and show their profound meaning, so often the epiphany is the key to the story itself: some episodes described, apparently not influential or important, they are essential in the life of the protagonist and are an emblem of their social and historical context. Joyce abandons the technique of the omniscient narrator and never uses

a single point of view: there are as many as there are characters. Furthermore, he often uses "direct speech" also for the characters' thoughts, in this way, presenting them without the interference of the narrator, allows the reader a direct knowledge of the character. As Daiches states (1960: 64) "In Dubliners Joyce is simply the clear-eyed observer, and he is observing what is around him, so that these stories have none of the symbolizing qualities that memory lends", and it could be said that this is an absolute novelty in the European literature. According to Daiches (1960: 67,68), "A study of Dubliners can tell us a great deal about the function of pattern in fiction and about the relation between realism as a technique and as an end. No English short-story writer has built up his design, has related the parts to the preconceived whole, more carefully than Joyce has done". This same point of view is expressed in other words by Allen (1964: 1) who states that:

> After the first world war, the age that had ended in July 1941 seemed as remote as the far side of the moon. The war split the landscape of time like an enormous natural catastrophe, obliterating long-established boundaries, blowing sky-high landmarks that for years had been taken for granted. It lay like an unbridgeable chasm between the present and the past, so that present and past seemed almost laughably different in kind. It set a gulf between the young who had fought it and the old who had stayed at home. What had seemed certainties, all the assumptions nurtured in Britain by a hundred years of virtual peace, during which wars were fought either by foreigners or, if the British were involved, by small professional armies on the peripheries of empire, were exposed as illusions. The war had speeded up social change as it had never been speeded up before. It emancipated women; it emancipated the working class. It made the motor car and the aeroplane commonplace. It affected everything and everybody. Nothing was as it was before.

As it can be seen, the novel of the early twentieth century is very touched by the historical events that have followed, and this is very important to consider when analysing its

characteristics. Another very important consideration of the age is made by Frattarola (2009) who states that "The majority of radical advances in auditory technology, on the other hand—the telephone (1876), microphone (1876), phonograph (1878), wireless (1899) and radio (1906)—took place within a brief time from the mid-1870s to the early 1900s. These inventions shaped modernist writers as they came of age in the late Victorian period and became common household items within the modernist period. This is not to say that auditory perception was not prevalent and significant in Victorian literature and culture." These innovations that characterized the beginning of the modern era must be taken into account, if we want to correctly contextualize all the literature produced in those years. According to Mansouri (2017):

> The multilayered and dialogical nature of the modern Irish novel and its critical calibre has created an accurate touchstone that enables the Irish to identify the very two sides of reality. On the one hand, reality emerges as a monolithic, obdurate construct, fabricated and observed by the root-tree State; yet on the other, reality manifests itself as the nation's branched memories of economic hardships, political marginalisation, ideological bifurcations, and psychological exiles.

This means that the geographical context must also be taken into account when analysing a work of the reach of Dubliners. According to Mizener (1965: 6) "the critical theories that encourage these interpretations are at bottom much the same. Both assume that what really matters is a truth that exists independently of the story and is definable in terms other than the author's; for them a story matters, not because of what it is, but because something it alludes to matters", thus opening up the important issue of why an author chooses to deal with certain topics rather than other ones. Another important aspect that characterized the modern novel is the total detachment from the realistic novel. As stated by Mizener (1965: 268):

The established conventions of the realistic novel and its familiar variations offer innumerable opportunities beyond those for mere verisimilitude and recognition which are often hastily said to be their only excuse for existence. The very survival over such a considerable period of time of realism as the normal mode of the novel suggests that in giving it up the novelist may be sacrificing the one indispensable element of the novel, out of a conviction that the representation of nature makes it impossible for him to express without falsification his strongest feelings – as it may if he cultivates long enough the kind of feelings thinking this way encourages.

This quotation clearly expresses how the modern novel detaches itself from the currents that had previously characterized literature. Another quotation that clearly describes the concept is given by Allen (1964. 3) quoting Virginia Woolf's Attack on the Edwardian novelists, and is as follows:

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn. But sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this? Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could base his work

upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy,

no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted sense, and perhaps not a

single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of

gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent

envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.

The modern novel of the twentieth century is therefore upset and distorted to the point of

losing the plot, the relationship between space and environment, a clear temporal path

and a new relationship between time and intertwining will be discovered. The characters

also change: the hero myth is replaced by new anti-heroes, full of the inconveniences and

problems typical of the time.

II.3.   A modern heroine: analysis of the character of Eveline

> *"She had consented to go away, to leave her home, Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question. In her home anyway she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life about her. Of course, she had to work hard, both in the house and at business. What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say she was a fool, perhaps."[5]*

Eveline is the protagonist of one of Joyce's short stories contained in the novel "The

Dubliners." The narration is in the third person, the narrator is anonymous and is

represented by Eveline's conscience. In this short story Joyce uses a particular technique,

which is the "stream of consciousness". Many critics over the years have tried to give a

definition of this technique, one of the clearest versions is given by Humphrey (1954: 2)

who states that:

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[5] Joyce, J, 2021, *Dubliners*, Milan, Hoepli, p. 108

> The stream -of-consciousness novel is identified most quickly by its subject matter. This, rather than its techniques, its purposes, or its themes, distinguishes it. Hence, the novels that are said to use the stream-of-consciousness technique to a considerable degree prove, upon analysis, to be novels which have as their essential subject matter the consciousness of one or more characters; that is the depicted consciousness serves as a screen on which the material in these novels is presented.

Another definition is given by Allen (1964: 9), alleging that "no doubt stream-of-consciousness in the twentieth century is related to the psychological discoveries of the time, especially Jung's invention of free-association tests as a tool in psychotherapy". As Allen (1964:11) will state later on in his essay, " Joyce's Dublin, as has often been pointed out, is a city in which no work is done, a city whose inhabitants continually pass and re-pass one another without making contact, a city of solitaries, one sign of which, of course, is Joyce's use of the stream-of-consciousness technique itself, for it is essentially the technique for rendering man-alone". The narration is in fact a perfect representation of Eveline's ideas, as if she were the author of the text herself. In the last part of the story there is an epiphany, that is a banal moment that appears radiant: Eveline hears the sound of an organ and suddenly freezes. Frank calls Eveline, but she doesn't answer and a cry of anguish is heard. As Hart states (1969: 48), "Eveline is oppressed by her environment, and like many others she considers the possibility of escape, but among all the book's principal characters she is the only one who is offered a positive opportunity to leave, an opportunity which she refuses", so Eveline's final decision can be considered a sort of "rebellion", like "the instrument of Joyce's rebellion was the written word (Fairhall: 1993). In this part of the tale, the story of Eveline and that of the author's melt, creating a sort of autobiographical reaction to life events. Much of this short story takes readers through Eveline's struggle to make a decision about her life and future. In Khorsand's view: "Her mind repeatedly moves back and fro to the memories of her friends, her

brothers and her mother and suddenly jumps to the future in which Frank is the only decisive element; Her past so crowded and her future so empty" (100). Joyce provides readers an air of sympathy with Eveline because her inability to make a decision has little to do with her and much to do about leaving her family behind along with the promises, she made to her mother who is now deceased. Readers see Eveline yearn for escape, but also see her struggle with the comforts of her current life that ties to the past. Her lack of confidence in her own future is shown from the very beginning: "She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? ...In her home anyway, she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life... What would they say of her in the stores...? ...she was a fool perhaps..." (Joyce: 28). Throughout the story, Eveline mostly thinks about her home and her family, but rarely mentions Frank and how she feels about him: the little bit that readers do receive, shows her true feelings about Frank and their relationship: "it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him" (Joyce: 30). This is the strongest description of Eveline's feelings for Frank that we are presented with which isn't a typical example of romance. Eveline is faced with the dilemma of either staying home and taking care of her family or leaving in order to marry the man she thinks she loves. She agrees to marry Frank but struggles with her decision even though her life at home is uneventful and miserable: "...tedium, fear, unceasing labour, and constrictions of her life ... to produce a bleak picture" (French: 452). Joyce describes Eveline as being "tired," and through her reflections, we find that her father is not only abusive but also useless when it comes to taking care of her family; therefore, she has settled for living a domestic life much like her mother. According to Khorsand, Eveline feels conflicted about her current status of complacent daughter or future wife: "[S]he delivers a sad impression of her life with her father, of her attempts in meeting the ends of the family, of her financial distresses and of her heavy responsibilities as a young woman. But she suddenly finishes with a basically different image; that in

spite of all the hardships in her life, she still finds it satisfactory or desirable to go on as it is". Being trapped in a domestic state of life leaves Eveline to daydream and wonder about what could be, and the stories she hears from Frank, her lover, only increases her longing for a more exciting life. Eveline uses Frank's tales as an escape to an exciting life, unlike her own: "[H]e had tales of distant countries… [H]e told her the names of the ships he had been on and the names of the different services. He had sailed through the Straights of Magellan and told her stories of the twenty-nine terrible Patagonians" (29,30). As Khorsand points out that Eveline mainly refers to Frank as "he" which funnels his character down to a simple pronoun, rather than a true love interest; in reality, Frank served as a superficial escape for a fresh start and better life. Although he promises her a life outside of Dublin, he cannot save her from the entrapment she has already been doomed to, which uncannily resembles that of her deceased mother's. Joyce's "Eveline" presents readers with a young woman's internal struggle that constitutes something more serious than that of the other characters in Joyce's previous short stories in Dubliners. Eveline not only has the desire to flee from this life connected to her in Dublin, but also the opportunity to break free of the shackles of this tiresome life. Readers see a major struggle within Eveline's mind and heart, but: "She insists on using the verb 'would' whenever she talks about her future. This could only be a sign of her hesitation. She is suspicious from the very beginning" (Khorsand 100,101). Readers get glimpses into Eveline's life and the struggles she has to endure because of her father's lack of responsibility he flees from: …the trouble was to get any money from her father. He said she used to squander the money, that she had no head, that he was not going to give her his hard-earned money… She had to work to keep the house together and to see that the two young children…went to school regularly and got their meals… Here, readers see Eveline having to grow up quickly after her mother passes, and because she takes on this matriarchal role, she feels obligated to her family to stay. In "Eveline" the window is

symbolic of the escape she takes in the form of her daydreams. Trevor Williams notes that: "…dreams of escape, the only form in which a future is available—and even dreams, in Dubliners, are rare…" Joyce makes it evident that Eveline cannot decide what the right choice is for her, and her window gazing suggests both longing and fear. Eveline looks around at her home and realizes that her emotional attachment isn't only to her family, but objects that have filled her everyday life: "[H]ome! She looked around the room reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years… perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided" (Joyce: 27). She clings to these ordinary objects along with their memories, which indicates that she cannot let go of her family relationships even though her mother is no longer with them. She obviously feels a pull towards fulfilling the promise she made to her mother to keep the family together, but she battles with the thought of living the same dull and draining life that her mother did. Eveline is complacent and although she fantasizes about a new life with Frank, she seems to be having a hard time with actually going through with it. The notion of leaving and beginning a new life is exhilarating, but to have to actually leave her family and go through with it offers the reader more insight into Eveline's mindset: although she has been damaged and let down by her father, she cannot bring herself to do the same to him. Although Eveline's father is emotionally abusive and an alcoholic, she clings to the better memories she has of him when her mother was alive: "…they had all gone for a picnic… She remembered her father putting on her mother's bonnet to make the children laugh" (Joyce 30). Her empathy for her father makes it difficult to leave him and her siblings. One might also wonder if she cannot leave her father because of the promise to her mother or if it's because he is the only connection left to the happy memories she once had with her family before her mother's passing. Eveline also lets readers know that although her life of taking care of her father and siblings isn't exactly desirable, she is not completely

