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**The Recreation of Community in Dylan Thomas's Impressions of Modern City:  
*Adventures in the Skin Trade*, and "Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar"**

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## **I. Introduction**

Sabías que las ciudades son accidentes que no prevalecerán frente a los árboles...

-- Jorge Teillier

During the academic period of 2013, the English Literature Seminar focused on the ways in which literary works approach to *the urban subject in the modern city*. This phenomenon was studied, in general terms, from a chronological point of view that allowed us to appreciate a wider landscape of this matter setting forth its temporal evolution, specifically from the eighteenth century up to twentieth century.

It is during twentieth century that the city shall consolidate itself as an intersection of multiple realities. The rise of postmodernism allowed the emergence of diverse narrations which depicted the world from any imaginable way. It is in this time when the dissolution of great narratives reflects a lack of a common essence provoked by the constant movement of a society that does not wait for anything. It is in the apparent calm of the period before the Second World War that an author arises as a remnant of a feeling that looked forgotten and lost, the sentiment of *community*. Dylan Thomas (27 October 1914 – 9 November 1953) a Welsh writer that is regarded mostly as a rural and religious poet makes some points that relates to the confrontation between human beings and city life. As a writer that was brought up in the countryside, he was very critic about the ambiguous way of living in the city, “I’ve just come back from three dark days in London, city of the restless dead ... there’s no difference between good & bad” (Thomas qtd. in Ackerman 40). This seemingly excessive indistinctness was the fundamental action that disturbed Dylan Thomas’s perception of London, an obscure city from he felt detached at some moments.

Because of his professedly aversion to London, he wrote some stories which have this milieu as scenery. In this way the author provided a novel way of understanding the issue of the urban subject, the one of a partially biased collective approach. The object of study, then, is going to be the notion of *community* in the modern city; a premodern idea that would seem lost and forgotten in a space, the urban milieu, that has as one of its outcomes the encouraging of individualism.

As a consequence of this, it is conventionally claimed that the modern structure of the city and its ideologies entail a progressive fragmentation of subjects in which alienation is

promoted as the correct manner of living the urban space. Nonetheless, in this exploration I intend to examine Thomas's communal approach to the city. In particular, it seems that in his narrations the urban subject is depicted as a subverted entity that dislocates their actual reality in order to expose the shortcomings of his current society. Hence, the idea of a concealed community will be confronted from a literary standpoint, in which fiction will be a support for the prolongation of this communal attitude amid an atmosphere that progressively become more and more alienating. Regarding this strand of thinking, and by the agency of this examination, it will be studied the idea of whether *it is possible to recreate a communal attitude in Dylan Thomas's impressions of modern city*.

The core text that will allow the analysis of the present object of study will be Dylan Thomas's unfinished novel *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1941) in which by means of a molting of experiential skins the poet depicts a quest for self-awareness that goes from a Welsh town to the city of London. In addition to this novel, a draft of an unpublished short story "Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar" (1934) will broaden Thomas's understanding regarding the city; that is due to the fact that via this short narration the urban space is depicted as a modernized reality which portrays a doleful rendering of the city of London. Additionally, this short narration is enriched with additions and corrections that the author attached to his text in order to refine it, highlighting in this mode the construction of this work of art.

Therefore, the notion of *adventure* will be the starting point in the current analysis. In Simmel's understanding, adventure is thought as an experience that takes form outside the ordinary course of life, showing a wholeness that is alien to the actual reality (Simmel 223). As a consequence of that, adventure is reflected as a dreamy like experience, something that is examined in his work "The adventure". Moreover, the essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" will be used as a modernist approach to the issue of the urban subject, in which the city acts as a space that promotes a blasé attitude. As adventure is understood as an oneiric experience, these recollections, then, will be presented in the chaos of personal experiences, providing in this way a new interpretation of the world. Therefore, it is in this apparently hectic visualization that through the sensational memories provided by Thomas's works that community could be deployed in an urban background.