unhappy: "It was hard work—a hard life—but now that she was about to leave it, she did not find it a wholly undesirable life" (Joyce: 29). It is possible that by showing readers her inability to decide, Joyce is hinting that she is terrified of what will happen once her daily routine is interrupted. Readers can sense Eveline's anxiety about the state of her current life through her restlessness: "[H]er time was running out… She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape!" (Joyce 30,31) By leaving to go to the station to meet with Frank, she is taking a step towards her new life, but all of the time it took her to actually leave her house hints at the fact that she has already made up her mind. Finally, Eveline takes action and leaves her home in hopes of starting a new life: "[U]p to this point, there has been a static and stagnant situation. Prior to this…nothing has happened. The narrator has been sitting next to the window recalling and going through her feeling in an unconscious dialogue" (Khorsand: 102). Down at the dock, it still seems as if Eveline is still trying to convince herself that running away with Frank is a good idea. It is uncanny that both of the characters in "Eveline" and "Araby" bring themselves up to this heightened sense of change and happiness only to let them sink down into disappointment after it is done and over. Although Eveline knows that there is a new life and fresh start that will lead to happiness outside of Dublin, she cannot bring herself to leave with Frank. As she stands on the dock, it is as if she is cemented there and cannot move: "She answered nothing…Her distress awoke a nausea in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer. It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish" (Joyce: 31). She watches as the boat Frank is on leaves, but she still does not seem fully confident in her decision to stay; Joyce describes Eveline as a: "passive… helpless animal". Joyce furthers the notion of Frank being insignificant in the larger scheme of things when he writes: "[H]er eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell of recognition". It is clear now that this attempt to escape was never about Frank, but about her own situation. In not allowing herself to fully

obligate herself to the decision to leave with Frank, she does not completely set herself up for disappointment when she finds that she is unable to go, but she is aware that by not going she must prepare herself for a lifetime of regret and looking back at her past. It is unclear, however, if Eveline chose to stay with her father or if she was trying to prevent herself from further hurt or distress in her life with Frank. She is perceptibly not content with her life at the moment, but not despondent enough to do anything but dream about it. When Eveline gazes out her window, it suggests that she wants more, but she cannot truly commit to anything besides staying with her father and fulfilling the promise to her mother. In Missing Pieces in Joyce's Dubliners, we read: "Eveline wants freedom from oppression, but does not possess enough will or selfhood to conceive of freedom to do anything..." (French: 451) What is clear is the fact that Eveline is not living her full life; she is simply reacting to the people and experiences around her. Nothing she does is for herself; she is simply trying to please the people around her. Eveline cannot escape this life that she was born into, but this is not just a question of whether she can or not, it is a question of if she wants to. At the end of "Eveline," we see her stuck in her own emotions and caught between her grieving father and the life she is comfortable with or a life that could provide a new beginning for her: "All what we have is Eveline's imaginations and hesitation" (Khorsand: 101). This adventure that Eveline is given the chance to take is just a quick escape from her current situation: she does not ever truly see herself leaving with Frank. David Ben-Mere concludes: The tragic ending, where she waits "like a helpless animal" at the dock, is classically understood as yet another example of Dublin's paralysis and its citizenry's metaphorical death. Like so many of her companions in Joyce's short-story collection, Eveline has made the "wrong" choice (455,456). Eveline, like our narrator in Araby is disappointed in herself and her inability to take charge of her own life and make a decision for herself. Khorsand writes: "the point with "Eveline" is that in that story actually nothing happens. The character is inactive. She practically does

nothing in the process of the story and her only action is a refusal to take an action: leaving the country". Yet again, we find a lonely alienated character that is trapped by the constraints of life. Eveline, much like Gabriel and Gretta in "The Dead" hold onto the past and the ghosts that come with it and allow them to seep into their current lives. Another aspect worth analysing is Hart vision (1969: 48) of the structure of Eveline's story, in fact he states that "The controlling structure of all the main elements of the story – plot, psychological development, imagery – is the opposition between change and no-change, between fevered action and frozen immobility. One of the key concepts which Joyce uses to give expression to this opposition is expressed in the word 'invasion', the idea being present in the first line: She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue', as if the plot of the story intertwined with the flow of thoughts in the mind of the protagonist.

III.   Female figures and society in the novel "1984" by G. Orwell

III.1. Defining the Contemporary Novel in the Postmodern Age

*"It is in the field of literary studies that the
Term 'postmodernism' has received the widest
Usage and provoked the most intense debate.
There have been many attempts to theorise the
Consequences and manifestations of
Postmodernism for literature, all usually
Running into problems of historical and formal
definition."[6]*

The novel 1984 by G. Orwell is part of what in literature is defined as the "post-historical novel", and in this paragraph this concept will be defined, as well as its main characteristics and context of development will be analysed. The novel in fact arose in a period strongly influenced by pessimism and post-modern philosophy, and the plot has been strongly influenced by this aspect and by the apocalyptic mood of the story. As stated by Nicol (2002: 9) in his essay, "Postmodernism and the contemporary novel have always enjoyed something of a special relationship, however complicated it has been. The postmodern debate has been particularly useful to anyone seeking to grasp the complexities and preoccupations of the fiction produced over the last few decades". From these words it is clear that modern novel and Postmodern Age are deeply intertwined. Before proceeding with the analysis of the modern novel, it is important to define what Postmodernism is, even if among critics there are different definitions of this term. One of the earliest uses of the term "postmodernity" was given by historian A. Tonybee in his study "A study of history" published in 1954, where he summarizes the concept saying that the term describes a historical period beginning since the end of the XIX century where a lot of changes took place, such as wars and broken peace. Later on, other

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[6] Woods, T, 1999, *Beginning Postmodernism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press

interpretations came to light around this concept. According to Nicol (2002: 13) "Among the theorists featured here there is a general consensus that postmodernism is the consequence of a new social and economic formation that begins around the middle of the twentieth century and ushers in significant cultural changes as a result", while according to critic S. Malpas (2005: 12):

> Postmodernism, with its focus on style and modes of representation, is often read as a successor to modernism, the collection of literary and cultural movements that emerged across Europe and North America during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. There are modernisms in literature, music, art, theatre, dance, architecture and even photography, Again, as with the multiplicity of postmodernisms, the problem that faces the critic is that each of these is different each of the others, and some (such as literature, art and music, even have multiple strands within their own modernisms which each lead in turn to more forms of postmodernism.

Another definition is given by Mari (2006: 77), who alleges that:

> Postmodern thought also seeks to elaborate a conception of history starting from the experience of time that exists in the human condition of our society, in which, for numerous reasons, both the connection between present and past and that between present and future can no longer be registered, either in the thought of traditional societies, or in more recent thought, directed trustingly or mythologically toward the exaltation of innovation and progress.

Another interesting definition of Postmodernism is given by J.F. Lyotard (in Nicol, 2002: 73) alleging what follows:

> Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences:

but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative, language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive meaning, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valences specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.

After considering a few definitions of the concept of Postmodernism, it is possible to place the modern novel within this framework. According to Calder (1976: 8), "Orwell had almost given up hope in 1948 when he wrote Nineteen Eighty-Four. Orwell saw power politics, not science, as the major threat to mankind, and he had had over the previous twelve years or so plenty of opportunity to savour the possibilities of power. In Nineteen Eighty-Four he was coping with both a personal and a public depression. His hopes of social revolution now seemed to him illusory", it can therefore be said that postmodernist novel was strongly influenced by the politic and world economic situation. In the Postmodern Age a change in society took place, as described by Asimakopoulos (2020: 4) who states that "in hierarchical orders, elites control the social structure and cultural production. Every society has a structure comprising statuses and roles within groups, networks, and institutions. Statuses are socially defined positions within a group or society – work status, for example. Statuses can be achieved or ascribed, but overall, one has a dominant master status.", so it is clear that the position within society is fundamental to define the hierarchical role of an individual with respect to the other. In this regard, Malpas (2005: 31) gives an interesting feedback on the way in which

Postmodernism has affected the XX century, stating that "this model of postmodernism presents culture as a continually mutating entity that is made up of a series of challenges and readjustments as postmodern works are assimilated. In other words, what counts as modernism or postmodernism will change as a culture adapts to the provocations that works of art produce. Equally, works that are postmodern for one culture may be modern or even realist for another.", returning an idea of Postmodernism as a current that has transformed the way of conceiving literature and visual arts in general. Considering the historical period in which Postmodernism developed, Bertens (1995: 180) affirms that "Postmodernism is what you get when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good", taking into account that i.e. an event such as the Industrial revolution was one of the most important circumstance that allowed society to make an epochal change from one era to another. As Sontag (in Nicol, 2002: 153) alleges:

> In the last few years there has been a good deal of discussion of a purported chasm which opened up some two centuries ago, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, between 'two cultures', the literary-artistic and the scientific". According to this diagnosis, any intelligent and articulate modern person is likely to inhabit one culture to the exclusion of the other. He will be concerned with different documents, different techniques, different problems; he will speak a different language.

This statement can let therefore imagine how the Industrial Revolution, consequently to the end of 1930 Big Depression, was a historical event that profoundly changed the way of living and thinking about the future of a social environment. In the case of 1984, the historical period pays a fundamental role since, as we will see in the next paragraph, many of the methods used by totalitarian regimes to control the masses are precisely those implemented by Big Brother. Some critics asserted that Big Brother's behavior was the

same as that of Stalinism when it carried out the deportations to the gulags. For example, Ataria (2019) writes that "Similarly to Winston Smith–Orwell's hero in the novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, the prisoner is rebooted and reborn as an object belonging to the Gulag. In this situation, the prisoner internalizes the Gulag's rules in the deepest possible manner." That of the gulags was a very sad page in world history, and Orwell refers to it very openly in 1984. Some other critics have also questioned which totalitarian regime in particular Orwell was focusing on when he wrote 1984, and an interesting view point is given by Hall (in Norris, 1984: 224,225), who affirms that "there is also the question of how much nineteen Eighty-Four was a caricature of Soviet totalitarianism, and how far it is pointed at totalitarian tendencies latent in all the superstates, including Western capitalism", suggesting that the book is a critique to Communism, but without actually excluding any references to Nazism and Fascism. It is interesting to notice what Easthope (in Norris, 1984: 271) states about the genre of 1984, that is "Nineteen Eighty-Four is not classic science fiction. Relatively low on fantasy situations and high on psychological complexity, it is much closer to the traditional realism of the nineteenth-century novel. On the basis of a rendering of individuals situated in an internally consistent world of everyday reality, a narrative is sustained according to the conventional links by which cause and effect are assumed to hook together", making 1984 not only a science fiction novel, but also a masterpiece connected to the reality of the time.

III.2. 1984: a dystopian novel as a result of Postmodernism

"Fair is foul and foul is fair."[7]

As seen in the previous paragraph, Postmodernism was characterized by a change in ethical values and political values of society. In literature, this movement has led to the

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[7] W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 1, scene 1

emergence of new literary genres, such as i.e. the dystopian novel. One of the most famous dystopian novels, 1984, was published in 1949, after World War II and the end of the historical totalitarian systems like Fascism, Nazism and Communism. In reference to this, it is interesting to analyse what Calder (1976: 45) states about Orwell's critique towards totalitarianism, that is:

> When Nineteen Eighty-Four was published many readers read the book as a statement of Orwell's rejection of socialism. That it was never intended to be this most critics now agree, but the fact that it could be read in that way, and was even embraced by the political right wing as a weapon for their cause, poses a problem.

In this regard, it is also interesting what critic R.A. Epstein (in Gleason, Goldsmith & Nussbaum, 2005: 66) affirms about Orwell's vision on totalitarian regimes, that is:

> In dealing with the totalitarian impulse, Orwell does a credible job in exposing the twisted personalities of the leaders. But he utterly fails to exposing the twisted personalities of the leaders. But he utterly fails to explain the durability or success of any totalitarian regime. On this point we have Orwell's implicit prophecy that the totalitarian nations will grow stronger over time so that their sheer mass will crush a prostrate world.

Dystopian societies are societies that have taken a wrong turn, societies where people are worth something to the government based on who or what they are to the regime and are given rights based on their behaviour and subservience to the leaders of the society. The population is usually divided into groups within the society. This gives them a sense of being together as well as creating us versus them situations that the leaders can use to their advantage to keep control over the population. As stated by Wilson (2013)," the words 'utopia' and 'dystopia' have more specific meanings than the term 'speculative

fiction'. Although one may speculate about all sorts of things, like the other terms, speculative fiction is usually about the nature of the world. To think about utopia, however, one must think about the ideal or perfect. Dystopia involves utopia's opposite: a nightmare, the ultimate flawed world, or 'a society worse than the existing one". This means that in the dystopian novel reality is exaggerated in order to make the setting a negative background of what are the mechanisms of a narrative setting. In the novel 1984, "Big Brother", which can be considered as a sort of allegory of the control that took place in totalitarian regimes, controls everything that people do. As described by Orwell in the novel (2000: 187,188):

> Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration. Nobody has ever seen Big Brother. He is a face on the hoardings, a voice on the telescreen. We may be reasonably sure that he will never die, and there is already considerable uncertainty as to when he was Born. Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear and reverence, emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than towards an organisation.

This part of the book may let deduce the features that characterized the leaders of the totalitarian regimes, and these leaders knew and saw everything about their State, but without showing themselves in public more than strictly necessary in order to assert their power. As stated by Campbell (in Norris, 1984: 126):

> Big Brother has become the metaphor for the modern state, and, although its success is formidable, since the term has become part of our political vocabulary, it is also a problem. Orwell's state is not just a spectre of secrecy and surveillance, because the

whole thesis also depends on a notion of absolute power which depends on the condition of mass powerlessness. In this context it is significant that Orwell feels comfortable in the temperate climes of English capitalism before the Second World War, only decades after the working class had won the franchise and before it was a major power in the land. It is post-revolutionary power which inflames his nightmare of the future state – his critique of the modern state is unmistakably directed against the socialist state.

It is clear that the novel and the clear references to the restriction of fundamental freedoms are an open critique of the political regimes that had dominated or were dominating the world of the time. In the book, in fact, "Big Brother" is an unidentified entity that controls people's behaviour and way of thinking, forcing them to do nothing that is not foreseen by the regime. In a statement made by Calder (1976: 35), "Big Brother is the logical extension of the uncritical acceptance of political power", it is therefore the human being who accepts the political power that has been imposed without resisting it. The language used by the regime is used as a tool by the dystopian government as a way to create barriers between the people that live within the society and to make this seem normal in their liberal use of everyday words or expressions to hide this in plain sight. It is interesting to consider what Calder (1976: 15) affirms about Orwell's language in 1984, that is:

> Orwell's language bluntly conveys the possibility of disaster. One senses throughout the book a state of mind that had to dispense with frills and graciousness – although Orwell had always aimed for a style as direct and unadulterated as possible. One of the most impressive aspects of the book is the way in which the style is totally appropriate for the message. There is one moment, when the language can't quite do what is required of it, [the famous rats scene,] but the failure there arises from the choice of an inadequate symbol of the ultimate personal terror. Perhaps the greatest

achievement of the book is the way in which Orwell has made language state so plainly, without strain or detectable exaggeration, so devastating a nightmare.

The novel is full of contradictory language, the main example is the slogan repeated by the Party, which is "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength" (Orwell, 2000: 7) and contradictory collocations, for example "The Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war" (Orwell, 2000: 8). It can be argued that language and human rights are closely connected in the novel, as one can lead to the lack of the other. By allowing some of the citizens basic human rights whilst at the same time withholding it from other members of the society, the regime or the people in charge of the society create a "us vs. them" mentality in the population that makes it easier to control people. It can be stated that language is also used to dehumanize people, as some are seen as not even being human or have lost their right to be considered human by the government. A limiting of personal freedom and dehumanization is also common in many dystopian societies due to the fear that people were becoming mechanised and an increase of critical thinking that, by many of the authors of dystopian novels, was a worrying sign and needed to be explored whilst at the same time warned against. They believed that "There is, however, another significant element … the fact that the lives of the factory workers are excessively regulated by the nature of their labour and their shift-patterns, to the point where they become mechanised themselves" (Stableford, 264). The authors of dystopian novels found this mechanisation of humans during the nineteenth-century to be an interesting and daunting element in the industrial world. This was something that was an established anxiety that, according to Stableford, dated back to the Romantic movements. It is interesting to note what Calder (1976: 9) writes about the contextualization of dystopian novels, in fact he states that "it is not the violence in Nineteen Eighty-Four that is the book's most alarming feature, although it is so hard to forget, but the control of the

mind through the control of history. In Orwell's Oceania men are manipulated through the manipulation of facts and of the past – although an atmosphere of constant warfare and continual threat is a necessary environment for this manipulation, underlining what the totalitarian regimes had put in place through the use i.e. of propaganda. Generally, propaganda spreads in order to support a cause, a political leader, a regime, or an organization. In the context of the novel 1984, a huge propaganda made about Big Brother, and it often serves purposes of the party. In addition, propaganda pictures the presence of Big Brother in 1984. Big Brother controls Oceania and its citizens by adopting different methods like fear, surveillance and propaganda. The Party uses propaganda to spread a good image about Big Brother. So, various slogans are made to reinforce the supremacy of Big Brother such as; war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength. Moreover, facts are fabricated to make people accept whatever party's reality, and this weakens the individuality of person's mind and obligates them into a continuous state of propaganda. To clarify, the extent Big Brother parallels to religion in 1984. Big Brother has features that draw the attention to God, for example, he is the head of the state and he never appears in the story. Yet, his physical appearance does not exist, but his control over people is always present. Big Brother is a dominating figure because he sees everything around Oceania. Therefore, the features of Big Brother in the novel can symbolize God because only God who has this features and Big Brother represent God of citizens in Oceania. The Party makes itself so powerful in order citizens of Oceania do not need religion. Instead, the Party has created Big Brother, a God-like figure who demands total obedience from his people. These considerations lead to the deduction that Orwell analysed and studied human nature in a very thorough way before writing the novel. This was deducted also by critic M. Drabble (in Gleason, Goldsmith & Nussbaum, 2005: 44), who states that:

On the evidence of Nineteen Eighty-Four it may easily be argued that Orwell had a low and essentially reductive view of human nature. As we have seen, the novel demonstrates how Orwell believes that we may all, even the bravest of us, be reduced by political manipulation and by violence to the lowest of acts. We become worse than rats. No one resists torture. Altruism does not exist. The gene is selfish, and the individual man is selfish. We are not, ultimately, capable of social or personal altruism.

All this occurs throughout the novel, in particular in the part where Winston is tortured in order to make him admit his secret opposition to the regime. After such considerations, it is important to take into account the period of life in which Orwell wrote the novel. In this regard, Gleason (2005: 82) states what follows:

Orwell seems to have begun what became Nineteen Eighty-Four in August 1946, when he was living on the island of Jura in the Hebrides. By the time he was seriously embarked on the project, his mood had been steadily darkening for several years, and it continued to do so. Partly, no doubt, this was due to his long struggle with illness. The awful winter of 1946-47 contributed to his contraction (or recontraction) of tuberculosis, and during the summer and fall of 1947 his health deteriorated drastically. But it was above all the unexpected death of his wife, Eileen, on the operating table at the end of March 1945, a blow from which he never fully recovered, that dramatically increased his loneliness and isolation.

It is therefore easy to understand how these negative facts influenced the redaction of 1984 as a dystopian novel, and the representation of the protagonists as victims who suffer what happens in the regime without having the strength to oppose it. There are may ways in which Big Brother exerts his power within the novel, the most used are the concepts of 'Newspeak' and 'Doublethink'. According to Zimbardo (in Gleason, Goldsmith, &

Nussbaum, 2005: 132) "by cancelling a lexicon of purged words, such as honour, justice, morality, and democracy, Newspeak abolished the underlying concepts that they expressed. Then, through the substitution of new words for old concepts, all conceptual analysis came to be meaningless and therefore stopped; liberty and justice became *crimethink* and rationalism became *oldthink*, and sexual relations not state prescribed became *sexcrime*". For what concerns 'Doublethink', it was a sort of mental cheating that generated doubt about the veracity of anything that happened. The definition given by Zimbardo (in Gleason, Goldsmith, & Nussbaum, 2005: 132, 133) is very interesting, as he states what follows:

> Doublethink is similar to" trance logic" among hypnotized subjects when they try to create a rational explanation for an irrational perception of a hallucinatory experience suggested by the hypnotist. At one level of consciousness, they know the hallucination they are experiencing is not an empirically valid perception, while at the same time, at another level of consciousness, they do not grasp that fact and believe the suggested hallucination is real. Thus they vigorously try to rationalize this anomaly to themselves and to others in order to make sense of the nonsensical experience. Doublethink similarly induces doubt and the need for the person to convince him- or herself that what is not really should be so.

It is therefore clear that there was a manipulation of thought combined with the spread of neologisms that could support the authority of the regime by confusing the masses on concepts that up to that moment were sufficiently expressed by the language without the necessity to insert new terms. It is interesting to analyse West's (in Gleason, A, Goldsmith, J, & Nussbaum, M C, 2005: 245) point of view, as he states that "Nineteen Eighty-Four quite clearly reflects the view, not uncommon among socialist, left-leaning intellectuals at mid-century, that communism – socialism combined with a horrific degree

of concentrated state power – was the great threat with which we all had to reckon, and unchecked state power was unquestionably the evil that lurked at its core." By carefully analysing the novel, it can be seen that Orwell is very pessimistic about the world future. As critic Hall (in Norris, 1984: 234, 235) states, "the novel was predicated on the stark proposition: 'what if totalitarianism is the future of all societies?'. The centre piece of this conception of a general totalitarian form of the modern state was the concept, not of class, but of power.", underlining the concern for the establishment of a totalitarian regime on a world level. This is the reason why the novel, especially in the end, leaves an open reflection on the political future of society. Some critics like Piers (2004) affirm that:

> The intimate historical relationship between the Utopia and the dystopia mirrors that between the intensity of hope and fear within the individual psyche as that psyche responds to an increasingly technological culture. As such, both in its historical significance and in its often characteristic concerns with power, liberty, and instrumentalization, examination of the dystopian literary frame is an ideal area for philosophical investigation into the deepest human fears and concerns raised by the dynamics of modernity, engaging as it does with the characteristic fears of a technological era in one of its most distinctive sources of artistic expression. The dystopian genre is thus a characteristically modern expressive arena in which the distinctive anxieties of our technological era are given voice in detailed form.

It is interesting to note the description of the concept of dystopia given by the author, which becomes also an object of interest in philosophical research.

III.3. An underground love: analysis of the character of Julia

"You're only a rebel from the waist downwards"[8]

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[8] Orwell, G, 2000, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, London, Penguin Books Ltd (p. 128)

In his book, the author sent several messages to the reader, especially regarding the increasingly invasive appearance of technology in human life, to which he risks becoming a slave. Winston and Julia are rudimentary figures because they are slowly learning, and at great personal risk, what it means to be men. One of the most representative scenes is the one in which Winston, trying to find out what life was like before Big Brother, talks to an old prolet owner of a pub who tells him that he only remembers disconnected fragments of his past, which cannot be reached. to no conclusion. Totalitarian society has managed to destroy the past by modifying or destroying objective documents and facts and, in many cases, has managed to eliminate even the very memory of the past by disintegrating the individual conscience. The problem of memory haunts Winston and he ceases to be an opponent of the system only when he ceases to believe in the past. What is striking is the passivity with which citizens accept as "truth", something they know very well is not true; the passivity with which they accept the existence of a ministry in which employees have the sole task of changing newspapers and history books daily to adapt them to the current situation and make Big Brother appear more heroic. In the novel, Julia is Winston's lover and the only other person who Winston can be sure hates the Party and wishes to rebel against it as he does. Despite this consideration, critics like Connors (1970) allege that:

> Subsequent passages, it should be noted, abundantly confirm that Winston lacks genuine feeling for Julia. Shortly after his arrest, he examines his peculiar relationship with Julia. Orwell writes: "He hardly ever thought of Julia. He could not fix his mind on her. He loved her and would not betray her; but that was only a fact, known as he knew the rules of arithmetic. He felt no love for her, and he hardly ever wondered what was happening to her" (p. 232). A few pages later—and prior to his initial confrontation with O'Brien—Winston explores the question again. "He thought: 'If I could save Julia by doubling my own pain, would I do it? Yes I would.'

But that was merely an intellectual decision, taken because he knew that he ought to

take it. He did not feel it" (p. 242).