Other notions that will be discussed throughout this work will be the ones of *myth* and *community*. Firstly, myth will be understood at the base of the French philosopher Roland Barthes who through the medium of *Mythologies* (1957) will set forth this concept from a discursive standpoint, grounding some of his notions in the Saussurian dichotomy of form and content. Additionally to Barthes, another French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy, will complement and confront the ideas exposed in *Mythologies*. Nancy's book *The Inoperative Community* (1986) will give a philosophical approach to these concepts. By virtue of his work, Nancy claims that those conceits are not part of the actual world, but they were interrupted by human's rationale. However he additionally claims that those ideas still have a space in the literary sphere, which would work as a substantiation of its existence.

Additionally, Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), and Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957) will contribute with two pivotal notions: *homoeconomicus* and *homoreligious*, respectively. Those concepts refer to attitudes and behaviours that some characters portray in the course of the narration in order to visualise their place in the world.

Having in mind these fundamental notions, a clarification to the literary approach follows. Nevertheless, before claiming the theories employed in this work I need to shed light on my own grounds. As a South American English language and literature student, I am going to be cultural and theoretically predisposed, or at least partially biased. On the one hand my native language is Spanish and not English. And on the other one the linguistic sphere—that is the main focus of the program that I study; in detriment of literature—will contribute with some of the mental foundations to grasp the main issue of this study. Subsequently I look myself as part of a community, an interpretive community. In the light of this I follow some protocols, as Stanley Fish has claimed, and because of that I will unveil myself through the process of writing. Therefore, *reader-response theory*, developed by the American literary theorist Stanley Fish will become fundamental for these purposes, principally his essay “Interpreting the ‘Variorum’” (1976).

Additionally to Fish's reader-response theory, the formalist posture that Warren & Wellek promote in their book *Theory of Literature* (1948) will serve as a deeper analysis of the literary work, in particular *image*, and *metaphor*. In this way the interpretation that reader-response theory encourages will be supported by a close-reading based on the form and content

that tropes outline. “no puede haber conflicto entre forma y contenido... porque ninguna tiene existencia sin la otra y la abstracción constituye el asesinato de ambas”(Osborne qtd. In Wellek 50). Thus, the process of interpretation will be taken from the very roots of the text itself in order to follow the *sensibility arrow*.

Therefore, as a final claim the leading objectives of this examination will be, firstly, to discuss how the social disaffection present in the modern city is thwarted in Dylan Thomas’s prose work—linked mainly to a religious stance and a countryside background—. Secondly, to set forth the modes in which a journey, from the town to the city, would portray a subverted perspective regarding the influence of modernity upon human experiences in city life. Thirdly, to demonstrate that the use of two apparent opposed literary theories, formalism and reader-response theory, would give an opening to convey a fresh and personal interpretation grounded on the close-reading of the literary texts. And finally, it will be pivotal to determine that the melting between literary theory and some philosophical and sociological accounts would be useful in the understanding of some interdisciplinary issues such as myth and community, in order to convey a broader scope to the reader.



## **II. Theoretical Framework**

To speak of the need for myth, in the case of the imaginative writer, is a sign of his felt need for communion with his society, for a recognized status as artist functioning within society

-- Rene Wellek & Austin Warren

In this section I will focus on some notions that I ponder significant for the development of this work. These will be discussed according to a pertinent bibliography that goes almost exclusively from a literary point of view. Additionally, it has got some significant contributions from a sociological and philosophical stance which will guide the current examination. Therefore, literary theories will be the starting point of this rendition, and after that the notions of: *image*, *metaphor*, *adventure*, *community* and *myth* will be examined in order to grasp the issue of Thomas's community in the modern city.

As seen previously community has been the main focus of this study, however in order to get a better understanding of this notion it is necessary to situate ourselves in the epoch in which community was weighed up as a delusive experience. The critical period of this term has been discussed from diverse perspectives, nonetheless there is a general agreement that it appears to be noticeable from the rise of industrialism onwards. It is from this moment that a change of milieu, from a rural to an urban setting, will put forward a process that affected the perception of this attitude to the ordinary person.

As a consequence of that state of flux, community has been engendered in the sphere of perceptions and beliefs; In the light of this this concept would take the form of a sensual construct in actual reality. Zygmunt Bauman reflects on this idea: "*Los significados y sentimientos que comunican las palabras no son, por supuesto, independientes unos de otros. La sensación que transmite "comunidad" es buena por los significados que transmite la palabra "comunidad": todos ellos prometen placeres, y con harta frecuencia tipos de placeres que a uno le gustaría experimentar pero que parece echar de menos*" (7). As appreciated in this account, some words remit us sensations that are rooted to our own cultural realities. As a consequence of this perceptive nature of some words –in this case community– is that reader-response theory will take the first approach of this exploration. Reader-response theories argue that: "insofar as reading occurs through time and involves the continuous adjustment of perceptions, ideas, feelings, and evaluations, the meaning of a work is the moment-by-moment experience of it, not something separate or left over. *Meaning* is therefore a process, not a product..." ("Reader-

Response Theory” 18-19). As seen, this subjectivist theory is understood as a consequence of a response to the strategies conveyed by our *interpretive communities*.

One of most known reader-response theorists, Stanley Fish develops that notion throughout his text “Interpreting the ‘Variorum’”. From this standpoint, then, the text and the interpretation are on quicksand,

... interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies, are not natural or universal, but learned... The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired, are the ways of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten or supplanted, or complicated or dropped from favour (2088).

Nevertheless, the limitation observed above is going to be counteracted by the integration of an objective literary theory, Formalism. Through the medium of this model perceptions will be stated on the basis of the core of literary work, “New Critics approach literature ... as an autonomous entity. *They focus on the form of the literary object, self-consciously separating literary criticism from ... other "extrinsic" matters.* They advocate intrinsic analysis or "close reading" [in order to examine] the complex stylistic orchestrations that compose poetry” (“Formalism” 17). Wherefore, the main reason to select formalism and at the same time reader-response theory is that the present standpoint will be focus on an ordinary reading experience, understood as a two-sided integration between the objective form and a perceived meaning. It is in the light of this that the contextual milieu of this work of art will not be that relevant in this present study. For instance, some biographical elements, such as that Dylan Thomas was an inveterate drunkard who lived most of his life in Laugharne, Wales, worked as a reader in the BBC, dwelt in the *dark city* of London for a time, and died—only once—in the United States in the course of a tour that depicted him as a poète maudit, just show another sort of narration, one that is external to the actual literary narration—such as formalists claimed. Therefore Thomas’s unfinished novel and short story draft employed in this inquiry will be perceived on its very life, which is exposed on the one hand by the images and metaphors, and on the other one on the reader’s perceptions of them.

Therefore, the spinal cord of this study will be formalist tropes. *Images* and *metaphors*, then, will have the chance of unveiling the literary form of community in the city.

The first trope in being scrutinized will be images. Images have been studied from different fields of knowledge, such as literature, or psychology. It is because of that multi-disciplinary approach that they have been defined from different perspectives “from images as the vestigial representatives of sensations we move with instructive ease to the second line which runs throughout our whole area – that of analogy and comparison” (Wellek & Warren 187). Via images a parallelism between real and literary world are put forward, an amalgamation through the depiction of a sensation. Wellek & Warren noticed that contrast by quoting some Ezra Pound’s words regarding image: “[the image] presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time [, a] unification of ideas” (187). It is in the light of this percipience that a common union among perceptions, beliefs and actual reality seems to be unveiled through poets’ minds.