As Sunstein (in Gleason, Goldsmith, & Nussbaum, 2005: 236) correctly summarizes, "the erotic connection between Julia and Winston produces a threat to the Party". Whereas Winston is restless, fatalistic, and concerned about large-scale social issues, Julia is sensual, pragmatic, and generally content to live in the moment and make the best of her life. Winston longs to join the Brotherhood and read Emmanuel Goldstein's abstract manifesto; is more concerned with enjoying sex and making practical plans to avoid getting caught by the Party. Winston essentially sees their affair as temporary; his fatalistic attitude makes him unable to imagine his relationship with Julia lasting very long. Julia, on the other hand, is well adapted to her chosen forms of small-scale rebellion. She claims to have had affairs with various Party members, and has no intention of terminating her pleasure-seeking, or of being caught (her involvement with Winston is what leads to her capture). is a striking contrast to Winston: apart from their mutual sexual desire and hatred of the Party, most of their traits are dissimilar, if not contradictory. When in the novel Winston and Julia fall in love, his love is bound to be difficult to carry on and strewn with obstacles. As Calder describes (1976: 22, 23):

The relationship with Julia is, of course, not at all satisfactory. The circumstances

under which it is conducted would hardly allow it to be, but its lack is contained

more fundamentally in Julia herself and in Winston's unwillingness to accept her

inadequacy. He needs her, but politically she can be of no use to him. Julia has no

interest in the political aspect of their actions, although she is acute in her

understanding of the ways of the Party and she realises why her sexuality cannot be

tolerated. She wants to escape the power of the Party, not attack it. Her

communication with Winston is almost entirely sexual, and although that is

important, as the love-making scenes in the almost dream land of the countryside and the womb-like interior of the room above the junk shop emphasize, it is not enough.

In the context of the novel, "the sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime." (Orwell, 63), as well as a limiting of personal freedom and dehumanization is also common in many dystopian societies due to the fear that people were becoming mechanised and an increase of critical thinking that, by many of the authors of dystopian novels, was a worrying sign and needed to be explored whilst at the same time warned against. In detail, as stated by Calder (1976: 21), "Julia's crime is that her frank sexuality is impermissible, but she sees her rebellion merely in personal terms, and she sees the Party's authority only in terms of how it restricts her wants". In the novel, Julia is described as a helpful person, ready to listen to Winston at any moment. For example, in Part II chapter IX, Winston is reading at a book, and even if Julia is not interested, she gives him her full attention. Winston says in fact "Julia, are you awake?" and she answers "Yes my love, I'm listening. Go on. It's marvellous" (Orwell, 2000: 182). This part of the book demonstrates what Campbell (in Norris, 194: 132) affirms about women's condition in Orwell's novels, above all in 1984, and that is" women are congratulated only when they stick in their men". It is important to consider that in the novel, the Party exerts a strong emotional control on people. As described by Zimbardo (in Gleason, Goldsmith, & Nussbaum, 2005: 134), "when exclusive Party loyalty was threatened by passions and spontaneous seeking of intimate pleasure, the Party punished such *sexcrime*. It is more difficult to dehumanize those who are in touch with primitive instincts, who are intimately connected with another person as a vital physical unit that might resist more vigorously than either partner in an isolated test-tube existence". In this regard it is possible to affirm that Winston and Julia are guilty of sexcrime, and that the

regime punishes them for having carried on an underground love and above all in contrast with the rules of the Party. For a better contextualization of the character of Julia, it is necessary to associate her with the character of Winston. In fact, he is the one who gives Julia a strong characterization of her personality. This concept is well described by Campbell (in Norris, 1984: 133) who states that "Julia is Winston's sleeping partner in sedition. Her rebellion is essentially sexual. She's promiscuous, she's had hundreds of men and her subversion is sealed in an equation between corruption and sexuality". In the same way, he compares Julia to Winston's former wife Katherine affirming that "in a curiously sexual politics, he counterposes Julia's revolutionary rapaciousness with his former wife Katherine's puritanism. Her party loyalty is expressed in her frigidity. Julia's delicious revolt is consummated in her illicit collection of make-up: throwing off the uniform of the party she dons the mantle of femininity". Many critics agree on the fact that Orwell is very anti-feminist in his writings. According to Beddoe (in Norris, 1984: 140):

Orwell was not only anti-feminist but he was totally blind to the role women were and are forced to play in the order of things. His prejudice severely hampered his analysis of capitalism and its workings. He saw capitalism as the exploitation of a male working class by a male ruling class. Women were just men's wives – middle class nags and working-class housekeepers, to be judged simply as good or bad in keeping a 'decent' home. He failed to see how capitalism manipulated both men and women, middle class and working class, alike. He seems to have been totally unaware of the integral role played by the family unit in capitalist production, i.e. male bread-winner with dependent wife (who serviced the male bread-winner and produced the next generation of workers) and dependent children. He was unaware too – or chose to ignore – the role women played in the waged work-force, either as

poorly paid workers who could depress wages or as a reserve army of labour, to be brought in and out of the work-force to suit the changing needs of capitalism.

As can be seen from these considerations, the role of women and the capitalism that characterized the era in which 1984 is set are closely related. In this regard, Beddoe provides a description of Julia as "Winston Smith's ally in the fight against Big Brother and totalitarianism; but whereas Winston's fight against the system is inspired by a desire for intellectual freedom, Julia goes along with him for illicit sex, black-market coffee and finally for love of Winston.", describing her as the stereotype of a frivolous woman with no true values for which to advance any important cause. Beddoe (147, 148) gives a detailed description of the character of Julia, who is painted as follows:

> Julia, Winston's mistress in Nineteen Eighty-Four, is distinguished from Orwell's other female characters in that she shows courage. She flouts the minor and then the major rules of this future totalitarian society. It is she who initiates contact with Winston: she has the enterprise and experience to arrange liaisons with him. She is prepared too to follow Winston in joining the Brotherhood, the opposition to Big Brother. But the protests of Winston and Julia against the regime are inspired by totally different motives. Whereas Winston is inspired by intellectual concepts like the integrity of history and the notion of freedom, Julia is only 'a rebel from the waist downwards'. The sexually attractive and sexually active Julia objects to the regime because it stops her having a good time. She is totally incapable of understanding the motives which drive Winston to revolt. 'Any kind of organized revolt against the Party, which was bound to be a failure, struck her as stupid. The clever thing was to break the rules and stay alive all the same'. When Winston talks to her of the Party and its doctrines, she invariably falls asleep. Her response to his reading of Goldstein's subversive text is the same […] Orwell's portrayal of the main female characters in his novels encapsulates his opinion on women. He is contemptuous of

women's intellects; he reduces married women and spinsters to stereotypes and in
the portrayal of both he draws on the conventions of seaside postcards.

This representation made by Orwell of women in his novels, and therefore also of Julia, clarifies in a very important way the features of the character who supports Winston in the fight against Big Brother. Julia is also sexually important in the novel because as Easthope (in Norris, 1984: 283) alleges:

Julia is the paperweight, Julia as the paperweight, is meant to be a mirror in whose reflection Winston Smith may appear fully present to himself in the form he wishes to see himself, a transcendent ego. The paperweight represents 'a sort of eternity', a point at which being is infinitely present outside temporal difference as well as spatial difference, a completed circle.

Thus, Julia becomes the mean through which Winston expresses his most hidden impulses. Moreover, Julia represents a sort of moral deterioration, a concept described by Calder (1976: 23) who alleges that:

The fact that Julia's use of make-up is also a part of this 'reality' might seem a contradiction, but it is important because, in Winston's eyes, it enhances her femininity, and therefore her sexuality, and a crucial part of their relationship is natural sexuality. The Party discourages femininity, and the hearty, robust image Julia adopts for the Party's benefit.

In this sense, the novel tends to diminish the female figure and all the characteristics associated with it. It is interesting to analyse what Sunstein (in Gleason, Goldsmith & Nussbaum, 2005: 237) writes about the sexual relationship between Julia and Winston, that is:

Julia claims – and though this is not entirely clear, she seems to be speaking in Orwell's voice – that if people are sexually active, they "feel happy and don't give a damn for anything". Political orthodoxy is a consequence of sexual frustration, which governments can channel into marching and flag-waving and the Two Minutes Hate. Sexual satisfaction removes the taste for these forms of political participation; people will no longer "get excited" once they are happy "inside" themselves.

It follows that the sexual part of the human being is important in the reflection of people's social life, and particularly in 1984 this aspect is treated as one of the methods to install shame in the human being and therefore give power to Big Brother. And further, Sunstein provides an important vision of sexuality in the totalitarian regime, which is as follows:

Orwell suggests that totalitarian governments favor "sexual puritanism", which induces "hysteria", something that such governments mobilize in their own favor. This is the image of patriotic frenzy as "sex gone sour." On this view, sexual freedom embodies freedom and individualism, and it is the deepest enemy of a totalitarian state. A state that allows sexual freedom will be unable to repress its citizens.

This is why Julia can be considered a heroine in this novel, as her battle against the regime becomes an individual battle against everything that limits human nature. Julia's character is also important in the moment of Winston's conversion to the regime. In a climate where sexuality is one of the evils par excellence, Winston's thoughts in front of the beautiful Julia appear natural but rebellious, unexpected. After all, his love for women is initially an attraction mixed with violence, a sense of hatred overwhelmed by desire. Dissatisfied with a perfect marriage only on Big Brother cameras, Winston's dreams are in fact so populated by a rebellious and naked Julia, like him an enemy of the Party. The relationship between Julia and Winston is therefore a matter of revolt towards

the system, the union of two enlightened and courageous people, but alone in the world. It is not the mutual attraction that unites the two lovers - not only that - but their common enemy, their common desire to feel human in a world of denied humanity. The tragic end of the two protagonists of 1984 is well known, but the way in which Orwell represents such a particular love story amazes at every reading. Sexuality, a literary element that usually develops between taboo and provocation, becomes here a strategy of controlling the masses, prompting the reader not only to enjoy the English author's prose, but also to reflect on real life, outside of the pages. Connecting to a contemporary vision, it could be said that in people's life nowadays nothing more is private, even telephone conversations can be easily intercepted and so, without us realizing it, what we say to our girlfriend or our mother can be accidentally heard by other ears because maybe: it was believed to be a conversation in code. We should ask ourselves nowadays and ask ourselves whether we are really freer at the dawn of the first decade of the XX century than our predecessors were seventy years ago during the period of the great dictatorships. It is not difficult to imagine who is behind this Big Brother in the age of the god of money, perhaps the governments themselves are in the dark or at least powerless in the face of this. Economic interests come first and the world is now governed by those who are more wealthy and able to make other individuals submit to their will. The most important thing is to avoid that the Big Brother who controls us takes possession, as in the book, of our conscience and our feelings, making us little more than puppets to be moved at one's own interest and pleasure.

IV. Female figures and society in the novel Purple Hibiscus by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

IV.1. Postcolonial literature and features of the novel

And so everywhere they went they turned it into England; and everybody they met they turned into English. But no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly them would ever be English.

Jamaica Kincaid, A small Place, 1988

The term "Postcolonial literature" is an expression that can indicate two different literary categorizations. According to critic Kaul (in Carey & Festa, 2009: 305):

Postcolonial scholarship begins with the assumption that postcolonial histories of empire originate in modes of consciousness and critique developed during the anticolonial struggles of the early twentieth century and the bloody processes of mid- and laten twentieth-century decolonization in European colonies across the globe. This origin reminds us that the specifically postcolonial dimensions of such revisionary historiography – including the aspiration to cast off European political control, to re-examine and rebuild economies and societies, to rethink and remake cultural structures as well as modes of collective and individual subject-formation – are not simply acts of the intellect. Postcolonial historiography is informed by active processes of political engagement that derive their intellectual priorities from dynamic contemporary challenges; from the knowledge that the colonial history of the independent nation, sedimented into state and institutional practices, militates against some changes and encourages others; and from the understanding that the political economy of the globe forged by over two centuries of European imperialism will continue to structure international relations in the foreseeable future.