As supposed, there is not only one kind of image. Formalists broke down this notion into the more outstanding ones. As Wellek & Warren describe, in 1924, Henry Wells published a typology of images that consisted in seven types of imagery, being the Sunken, the Radical, and the Expansive the highest categories of those (201). In concordance to Thomas’s communal essence the focus of this work will be on two from the more unifying and perceptive sets, the *Radical* and the *Expansive*. Wellek & Warren provide definitions of those terms:

- 1- *The Radical Image* – so-called perhaps because of its terms meet only at their roots, at an invisible logical ground, like final cause, rather than by juxtaposed obvious surfaces – is the image the minor term of which seems ‘unpoetic’, either because too homely and utilitarian or because too technical, scientific, learned.
- 2- *The Expansive Image* is one in which terms open a wide vista to the imagination and each term strongly modifies the other: the ‘interaction’ and ‘interpenetration’ which, according to modern poetic theory, are central forms of poetic action occur most richly in the Expansive metaphor. (202-203)

Similarly to images metaphors are defined on the basis of four substantial elements: “that of analogy; that of double vision; that of sensuous image, revelatory of the imperceptible; [and]

that of animistic projection” (Wellek & Warren 197). Furthermore, Wellek & Warren portray a general scope of metaphors in virtue of a classification of them. The literary theorist Pongs categorized metaphors into three main types which were: (1) Mystical metaphor, (2) Magical metaphor, and (3) Anti-mystic metaphor. Basically, due to the religious<sup>1</sup> nature of Thomas’s writings the focus of this exploration will be on the first two categories: “The mystical metaphor and the magic are both de-animizing: they run counter to man’s projection of himself into the non-human world; they summon up the other – the impersonal world of things, monumental art, physical law...” (Wellek & Warren 205). Besides these seemingly fixed categories, these literary critics additionally state that Pong’s categories are: “alternative ways of looking at and to responding life” (206). It is in the light of this idea that metaphors are seen as temporal remnants of each period-style. In a similar mode, Stanley Fish highlights this temporal nature of literary texts, “... there is a corresponding change in texts, not because they are being read differently, but because they are being written differently” (Fish 2088). Categories at this extent are seen as complementary devices whose aim is to understand the intricate essence found within literary works.

Additionally to this literary account, some characters will be characterized regarding their attitude toward city life. Then, two faces will be set forth. The first one is Ian Watt’s *homoeconomicus*, a term that relates a capitalist stance that promotes the accumulation of material goods as way of being socially respected. Ian Watt states that: “[the *homoeconomicus*] symbolized the new outlook of individualism in its economic aspect” (60); this face gets a climax in modern times. The second face is Mircea Eliade’s *homoreligious*, a term that refers to an attitude that promotes a meeting with older holy values in order to situate themselves in a sacred world. Mircea Eliade claims that: “[the] *homoreligious* always believes that there is an absolute reality, *the sacred*, which transcends this world...” (202); this face is aligned to a premodern reality in which some experiences such as community and myth still survived. These accounts will not be presented as opposed faces, but they will set forth two facets regarding human approach to world; one that is rising, *homoeconomicus*, and one that is being buried, *homoreligious*.

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<sup>1</sup>The term ‘religion’ will be understood on the basis of its etymological root associated with the Latin term *religare*, i.e. ‘to bind fast’ (Etymonlyne.com). This binding fast will be understood from this point of view as another way of referring to a common union.

By the agency of tropes Thomas's community will be presented before us in a literary manner. Nevertheless, in the course of this account a query related to the ordinary ways of attaining an understanding that goes beyond the literary sphere rises. As explained above, this study will take additionally a logical strand from a sociological and philosophical domain; as a manner of grounding a connection among the literary world and other disciplines. The path in which community is exposed has to do firstly with a quest for a paradise lost, such as Samuel Bennet, the protagonist in *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, experiences. Adventure is, then, the starting point of this path in which the progression of this community is narrated as an everyday experience through images and metaphors that takes part of an extemporal myth.

In his article "The Adventure", Simmel suggests a number of features and forms regarding the notion *adventure*. Nevertheless the more general one refers to a "*dropping out of the continuity of life*" (222). This approach bears certain similarities to its French etymological root which refers to "taking a chance" ("adventure"). In the sense that, adventure is unveiled after us in the limits of our own experiences; they are not only on the ordinary internal boundaries of them but they are always present on the external and ever-changing ones. Therefore this notion is portrayed as a sensual entity that cannot be grasped easily. It takes, then, a delusive form which can be related to the one depicted by Zygmunt Bauman regarding community, the one which refers to the myth of Tantalus. The correspondences between this particular myth and both community and adventure can be understood as the eternal will of almost attaining the desired object as the consequence of a divine punishment (Bauman 12-13). It is a consequence of this unconventional nature of the adventure that Simmel states that "a remembered adventure tends to take on the quality of a dream" (222). Consequently, in an adventure the subject is situated apart from the continuity of the narrator's life –it belongs to a dream-like experience which does not necessarily have an important place in the configuration of the characters–. Therefore, it is seen as feeling of selflessness, a constant interpersonal melting. The adventure, seen as a dream, is therefore a meaningless life experience, another anecdote, something that does not occur ordinarily. Nonetheless it is connected with the bearer of the adventure having a personal meaning and a communal transcendence.

The notion of dreaming will be our link between reality and fiction. As a matter of fact Dylan Thomas's works are typically described as oneiric experiences. In the specific case of this

study, primary sources are placed in a nocturnal setting—the place where dreams generally emerge. Subsequently Images depicted during dreaming are presented as reminiscences of an external non-rational world, one that is associated to the pre-modern notion of myth, a concept that revolts in many fields of knowledge. Wellek & Warren outlines that “The whole series (image, metaphor, symbol, myth) ... were studied as detachable parts of the works in which they appear. Our own view, on the other hand, sees the meaning and function of literature as centrally present in metaphor and myth” (193). In concordance to this understanding I am harmoniously inclined to state that both myth and metaphor are essential parts in the development of an appropriate understanding of literary works. Furthermore, it seems they can help to elucidate a broader scope regarding interdisciplinary issues, such as community, on the basis of reader’s interpretations. Moreover, *myth* is viewed as a rather complex term that is usually attached to *community*, “To speak of the need for myth, in the case of the imaginative writer, is a sign of his felt need for communion with his society, for a recognized status as artist functioning within society.” (Wellek & Warren 192). Then, according to this quotation, the writer has got the will to relate himself with their environs. Therefore, from this point of view, the reader may be able to experience a similar communion by the reading—and consequent mental recreation, based on their personal experiences— of those texts.

Thereupon, community is observable by writers’ insights in actual world, in this particular case Thomas’ short story and unfinished novel. In which the own self is thrown to a venue, the city of London, in order to get that lost communion, a feeling that seems even forgotten in his natal countryside.

It is because of this close entailment between community and myth that those terms need to be explained thoroughly. Consequently, a new question emerges, one regarding the notion of myth. Roland Barthes by his book *Mythologies* sheds light on this: “What is a myth today? I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent with etymology: *myth is a type of speech*” (109). Therefore, myth is understood as a type of speech. It means that this is in the core of language, as a reflection of our actual essence.

Subsequently, along this work Barthes analyses this term from a structuralist perspective taking into account its form and meaning: “The signifier of myth presents itself in an ambiguous way: full on one side and empty on the other ... the meaning of the myth has its own value, it

belongs to history ... When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself ... history evaporates.” (117). It is because of this evaporation of sense that myth becomes a construct –myth begun to be thought as a delusion from modern times onwards–. The Enlightenment was in charge of translating this mythical meaning into encyclopaedic form, leaving only the letters on the surface, and taking away its history. A similar conception of myth, but in a philosophical way, is portrayed by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy: “Fundamentally, *mythos* is the *act of language* par excellence, the performing of the paradigm, as the *logos* fictions this paradigm to itself in order to project upon it the essence and the power it believes to be its own.” (54). From this viewpoint, myth has been always perceived in human world, as a form of unveiling uncertainties. As language exists mythical world can be related.

Therefore, it is in the sphere of this interdependent necessity between language and myth that community emerges as the event where words, as form, are transformed into myth, as meaning. In that event, community needs the other to survive, “Community is what takes place always through others and for others” (Nancy 15). Accordingly, community is created by myth, and myth is created in community, “they engender one another, infinitely and immediately.” (Nancy 50). However, this notion seems to fade away in the first half of the twentieth century that is because the city became the place of reunion par excellence, particularly inside the metropolis which is the artificial progression of a city.