According to some critics, it corresponds to all literary production in some way in contrast to everything that was "colonial", that is, linked to a political, linguistic and cultural hegemony of the European colonial powers over the colonies; according to others, the "postcolonial" should be understood in a chronological sense, referring to everything that is produced in the period following the colonial one. As Aschcroft alleges (2001: 7), "Post-colonial studies developed as a way of addressing the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism.", while Carey (in Carey & Festa, 2009: 105) affirms that "Postcolonial scholarship in particular has been attuned to the disjunction in the period between a politics of liberation and autonomy, which coincides at the same time with imperial expansion and the subjugation of native peoples, and a new ethics of equality which nonetheless occurs in an era of slavery unprecedented in its scale and brutality."; in a similar vision, Brennan (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 102) states that "Deriving many of its motifs and much of its language from the anticolonial independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s, postcolonial studies has always in one sense been about emancipation.", and Cooper (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 401) alleges that:

Postcolonial studies have brought before a large and transcontinental public the place of colonialism in world history, yet it has tended to obscure the very history whose importance it has highlighted. A generic colonialism – located somewhere between 1492 and the 1970s – has been given the decisive role in shaping a postcolonial moment, in which intellectuals can condemn the continuation of invidious distinctions and exploitation and celebrate the proliferation of cultural hybridities and the fracturing of cultural boundaries.

Another interesting viewpoint is given by Lionnet (1995: 23) who states that:

Postcolonial writers have had to invent mythologies of their own, stories and allegories of "self" and "other" that can translate this complex heritage and perhaps

make a difference by helping to transform the mentality of the oppressed as well as their self-perception. Postcolonial autobiography, in all its myriad forms, is best defined by this transformative and visionary dimension: by the conviction that writing matters and that narrative has the power to transform the reader. Writers from a variety of colonial backgrounds are often moved by a sense of urgency and responsibility and by a need to take risks that help change the form of the genre as well as relations of power in society.

Similarly, Francesconi (in Palusci, 2006: 209, 210) affirms what follows:

Undoubtedly, Western languages have constituted the agencies of colonisation: they have been variously imposed either on the whole population or on specific social groups on the basis of social, political and economic privileges. These hegemonic media have basically occupied intellectual spaces, functioning as languages of education in the colonies. This helps to explain why a significant portion of non-Western texts have been written in colonial languages rather than in their writer's native tongues.

A similar vision is givens also by Aschcroft (2001: 124) who affirms that:

The issues surrounding the concept of place – how it is conceived, how it differs from 'space' or 'location', how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, how it becomes the horizon of identity – are some of the most difficult and debated in post-colonial experience. The physical occupation and control of space have been crucial to British imperialism.

Furthermore, from the perspective of a rough description of what postcolonial theory is, Lazarus (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 427) states that "there is no need to deny that the concepts, problematics, and methods generated within postcolonial studies have contributed decisively to the interpretation and elucidation of important literary works today called

postcolonial", while Lionnet (1995: 171) affirms that "For the colonial or postcolonial writer, caught in this unstable landscape despite herself and subjected to a system of thought that consigns her to the margins while necessarily implicating her in the system whose language she uses, the question of historical change has always been a primordial one". Postcolonialism developed from the early 1950s and aimed to change the dominant ways of thinking about the relationships between the Western and non-Western world, trying to overturn the image of the world by looking beyond, trying to understand how it is different. According to Boehmer (1995: 196):

> For the colonized to tell a history meant assuming control – taking charge of the past, of self-definition, or of political destiny. No longer was history something that came only from outside. Whereas colonized peoples had previously been relegated to early historical periods frozen in time, or to the realm of the timeless, in histories and historical narrative they gained access to temporality. They represented themselves as governing the course of their own lives.

The perception of the world of non-Western subjects, always first formally then informally placed under the dominion of the white-western "ideal" model. One aspect that has been extensively analysed is that of language. In reference to this, Aschcroft (2001: 63) writes that "Postcolonial literatures reveal this most clearly when their appropriations of English, far from inscribing either vernacular or 'standard forms, creates a new discourse at their interface. Post-colonial writing represents neither speech nor local reality but constructs a discourse which may intimate them". Postcolonialism proposed to offer a different vision of the world, it claimed the right of all peoples to have the same material and cultural well-being against a reality that today appears full of inequality in which much of the injustice proceeds along the clearly drawn dividing line

in the time of the expansion of the European empires of the XIX century. Brennan (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 102) summarizes the concept alleging that:

> From the start, in other words, postcolonial studies were caught in a double bind comprising incompatible intellectual traditions. Under the forces of the conservative public climate in which it came into existence, it found its authority in a veiled neomodernism hostile to its origins in the early anticolonial movements, and perhaps for that reason remained theoretically hostile to origins in any form.

In a similar way, Boehmer (1995: 198) affirms that:

> Postcolonial fiction therefore gives structure to, as well as being structured by, history. Here we come to the idea of historical narrative – indeed of narrative in general – as a process of form-giving. The space-time framework and patterns of casualty in a narrative work not only impart coherence to a fragmented history, but also help organize and clarify foundational moments in the anti-imperial movement: the initial emergence of political self-consciousness, say, or the explosion of resistance.

Postcolonial theories, or postcolonial criticism, have been analysed by several critics. Moore-Gilbert (1997: 5) gives a very interesting description about them, stating that:

> Postcolonial criticism and theory alike comprise a variety of practices, performed within a range of disciplinary fields in a multitude of different institutional locations around the globe. Many of these long predate the period when the term 'postcolonial' began to gain currency and have since been claimed retrospectively as continuous, or contiguous, with what are now commonly identified as postcolonial modes of cultural analysis. Anyone with the temerity to write a history of these practices would probably have to start at least as early as the beginning of this century with the work of figures as different as the African-American thinker.

Moore Gilbert (1997: 8) states also that "Postcolonial criticism has not simply enlarged the traditional field of English studies, or refocused attention on neglected aspects or areas within it. It has also, in association with other relatively recent critical discourses as various as feminism and deconstruction, significantly altered the modes of analysis which were dominant within the discipline in the period from 1945 to 1980". Colonial domination was legitimized by anthropological theories as a need for Western paternalistic protection over those inferior and incapable areas. The basis of these theories started from the concept of race, white and non-white, the white one obviously provided the ideal characteristics of civilization. As stated by Matz (2004: 146) "Europeans were forced to realize that their culture was only one amongst a plurality of ways of conceiving of reality and organizing its representations in art and social practice", postcolonialism therefore indicates a political perspective and an active and operational philosophy aimed at denouncing and contesting these imbalances, continuing the anti-colonial struggles with new forms. It claims the right to access strategic resources and the achievement of one's material well-being, but it also deals with the dynamic power of the cultures that now take over Western societies. Its contents and objectives are therefore anti-elitist and tend to re-evaluate the abilities of the common people, postcolonialism proposes itself as the political voice of the subordinates, of the social classes and of the oppressed peoples. In a similar way, Ashcroft (2001: 21) states that "The most tenacious aspect of colonial control has been its capacity to bind the colonized into a binary myth. Underlying all colonial discourse is a binary of colonizer/colonized, civilized/uncivilized, white /black which works to justify the "*mission civilisatrice*" and perpetuate a cultural distinction which is essential to the 'business of economic and political exploitation.", and he adds (*ibid*) "An alternative, determinist view which proposes that language actually constructs that which is perceived and experienced by speakers is less problematic for post-colonial

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theory, but it is problematic none the less". Theorising the consequences of a racial differentiation, critic Ferguson (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 169) alleges that:

> As racial thinking emerged in its modern form in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, the supposed racial "types2 of Homo sapiens were fitted into a similar scheme. The doctrine of polygenism held that the different "races" were created separately by God and that they held – by nature and by divine plan – different ranks in the overall scheme of things. Opponents of such views often protested that "inferior races did not constitute an original creation, but rather the result of a fall from grace […]

One of the most repressive policies implemented by ethnic white populations towards blacks was that of "apartheid". Apartheid was the racial segregation policy instituted around 1950 by the ethnic white government of South Africa, and remained in force until the early 1990s. This type of segregation was also applied by the South African government to Namibia, until 1996 administered by South Africa. By extension, the term is still used today to emphasize any form of civil and political segregation to the detriment of minorities, by the government of a sovereign state, on the basis of ethnic and social prejudices. In Comaroff's (in Bunzl & al., 2005: 127) vision, "there is copious evidence that the end of apartheid – which came amid seismic shifts in global geopolitics and momentous change in regular modes of communication and representation- has seen the birth of a host of creative new ways of engaging the past". Postcolonial theory is not a scientific theory rather it encompasses a set of interrelated perspectives. It aims to change the way of thinking of Western people through the inclusion of alternative knowledge. All this to create a more just and egalitarian relationship between the different populations of the world. It has some analogies with feminism as it moves from many sides to avoid and cancel the inequalities present in the world. An interesting point of view on

Postcolonialism is given by critic Brennan (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 101) who declares what follows:

> The idea of the global periphery – not just the periphery's physical spaces where cheap manufacturing and resource extraction flourish – is itself an economic engine. A long discourse of dissent, of which postcolonial studies constitutes a particular phase, reminds us that the idea of the global periphery has often relied on inherited prejudices, cultural dissonances, or factual ignorance. In such an argument, the emphasis tends to rest on the offensiveness of the very concept, its epistemological violence (a periphery has inherently less value than a centre, after all). But the moral emphasis deflects a more important aspect of the concept: its utility in the mundane, results-oriented process of profit making. Although not consciously perhaps, the periphery is an idea that is willed, and it governs perception under the quiet dictates of interest".

This may mean that Colonial domination was legitimized by anthropological theories as a need for Western paternalistic protection over those inferior and incapable areas. The basis of these theories started from the concept of race, white and non-white, the white one obviously provided the ideal characteristics of civilization. As Boehmer (1995: 248) underlines, "postcolonial discourse concentrates its energies on hybrid texts because they not only signify but seem to encourage and give support to cultural interaction". Only in the XX century did colonized societies somehow triumph over colonial domination, but it is a relative triumph, as domination from being direct to today turns into indirect form as real independence those imperialists do not give them. They never date, control over the colonies is perpetuated and international power relations have never undergone substantial changes; governments determined to rebel against such impositions and indirect violence have been victims of heavy military reprisals. According to Boehmer (1995: 29), "it was in the nineteenth century that the economic supremacy and political

authority of Europe, and in particular of Britain, became global. For the British, the post-1815 period, or more specifically, the time of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), represented their great age of colonization. By 1815, the nation had established itself as a dominant power in the world, a pacemaker of European industrialization and expansion.", and as is well known, Queen Victoria I was the embodiment of British preponderance in the political affairs of Europe and the symbol of imperial triumph between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Victorian Age, which spans sixty-three years of her reign, was one of the longest in history and at the same time a period of great technological and social changes. At this point it is important to describe what the British Empire represented as a world power. The British Empire was the largest empire of all time. It included colonies, domains, protectorates, mandates and other territories administered by the United Kingdom. Born with the overseas possessions and trading posts founded by England in the late XVI and early XVIII centuries, at its height it was the largest empire in history and for over a century it was a global power and superpower. In 1920, the British Empire ruled about 458 million people, one fifth of the world's population at the time and covered nearly a quarter of the entire surface of the Earth. Therefore its political, legal, linguistic and cultural heritage is still widespread, so much so that at the height of its power the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets", as well as for the ancient Spanish Empire, was often also used to describe the British Empire, since it was so extensive throughout the world that the sun always shone on at least one of its territories. Referring to this aspect, Boehmer writes that "between 1790 and 1820 approximately 150 million people in lands as far apart as southern Africa, Australia, and the Indian subcontinent were declared under British control. Already imposingly imperial in aspect, Britain was now set for the phenomenal growth of Empire under Victoria. Over the next decades, New Zealand, Natal, territories on the West African Coast and in South-East Asia, Australia and Canada were occupied or annexed.", therefore it might be imagined

how the literature of that period was also influenced by this new colonial race that the British Empire was undertaking, and it is important that "While we approach the postcolonial debate, we should remember that the width of the field questions any encompassing definition. Thus Africa constitutes a world apart in which memory plays a peculiar role (Palusci, 2006: 21). Another aspect worth considering is the representation of the colonised people by the writers of the period, in particular black people. As Nussbaum (in Carey & Festa, 2009: 143) points out, "reading the eighteenth century poses a threat to the stability, coherence, and purity of the racial self that is paralleled only by the circumstances of the twenty-first century, As we are increasingly coming to recognize, representations of people of colour in the eighteenth century mutate through the spectrum of tawny, sallow, olive, mulatto, sooty, and ebony – of East Indian, West Indian, American Indian, Pacific islander, and North and sub-Saharan African, all of whom are at times designated in British (if not American) parlance as 'black'", thus leading to focus on the figure of the foreigner, of the person other than the white colonist who finds himself subjected to the sole question of race inferiority. Critic Nussbaum (in Carey & Festa, 2009: 165,166) gives us a very interesting reading of the submission politics carried out by the British Empire towards blacks, stating that:

> Orientalist discourse in England becomes more coherent and legible when the British
> slave trade ends and the focus moves away from African slaves as abject persons.
> Sub-Saharan Africans become more clearly recognizable as prototypical subjects of
> slavery through the process necessary to identify them as eligible for freedom, a
> process that also, ironically, increasingly racializes them. Locating and naming a
> racially inflected sub-Saharan African black contributes to enabling a certain kind of
> Oriental 'so-called' to cohere in the cultural imagination. Recognizing these terrains
> that 'Orientals' and 'Blacks so called' traverse in the eighteenth century may begin
> to modulate the cognitive and spatial structures by which we make sense of the

literary history of British attitudes towards the East, and of the history of blackness,

before the turn into the nineteenth century.

Similarly, critic Lionnet (1995: 173) affirms that "It is therefore not surprising that these fictional postcolonial texts find resonance with many contemporary readers: marginalized, exiled subjects and cultural nomads. Although such readers must invest themselves in the work in order to make sense of it, they can discover there linguistic forms and an eclecticism that parallel their daily experience". Another way of "wandering" in the colonialist discourse is given to us by Boehmer (1995: 79), as he alleges that "In literature, as in colonialist politics, one of the most significant aspects of European self-projection was its representation of the people who inhabited the lands they claimed: the natives, the colonized.", a term that includes not only blacks, but all those who were subjected to the expansionist plans of the colonizers. As critic Walder (in Palusci, 2006: 54) underlines:

> How we identify ourselves depends upon the situation in which we are called upon
>
> to do so, since in practice everyone has more than one identity and even, arguably,
>
> more than one place to call home. Although for most people in long-settled and
>
> unified countries like the United Kingdom, the question of who we are, what we call
>
> ourselves, or where our homeland lies, seems less of an issue than for people in, or
>
> from, the former colonised territories of the world, where national identity has been
>
> a more troubled and troubling phenomenon, and far from settled or agreed.

The conclusion that can be drawn might be that the search for national identity has been the leitmotif of postcolonial literature, with authors who have always tried to define themselves as part of a culture, and that this culture is probably still being defined.

IV.2. Postcolonial influences and women's condition in "Purple Hibiscus"

"Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,

Sounds and sweet airs that give delight
And hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
will hum about mine ears; and sometimes
voices, that if I then had waked after long sleep,
will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
the clouds, methought, would open and show
riches ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again."[9]

The novel "Purple Hibiscus", Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut work, tells the civil and political transformations of postcolonialism, but it is also a novel on the fine line that divides adolescence from adulthood, love from hate. A purple flower, "symbol of freedom and rebellion" (Uko in Emenyonu, 2017: 60), sown and cared for while waiting for it to blossom, which is a symbol of tomorrow, a future that will be the result of a growth made up of questions posed in the face of contradictions. Asking oneself why, asking oneself about one's identity up to the most difficult and important of discoveries: the freedom to be and the importance of fighting for this same freedom. The story, set in Nigeria, inevitably leads to a reflection on the history of Africa and the effects that colonialism has had on it. According to critic Ferguson (in Bunzl & al., 2005: 166):

> Africa always seems to come to the question of modernity from without. Generations of Western scholars have considered Africa as either beyond the pale of the modern (the savage heart of darkness that lurks beyond the edges of the civilized world) or before it (the "primitive", "traditional" place always not yet in the time of the up-to-date present). Today, scholars critical of the evolutionist time lines and static essentialisms of older modernization paradigms struggle to redescribe Africa as within the modern. Seeking to deprovincialize the notion of the modern, and to sever its automatic connection within the West, they prefer to locate contemporary African social realities within a broader, pluralized notion of the modern, as constituting an "alternative" modernity.

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[9] Shakespeare, W, *The tempest*, 2011, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Breaking the invisible chains requires courage because it means doubting every certainty, breaking down every foundation. Balance is lost, the compass needle no longer indicates a path to follow; but it is precisely by facing this bewilderment that one discovers the spontaneity of a smile, the wonder of love, the strength enclosed in one's legs. Happiness is not a gift that is obtained simply by wishing for it, freedom is a conquest that requires wounds, but it is by fighting that one can obtain happiness and the freedom to be oneself in a land that is finally free. In this regard, it is important to consider in which measure the cultural context is fundamental for the interpretation of the work. As critic Moore-Gilbert alleges (1997: 12):

> […]just a feminist criticism need not to be confined to analysis of women's or feminist texts, or to geographical regions or socio-cultural formations in which feminism is an influence, or to the period since the technical political emancipation of women (in this has, indeed, happened) in the area under discussion, so it seems to me that postcolonial criticism can in principle be legitimately applied to any number of different contexts.

As the story takes place in Nigeria, upset by cultural and political changes, and taking into account the changes that have taken place in this country since it was an English colony until independence is fundamental for the analysis of the novel. The focus of the "Nigerian problem" is exhaustively summarized by scholar Achebe (1983: 1), who states that "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership", from which it is clear that the problem in Nigeria has always been that of the lack of a leader to take over the reins of the country. As Nussabum (in Carey & Festa, 2009: 144) alleges, "the abolition movement parallels the evolution of racial phenotypes,

combined with particular character traits, into categories of human difference that are identified with given geographical origins and locations.", and in this regard it is useful to consider that the discourse revolves around a people of black people, a term understood, as Nussabaum (in Carey & Festa, 2009: 143) says, "'negro' clearly signifies a sub-Saharan African who is subject to enslavement". The colonial penetration in the African hinterland usually took place after exploratory expeditions, which gave the idea of the geological resources of the vast territories. Colonial expansion reached its peak with a "colonial rush" in the last quarter of the XIX century. The indigenous peoples found themselves integrated into the political and economic structures created by the European colonizers, finding themselves subject to them. The elites of indigenous peoples (such as tribal leaders) enjoyed some advantages, such as some social positions, but Africans were generally excluded from political decisions. Finally, colonialism led to an impoverishment also in cultural terms, as well as to the impossibility of a political independence of the territory. In this regard, Lionnet (1995: 173) states that "It is in the fictional narration of the quotidian that writing becomes permeated by orality and that the oscillation between the written and the spoken word reveals the essential preoccupation of these postcolonial writers: namely, to let the silenced migrants and cultural minorities speak in their own voices. Through their use of linguistic particularisms, the writers transform the dominant language, rendering it porous and open to what was once its other. According to Acquarone (2013: 22, 23):

> The position of the woman in the contemporary world has given rise to the struggles
> of feminism in its varied and often conflicting assertions. From its origins in the
> materialism of social and political controversies about active participation in the
> public world to the later rejection of physicality because of the risk of essentialism,
> feminism has developed and assumed a variety of voices. The debate over difference
> isolated the physicality of sex from the concept of gender as a social construction

with the purpose of avoiding the pitfalls of patriarchy. When sexuality was conceived

as coincidental with gender, certain social and psychological attitudes came to be

seen as indissolubly tied to women and then considered "natural".

Between the XVII and XIX centuries, European travellers and traders founded port cities to boost the growing slave trade destined for the Americas. Raw materials and finished products replaced the slave trade during the 19th century. The "Royal Niger Company" was founded by the UK government in 1886. Nigeria became a UK protectorate in 1901, and a colony in 1914. In response to the growing Nigerian nationalism that followed the end of World War II, the UK led the colony towards self-government on a federal basis. Nigeria gained complete independence on 1 October 1960, as a federation of three regions, each of which substantially retained a margin of self-government. In 1966, two consecutive *"coups d'état"* carried out by two different groups of military officers brought the country under military control. The leaders of the second coup sought to increase the powers of the federal government, and replaced the regional governments with twelve state governments. The Igbo, the dominant ethnic group in the eastern region, declared the independence of the Republic of Biafra in 1967, which led to a bloody civil war that ended with their defeat in 1970. Considering the effects of colonization in particular on women, Katrak (2006: 8) makes an important observation, stating that "third world women writers represent the complex ways in which women's bodies are colonized. Similar to anti-colonial struggles for independence on the macro political arena, women resist bodily oppressions by using strategies and tactics that are often part of women's ways of knowing and acting, and Bryce (in Chew, Jensen & Rutherford, 1994: 619) in the same way affirms that "Rather than a definitive closure constituting a decisive break with tradition, it may be more appropriate to see African women's writing as a process, with both historical and innovative dimensions". A geographical deterritorializing that forces colonizers to depart parallels how women attempt reclaiming

their bodies from patriarchal domination.", meaning a very practical and physical way of experiencing colonization by women. Similarly, Boehmer (1995: 224) affirms that:

> Colonized women were, as it is called, doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, social class, and, in some cases, religion and caste. Far from being eradicated, the grim irony of the independence period was that many of these forms of exclusion were reinforced by the pressures of national liberation. Gender divisions in particular were often brought into greater prominence.

Another interesting point of view is Nixon's one (in Bunzl & Al., 2005: 235), who states that "in the context of a romantic primordialism, the colonized, especially women, have been repeatedly naturalized as objects of heritage to be owned, preserved, or patronized rather than as the subjects of their own land and legacies" as the position of women during postcolonial period was that of degraded and passively oppressed "objects". As Boehmer underlines (1995:227, 228):

> In their work they retrieve suppressed oral traditions, half-forgotten histories, unrecorded private languages, moments of understated or unrecognized women's resistance. To the more general postcolonial interest in multiplicity, therefore, they add the concept of women's many-centred, constellated power, the stress being at once on the importance of diversity and on having the power to articulate selfhood.

What emerges is therefore the difficulty with which postcolonial female writers have established themselves, as they were considered to be much inferior to their male colleagues. In this regard, it is interesting to note what Bryce (in Chew, Jensen & Rutherford, 1994: 620) says about the writings of postcolonial writers, that is "The narratives of African women have emerged within this post-colonial context, where the

emphasis is not on a naïve return to origin, but on retrieval, rediscovery and reinvention",

and similarly Lionnet (1995: 87, 88) affirms that:

> In postcolonial literature the gendered and racialized body of the female protagonist
> is consistently overdetermined; it is a partial object on which are written various
> cultural scripts and their death-dealing blows. Burdened with religious and
> philosophical as well as psychoanalytic, sexual, and racial meanings, the body has
> long occupied a prominent place in cultural discourses.

And more (1995: 101) she affirms that "Women writers are often especially aware of their

task as producers of images that both participate in the dominant representations of their

culture and simultaneously undermine and subvert those images by offering a re-vision

of familiar scripts. Another viewpoint about female postcolonial writers is given by

Hamam (2014: 22) who affirms that:

> Besides, historical, political, and, to some extent, theoretical writings on oppression
> can miss out or downplay female experiences of oppression and resistance. However,
> the subjective form of knowledge generated by women's narratives can counter this
> masculinist blind-spot. This touches on questions of literary representation or how
> literature by women can testify to specific suffering of women under various forms
> of colonisation such as sexism in postcolonial societies. It also relates to the presence
> of postcolonial women writers as literary activists and of their writing as an ethico-
> political project of ongoing emancipation from the legacies of colonialism and
> patriarchy, among other power structures.

IV.3. The struggle for freedom by Kambili Achike

I creep among you, putting
Shame to your conceit
You, whose attention is turned
Away to the sky – shout

You do not see the chameleon
Mocking your fear.
If you still seek me, turn
Your hearts to the silence,
Alert to the forest.[10]

Kambili Achike, whose name means "let me be" (Coker in Emenyou, 2017: 109) is a teenager, of Igbo ethnicity, and the protagonist of the novel "Purple Hibiscus", which is set in Nigeria during a turbulent time in its political history, where there is a vacuum of power and a dictator whose rise to power is present in references to oil shortages. Igbo population has always been a thorn in Nigeria's side. According to Achebe (1983: 45), they are described as "aggressive, arrogant and clannish", in fact the major example in the book is Mr. Eugene, Kambili's father, who is an important man in his society and donates considerable amounts of money to needy individuals and worthy causes, but he is protagonist of violence within the family house, i.e. the episode where Beatrice, his wife, loses the baby she was carrying most likely due to Eugene's mistreatment (Adichie Ngozi, C, 2004: 33). As "maternity is viewed as sacred in the traditions of all African societies" (Uko in Emenyonu, 2017: 57), the episode perplexes the reader who does not expect such an act of violence within the family itself. Uko continues alleging that (in Emenyonu, 2017: 57, 58):

> In the African context, the mother is also required to bear male children so as to ensure the perpetuity of the lineage, and care for the family – her immediate/nuclear family and the extended family. She is always expected to be in a family context, which a man will always head – as her husband or her father or her uncle or her brother. That motherhood should be effective under assumed male protection easily derives from the image of the woman whose position is naturally 'under' the man.