Thenceforth, as an abridgement of this part, what I try to convey by means of these devices is a rendition of an interdependent dialogue with the literary and non-literary experiences of community. The analysis, then, will be based on two literary theories, reader-response theory and formalism, which have examined the literary aspects of interpretation, and a taxonomy of image and metaphor. Furthermore, philosophy and sociology have unveiled the main issue of this study from a scope that goes beyond the literary experience. Consequently, Nancy and Simmel’s strand of thinking will provide this examination a bond with other disciplines of thought. In summary, this theoretical construct has granted an appropriate ground to Thomas’s recreation of a transcendental experience; what brings to consciousness an integration of the recently examined notions of adventure, myth, and community, as an amalgamation that will be referred as a *communal attitude*.



### **III. Analysis**

One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple  
-- Jack Kerouac

In order to follow the protocols that Stanley Fish claims by his notion of interpretive communities I would like to state my own experiential approach to literary texts. Therefore, before the analysis of Thomas's writings I will give a short rendering of my arrival to this specific novel. "*I don't know where I'm going. I haven't any idea in the world. That's why I came up to London*" (Thomas 254). When I chose the literature seminar I felt likewise Samuel Bennet, the protagonist of *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, however in this case, it is not the city of London my place for growth but a university course. That is because, it is here where I can show how free I am and in which ways the teachings that have nurtured me throughout my passing by university would support my perceptions about actual world through the medium of a literary work.

Furthermore, as seen through the theoretical framework Stanley Fish additionally states that a close rapport emerges by the meeting between literary texts and readers. This process is seen as an integration of reader's intentions and experiences (Fish 2083). Therefore, my leading intention, as expressed previously, is to look for community in a modernised environment. Thus, this purpose can be seen through the experience of choosing an author that could portray that idea. Since the year previous to my degree seminar I was in the search of an author who would portray an appealing urban subject, one that makes me shiver. I had in mind a great amount of writers, such as Dylan Thomas, Norman Mailer, Ian McEwan, James Joyce, Jack Kerouac, among others. From the onset, I focused myself on Jack Kerouac and his *Dharma Bums*. I made a lot of research about him and his writings. Nonetheless, during the development of the seminar I realized that he would not be a suitable project to accomplish. My interests had changed. It was one day that I was reading some book reviews by Jorge Teillier that I met for the first time Thomas's prose works—An author that I turned down at the beginning, because I assumed that his writings were only located in the countryside—. The portrayal given by the Chilean bard was the crucial impulse to go into the Welsh writer. "... *la tarea del poeta es recuperar lo irrecoverable. Recuperar los dominios perdidos*" (Teillier 3). According to Teillier Thomas's rendition of life, and in this case city life, was filled with hope, and solidarity. This depiction made by a poet to another poet was the reason of my choice. It is in the light of the previous statement that the intrinsic resolve to recreate a lost space shivered me.

## 1. A dreamy journey: from the town to the city

Dylan Thomas's oneiric narrations take the shape of a poetic prose. The narration, consequently, is enriched by the use of various kinds of tropes that are commonly associated to a lyrical sphere; in particular, metaphors and images that extol a setting well-disposed to adventure. In this space, the development of the story is put forward in a moulded skin which represents both an ever changing city, and an ever changing character. As a consequence of this, the reader becomes an accomplice in the story, a role that allows him/her to appreciate the course of it. *Adventures in the Skin Trade* starts at the very dawning of the day. It is five to two in the morning and the protagonist rises in the middle of the night, "That early morning, in January 1933, only one person was awake in the street, and he was the quietest. Call him Samuel Bennet." (239). Silence is shed on a newborn day, a setting in which darkness melts with Samuel's spirit. This radical image reflects, firstly, the discreet essence of that space, and secondly, a first approach to the protagonist's demeanour. The story, as seen in this opening scene, is mostly focused on Bennet's fortunes and misfortunes, as a matter of fact his present state is depicted metonymically by the image of heavy eyes that gather together the weight of a vivid dream, "His eyes were still heavy from a dream of untouchable city women..." (239). The night is additionally displayed as the space in which dreams are experienced. In particular, this dream enlivens his will to go to an imagined city, one full of women. This image reflects a sexual desire, inherent to all human beings as a way to establish sentimental bonds, especially at the age of Bennet, twenty years old.