As Achebe describes (1983: 46):

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[10] Oludhe-Macgoye, M, 'Mathenge', The Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English, selected by A. Maja-Pearce (Heinemann, 1990), p. 19

The origin of the national resentment of the Igbo is as old as Nigeria and quite as complicated. But it can be summarized thus: The Igbo culture being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive, gave the Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in Nigerian colonial society. Unlike the Hausa/Fulani he was unhindered by a wary religion and unlike the Yoruba unhampered by traditional hierarchies. This kind of creature, fearing nor God nor man, was custom-made to grasp the opportunities, such as they were, of the white man's dispensation. And the Igbo did so with both hands. Although the Yoruba had a huge historical and geographical head-start the Igbo wiped out their handicap in one fantastic burst of energy in the twenty years between 1930 and 1950.

Commanded into her father's bedroom for punishment Kambili associates his bright open room as a never-ending heaven and a place "there was nowhere to run to" when penance waits. As the family's chief of executive and self-appointed God, Eugene carries out his duties and regularly tortures his family to become the humble servants of God. As underlined by critic Coker (in Emenyou, 2017: 106):

> […] the terror unleashed on the household by Eugene in Purple hibiscus, in the name of principles and religious high-handedness, produces children that never enjoy the bliss of the home. For Jaja and Kambili, their home is no better than a detention camp, ruled by Eugene, the high-handed hypocritical father. Instances of domestic violence and wife battery are proofs in this regard. As such, deviance and protest become the hallmark of the children's disposition from childhood. In fact, Kambili is relegated to perpetual silence which is why she could hardly cope with the strength of will of Amaka, on their visit to Enugu. The child narrative strategy employed by Adichie affords an opportunity of a panoramic view of the disconnect in Eugene's family.

Kambili recollects her father's disciplinary penalties from an early age when she herself had to pick up her spanking stick in the garden, learning how to find branches which Jaja "soaked in cold water because he said that made them less painful when they landed on their body" (Adichie, 2004: 193). Kambili is an interesting character above all because she represents what most women in her country have never had the courage to do. In fact, she, supported by her aunt Ifeoma, leads in her little one a rebellion against the condition of the Nigerian woman at that time. For example, in the dialogue between Kambili's mother and auntie Ifeoma at the beginning of the novel (Adichie, 2004: 75), Kambili's mother accuses aunt Ifeoma of being too libertine, and asks her how a woman can live without a man. Her aunt, who teaches at the university and is a widow, replies with textual words that summarize everything that Kambili will then carry out in her fight for independence, namely "sometimes life begins when marriage ends". This view of married life is an effect, as Lionnet says, of the diaspora of postcolonial women writers. In fact, she (1995: 102) states that "many twentieth-century black women writers in Africa and the diasporas have, since 1970s, been equating marriage itself (or other forms of heterosexual alliance) with confinement and captivity, denouncing their culture's failure to offer models of sexual partnership that are not demeaning or degrading women, and that allow for the mutual recognition of differences".

As Ndula states (in Emenyou, 2017: 32,):

> […] the year 2003, when the novel was published, as the year of the election in which for the first time two women were in the run for the presidency in Nigeria. She goes on to describe Nigeria in that year as a 'capitalist society in which a woman is doubly oppressed, first as a worker whose employer must maximize profit by exploiting her labour power and secondly as a woman in a patriarchal society'.

It thus emerges that Nigeria at some point underwent a major shift in recognizing that women could also have the right to become President, since it was only men who had assumed power. In a passage of the novel (Adichie, 2004, 87), Kambili is looking at Jaja, her brother, and she reflects on women's conditions in her hometown. Her thoughts flow and she understands that "women were not supposed to know anything at all, since it was the first step toward the initiation to manhood. But Jaja once told me that he heard that boys were flogged and made to bathe in the presence of a taunting crowd". According to Duran (in Emenyonu, 2017: 45):

Work on the cultures of Western Africa has frequently emphasized the constructs of trade and the importance of the roles of women – more contemporary writing has frequently tried to show that the roles of women are significantly different from female roles in the West. A great deal of the writing on the topic has underscored the matrilineal and female-empowered constructions of those societies, and the extent to which such constructions affected diasporic cultures across the globe. But many have some difficulty imagining the lives of women of the various cultures to which advertence might be made – Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa – and the various permutations for women in those cultures. Adichie does not noteworthy job of providing us with characters that exemplify both the strength of the past and the fortitude of today. Yesterday's women traders exhibited particular characteristics that allow us to read into their societies.

This statement is very interesting because it highlights precisely the difference between the possibilities that Nigerian men had more than women. For example, Bryce (in Chew, Jensen & Rutherford, 1994: 619) states that "The colonial school system, whose project it was to undermine custom, paint polygamy as immoral and elevate virginity above fertility as the index of a woman's value, offered instead a fantasy of romantic love and monogamous marriage". Adichie, as a Nigerian writer, develops in "Purple Hibiscus" and

in her other works many themes that recur among the female writers of postcolonial literature. According to Boehmer (1995: 187), "to conceive an independent national identity, postcolonial writers concentrated on developing a symbolic vocabulary that was recognizably indigenous – or at least other to European representation – and yet at the same time intelligible within a global grammar of post-war politics. For example, in the novel there are many references to terms that belong to Igbo ethnicity. As Duran points out (in Emenyonu, 2017: 47), "Kambili is not the sort of individual who is given to rankings in social relations, or to attempts to make herself bigger. One of the features of Kambili's observant personality that plays the largest role in the novel's structure has to do with her ability to simultaneously distance herself from what she sees around her, yet play at least some kind of role", for example in the part where she must feel almost ashamed of being forced, during a confession with Father Amadi, to renounce the normal wishes of a teenager, such as playing volleyball or wearing a lipstick (Adichie, 2004: 176, 177), or when Jaja, her brother, asks Mr. Eugene to have the key to his room, and his father promptly accuses him of wanting to have some privacy to commit some sin, such as masturbating (Adichie, 2004: 191, 192). A very interesting vision is given by Duran (in Emenyonu, 2017: 46) who affirms that:

> In Kambili's interaction with her family, she displays a purpose and determination far beyond her years – although much of the novel centres around her interactions with her father, Eugene, and his obsessive interest in religion, it is in Kambili's response to these issues that we see the makeup of her personality, Always the observer, she is moved on many occasions toward an internal dialogue that presents her with a variety of overviews.

An example is the episode in which she visits Papa-Nnukwu, the grandfather regarded as a pagan, and whose food is forbidden to touch (Adichie, 2004: 51) or the episode in which Kambili goes with aunt Ifeoma to the Catholic University of Nigeria and she sees no

woman wearing a scarf to cover her head, and she thinks about what her father would have said seeing no woman's head covered in the house of God, and how scandalized he would also have been to see that some women wore men's clothes (Adichie, 2004: 240). The story is told from the point of view of a young woman, and as Coker (in Emenyou, 2017: 101) affirms:

> The child hero instantiates a paradox of vulnerability, through the will power she exhibits in the narrative. This becomes a metaphor which is foregrounded in the use of child narration that empowers the child figure, ultimately deepening the thematic directions of the text, while also conferring unique narrative qualities that help to engage the socio-historical context of the works. In this sense, the peculiar omniscience of the child hero, which enables her to navigate the intricacies of the world, comes across as a key feature in turning a disadvantage to an advantage – in the sense that her presumed innocence makes her a powerful and harmless vessel of domestic and societal vicissitudes.

Kambili receives a lot of abuse from her father, such as when he forces her to dip her feet in hot water for responding to him in a way that didn't seem appropriate to him (Adichie, 2004: 200), and then she becomes a "purple hibiscus" herself, struggling to assert her identity as a woman. According to Nabutanyi (in Emenyonu, 2017: 73):

> […] Purple Hibiscus is one of the more recent African literary texts that deploy a testifying child to provide insightful comments on ritualized abuse of some children living seemingly stable African middle-class homes. Her text build on the huge scholarly archive that explores child physical abuse as one of the commonest forms of trauma to which many African children are exposed. While recent socio-anthropological scholarship of this African phenomenon attributes it to extreme poverty, civil wars, genocide and disintegrating families, Adichie's text eloquently

establishes a link between performativity of respectability and propriety within some African middle-class homes and child abuse.

Another example of abuse happens when, as underlined by Nabutanyi (in Emenyonu, 2017: 77, 78):

> He (Eugene) beats Kambili for breaking the Eucharist fast because of the pains of her first menstrual period, and Beatrice and Jaja for helping her to 'sin'. It is ironic that the essence of the Christian ritual of fasting as a form of cleansing, and the home as a nurturing and safe environment, are tainted by a father who feels his authority (and God's) has been undermined by his family's breaking the Eucharist fast. Adichie uses the symbolism associated with menstruation, which in many cultures is an occasion for celebration that marks a transition from girlhood to womanhood (flowering), to demonstrate that Eugene is not interested in the spiritual welfare of his family, but rather in the performance of publicly visible religious uprightness.

The climax of the story is when Eugene dies. At that moment it almost seems that his family is being freed from the burden of having to demonstrate a perfect life outside the home, but which weighed as much at home as a boulder. As Nabutanyi (in Emenyonu, 2017: 76) describes:

> In Purple Hibiscus, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie allows her silenced, precocious fifteen-year-old protagonist a form of articulation to disclose the violent 'disciplining' in her middle-class home without invalidating her depiction as a traumatized child. By granting Kambili a double persona – as a cowed, silenced and simultaneously an articulate child – Adichie creates for her a convincing grammar to speak about domestic abuse.

In this sense, Beatrice's murder of Eugene appears to be liberating. Thinking that the blame for throwing rat poison in Eugene's tea is taken by Jaja to protect his mother (Adichie, 2004: 291), it might be argued how Jaja is the man who represents a possible

generational change in Nigerian society. Until that moment in fact, the tendency after Europeans had colonized several continents including various parts of Africa, was to consider women inferior to men. As Hume states (in Emenyou, 2017: 90):

> The European belief that women belonged exclusively at home and were subordinate to men in this way (not complementary to them) meant that women's domestic roles were considered a servant-like duty, and those roles lost their traditional value.

And she adds (ibid) that "colonial times took from women their financial independence, their sacred identity as food-providers and market women, subjugated them to the power of men, and marginalized them as women and citizens". As the scholar points out later on in her essay (in Emenyou, 2017: 91):

> By contrasting the way in which one space inscribes itself on women (Eugene's dining room) against another in which women inscribe themselves upon the social space (Ifeoma's kitchen) we see Kambili growing to understand and manoeuvre within space as a woman; she has finally worked out how to make her creation of space an exchange in which she can construct and be constructed by these spaces.

The critic specifies that (in Emenyou, 2017:92) "Eugene's authority over the dining room in his household serves as an example of the way in which the binary of public versus private can be complicated and should be reconsidered", as if the places of the house represented the spaces of society in which the events that characterize the history of Kambili, of her people and her family take place. Another example of abuse suffered by Kambili touching Eugene's space is when she has menstrual cramps one Sunday morning and she needs to eat something in order to take a Panadol, but the father doesn't accept the situation, he takes off his leather belt and he beats them all (Adichie, 2004: 101). According to Hume (in Emenyou, 2017: 94)

The fact that this beating takes place in the dining room, a space which culturally signifies the ways in which Igbo women care for their families, and that the beating took place for reasons related to Kambili's female sexual organs, is doubly cruel. The space becomes physically inscribed on her body, mind and sexuality. Through this space, Kambili and her mother are rendered non people, non-women and non-Igbo.

Depriving a person of their sexual identity has always been a way to reduce their identity to zero. Considering the history, this occurred for example in the Nazi extermination camps, where the people became only numbers if not even test subjects. Hume (*ibid*) points out that "For most of the novel, Eugene's dining room remains a vacuum in which women are physically restricted and abused, representationally silenced and erased from cultural existence, and sexually repressed", different from aunt Ifeoma's kitchen where Kambili feels free and peaceful, and with a view to seeing the novel as a contrast between feminine sensibility and masculine toughness, the solidarity between the women of the history supports this point of view.

Conclusion

As investigated in the first chapter, the analysed heroine Hetty Sorrel is the classic character of the Victorian realist novel who presents the simple features of a woman facing everyday life. Hetty is a country girl who, in her naivety, is put in a difficult situation by Arthur Donnithorne, the man she had fallen in love with. The consequence of her love makes her perform two immoral acts, namely to become pregnant outside of marriage and to kill her son, albeit unintentionally. Hetty is therefore a heroine who suffers the events of life, so much so that she accepts with obvious resignation her destiny of being transported to a distant country to lead the rest of her days. As we have seen, Hetty's characteristics take on even more vivid traits when compared to those of the character that we can consider her alter-ego, namely Dinah Morris. Hetty is a carnal character, the same physical traits i.e. a dark-haired beauty and rosy cheeks give her the idea of life flowing by. Dinah, on the other hand, is a straight character, her pale complexion and docile character make her appear almost like an angelic figure. In the novel Hetty has all the characteristics of the characters in Eliot's realist novels, i.e. the actions and behaviours of simple people who dedicate themselves to their daily activities, without dedicating too much time to interiority or spirituality. These characteristics make the character react instinctively, also leading her to make mistakes that will affect her future. Another interesting aspect to consider is that Hetty had the possibility of leading a life full of morality alongside Adam, but she is more attracted by the elusive character of Arthur, who symbolizes the sin that differs so much from Dinah, who, being a Methodist preacher, she chooses carefully and following many reflections to walk the path of purity and spiritual purification. It can therefore be said that Hetty is an instinctive female figure, who does not analyse actions before carrying them out and for this reason she finds herself overwhelmed by life's events, especially in the negative and suffering

aspects. The second chapter analyses the character of Eveline, one of the female protagonists of a story contained in the novel "Dubliners" by J. Joyce. Many aspects have emerged, such as that Eveline is a character who is afraid to make choices, although her instinct is led to take certain actions. Eveline is therefore "paralysed", just as the Dublin of the time was paralysed, a city still tried by the struggles between Catholics and Protestants and with an economy still under development. Eveline is the classic modern heroine, in which we see above all the influences of psychoanalysis and research conducted by German psychoanalyst S. Freud. It is no coincidence, for example, that the author in narrating the story uses the method of the "stream of consciousness", a technique that allows the thought of the characters to be known without using dialogue. It is thanks to this technique that the reader is constantly able to know what is in the head and thoughts of the characters without them speaking, allowing him to predict what actions they will take. Eveline is therefore a character who reflects a lot, who asks as many questions as there are steps she finds herself taking. No action is dictated by impulse but by an almost cold assessment of the risks that each decision could entail. It is no coincidence that up to the end she is undecided whether to leave with Frank and that at the very last moment she decides not to get on that ship that would take her away from the paralyzing context in which she has found herself living up to that moment. In this regard, it is natural to wonder if basking in the talk, if the "non-choice" is a way not to risk, to protect herself from any actions that could put her person in difficult situations. Eveline is a rather contradictory character, because if on the one hand she dreams of freedom looking out the window of her house, on the other she is unable to take those steps that would lead to this freedom, and the fact of not making a decision leads her to be, in the eyes of the reader, a very thoughtful character but at the same time lacking the will and courage to change her condition. If a literary character of the modern era was analysed with Eveline, in the third chapter space was given to Julia, a female character belonging to contemporary literature.

Julia is first and foremost a character of a dystopian novel, so the context in which the story takes place is to be considered as fundamental. Orwell, author of the novel "1984", has carefully chosen the characteristics to give to each of the characters of the novel. Julia is absolutely a revolutionary character, as for her the rules dictated by the regime are completely absurd. She embarks on an extramarital love affair with Wilson, something absolutely forbidden by the Big Brother regime, and together with him they carry on a clandestine fight against the regime, while aware of the enormous risks they face. She is a character who does not follow the rules, she only follows her ideals and the ideas she thinks are right. Julia is a character who isn't afraid to make choices, who doesn't let herself be influenced by the context in which she lives, but who on the contrary has ideals and struggles, first in an inconspicuous and then increasingly evident way, to affirm those who are the values he believes in. She lives in a difficult context such as that of a totalitarian regime, where it is well known that personal freedoms were greatly restricted if not even cancelled, but this does not mean that she let herself be discouraged from pursuing her principles with determination. She is a woman who knows that her choices can lead her to arrest or even to death, but the will to live a different life where freedom is the first prerequisite is stronger than any external limitation. In the novel is Julia who influences Wilson, and not the other way around, convincing him that a life lived in the shadows is a meaningless life, and Wilson slowly realizes that her ideas are right and gets carried away, without undergoing but becoming part active in the struggle against power, in Julia's fight against the injustices of Big Brother. In this sense Julia is a modern heroine, and as we have seen in the chapter dedicated to her, many critics support the thesis that she represents the ideals of freedom that guided all those who fought against totalitarian regimes. Julia is the symbol of change, of the will that was making its way at the end of the XX century, namely the need for radical change in a society tried above all by the Great Depression of the end of the century. If with Julia a change in the female figure of

the novel has begun to be glimpsed, this appears even more clear with Kambili Achike, the protagonist of the novel "Purple Hibiscus" by C. N. Adichie. The character has been extensively analysed in chapter four and it has been seen how Kambili is a character who suffers from the rules and defects of a still backward and patriarchal society like that of Nigeria. First of all, Kambili is a young woman, and as such she is not granted the same rights as males. This is reminded to her by her father, but also by other figures who interact with her throughout the novel. As some critics have underlined, the postcolonial novel is the result of rules and habits that the settlers transmitted to the indigenous peoples during the "Great Colonization" that began in the XIX century, sometimes imposing customs and habits that did not suit populations accustomed to live without any society rules and in close contact with nature. Kambili is therefore a contemporary heroine, a girl who finds herself living her adolescence with an overbearing father and a mother who is unable to rebel until the end of the novel, exhausted by her husband's constant harassment. Also, in this last case, it is then the son who takes the blame for the murder, because a man simply ends up in prison while the death penalty is foreseen for a woman. The son's gesture contains the seed of the generational change that is taking place in a continent like Africa, where until a few years ago the woman was considered a mere object. Religion and politics, still deeply rooted in Nigeria, do not help her in her struggle for emancipation. She is understood only by her aunt Ifeoma, the only female character in the novel to have achieved independence, also favoured by her condition as a widow. It is important to consider that in this postcolonial novel the choice of a young female protagonist is not accidental, but symbolizes the will to affirm one's own culture as independent from the motherland which for years has subjugated and imposed its own rules on the native populations. Kambili is the symbol of this revolt, and the closing of the novel leaves the reader still open to the question of whether the protagonist's life will finally be different from that lived by her mother. At this point, given the type of thesis I

carried out, it is interesting to make a brief comparison between the four characters I have analysed in this dissertation. It can be said that Hetty and Eveline are very similar in that both do not face life events but are victims of them. However, there is a difference between them, and that is that while Hetty is an impulsive character who acts without thinking about the consequences of her choices, Eveline is a reflective character who analyses every aspect of her life and takes every decision with absolute clarity. As stated by critic Lefkovitz (in Mahawatte, 2013: 84):

> The language in which George Eliot describes her heroines' beauty in Adam Bede records a transition in nineteenth-century values. Here, Eliot's physical descriptions facilitate the delicate heroine's going out of fashion. Through her descriptions, Eliot not only frees the delicate heroine to go out without subjecting her to risks that the delicate heroine typically faces, risks of rape or death, but Eliot also attempts to reconcile competing and mutually exclusive styles of beauty by creating healthy delicacy, a beauty that is both spiritual and sexual. She does so by appealing to and undermining literature's codes of delicacy.

In a similar way, scholar Ben-Merre (2012: 455) describes Eveline's behaviour with the following words "As most readers understand the story, Eveline does not leave. The tragic ending, where she waits 'like a helpless animal' at the dock, is classically understood as yet another example of Dublin's paralysis and its citizenry's metaphorical death", underlining how Eveline's own thoughts paralyze her letting her stay in Dublin forever. Julia and Kambili, on the other hand, are different, as they are more active characters and, although they too develop their own thoughts, they also manage to put them into practice. However, unlike Kambili, Julia seems to challenge society by going against all rules, while Kambili, perhaps also given her younger age, criticizes the rules of the society in which she lives but without ever openly disobeying them. In a passage of the book, Eveline is described as a woman who suffers the passage of time, in fact "Her time was

running out but she continued to sit by the window, leaning her head against the window curtain, inhaling the odour of dusty cretonne" (Joyce: 111), precisely to signify her passivity in looking at events from the window without being an active part of them. A description of Kambili is instead given by critic Ogaga (2017), who states what follows:

> From childhood, Kambili's development is not dynamic but fogged-up, as it were. The protagonist and her brother struggle to define themselves beyond the rigid, suffocating world their calvinistic father has designed for them. This fussy mercantile man builds an environment that lacks the ventilation necessary for a steady relationship with the outside when the inside becomes too suffocating. The narrative is woven around Palm Sunday, yet the development of the protagonist and her brother has a quadrilateral dimension; their father's mansion at Enugu, school, church, and Nsukka. Nsukka has the most amazing effect on their developmental process, especially as it is the only location Kambili visits on four occasions.

And more, Ogaga adds:

> The Achike children are very typical of children from the aristocratic class, yet they are empty psychologically. Kambili is alienated socially, culturally, and psychologically from everyone around her except her brother; she easily loses perspective and focus. On a number of occasions she hardly expresses her intentions. Kambili's father's house is wild and grand, but menacing—a suffocating paradise. It lacks almost nothing, yet the house overwhelms her psyche instead of elevating and animating it. Eugene's personality and his presence in the house as the "god" of the family continues to stunt any emotional and psychological stability Kambili tries to build up naturally from the inside. Eugene runs the family like a domestic Hitler and an emotional terrorist; he is not evil, but brutish and loving, a benevolent protector and an affectionate monster. His character enunciates not only the sense of intimate brutality but also that of traditional phallocentricism geared towards the domestication of violence. From Kambili's narrative the reader becomes exposed to

the fact that besides Eugene the other three members of this nuclear family are less than fully human, specifically because they lack the kind of dignity that lends an individual life respect and identity.

And it is precisely dignity that Kambili fights for, just like Julia, while Hetty and Eveline seem more interested in surviving than in fighting for an ideal. Instead, what unites the four protagonists, in addition to being female characters, is the suffering that all four experience and the difficulties, which, although different due to the context in which the four novels develop, that all four find themselves facing face up to. Another aspect which all four women interface with, and which it is not obvious to analyse, is the relationship with the male part, with sexuality and love. The relationship is turbulent for all four protagonists, and whether it is a relative or a partner, in different ways they live a defective love, either because they are not up to male expectations or because they themselves are disappointed by which then do not materialize. As female protagonists, the male counterpart is important to consider for the characterization of the character. In addition to analysing the characteristics of the individualized female figures, in this dissertation it has been demonstrated that the analysis of the female figure in the novel is a subject that has not been and probably will never be fully resolved. There are many reasons for this statement: firstly, the research material is very vast and this makes it always open to new insights. Secondly, many critics have studied and analysed the subject and almost all the novels recognized as important in the English literature have undergone a process of studying the female characters present in them. Thirdly, there are always new emerging English-speaking writers dealing with female characters, and it is on them in particular that I would like to focus. We have seen how the four heroines we have taken into consideration have changed the fate and the characteristics of the plot of each of the stories in which they are inserted. If it is true that the figure of the woman is important for understanding a historical era, it is also true that the analysis conducted in this thesis

is not sufficient to describe all the aspects that should be considered. This is because research does not stop, and it is right that there is a continuous study of literature, in order to be able to analyse as many aspects as possible to extrapolate from a literary work.

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