By the agency of this intimate rendition, Thomas deployed a new beginning in the life of Samuel Bennet. At this point, it is important to have in mind the significance of the protagonist's surname. The term "Bennet" is a shortening of the name of a plant that usually grows in the city; *herb Bennet* that comes from the Latin *herba benedicta*, and whose scientific name is *Geum Urbanum* ("Geum Urbanum"). The name, therefore, highlights the way in which nature accommodates itself on all environments, even in the artificiality of an urban setting.

Beyond this reference to nature, and following with the idea of a fresh start that is supported by the night, Samuel wants to make evident his will to be a new person, to moult, consciously, his first skin, "...Come and look at Samuel Bennet destroying his parents' house in

Mortimer Street ... Samuel shouted under his breath, ‘Come and see me destroying the evidence, Mrs. Rosser; have a peep from under your hairnet... come and see me break the china without any noise so that I can never come back.’ (242). Samuel destroys some material goods that belong to his family before departing, as a sort of purifying ritual that makes him conscious of the consequences of leaving home. Through the medium of an anaphora, “come and see”, he emphasises his determination of “never come back” in order to become an autonomous being.

The setting of this initial milieu is the town, a space that is in the between of countryside and city. It is in this specific background that the story unveils existential doubts, regarding a manner of living that is still rising, and that encourages an intrinsic necessity of material goods. As seen in the theoretical framework, this is the period in which capitalism, lastly, takes the form of a new religion, as Benjamin claimed. Samuel makes evident this necessity by the depiction of his mother going shopping, “There she was, walking down the street along the window-sill, step by step, stout, safe, confident, buried in her errands, clutching her handbag, stepping aside from the *common women* blind and heavy under a week’s provisions, prying into the looking-glasses at the doors of furniture shops.” (240). This radical image reveals a new human being who survives walking around the streets under the shelter of their belongings. Samuel’s mother, then, sets forth an illustration of Watt’s *homoeconomicus*, *i.e.* a person that pursues a social status by the accumulation of material goods. This economic enjoyment is depicted in her demeanour that is enumerated by positive adjectives, “There she was ... stout, safe, [and] confident”. Moreover, she portrays a segregated urban space by her detachment from lower class women, “stepping aside the common women”. Thus, by this scene, Samuel’s mother exemplifies the ordinary people of those times, the ones that wanted to be seen as part of a prestigious social group, in this case bourgeoisie.

It is from this ordinary existence that Samuel wants to escape. He plans to be “out of the regular course of a human destiny” (Simmel 223), in order to elude some social issues, such as the individualism promoted by a capitalist system. He feels suffocated in this environment where citizens work as “[a] complicated organization [that] resembled machinery” (Simmel, 227). This mechanistic approach to everyday experiences is visualized throughout a dialogue in a post office, “You can hear them in the lane behind the post office as you tiptoe along, they are saying, ‘So he said and I said and he said and Oh yeah I said,’” ( 242-243). This passage is enriched by

an alliteration of sibilant sounds that emphasizes a liquefied setting that exposes a mechanization of human experiences. Language, hence, is divested from its content, and only works as form. A demonstrative case of this language mechanization is also found in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener". The protagonist of this story, Bartleby, is unable to express himself more than a few sentences, and therefore he does show himself mostly by his actions, leaving his mental life just in a mere beholder's assumption. Gilles Deleuze sheds a light on this procedure "The formula I PREFER NOT TO excludes all alternatives, and devours what it claims to conserve no less than it distances itself from everything else" (73). This distance from human quotidian life works as an extreme case of unification with this new mechanical world, alienating individual form from a general content.

Thomas's (anti)hero wants to be autonomous, and likewise the farmers that since the eighteenth century have been gone from the country to the city, Samuel's main aim is to attain both a physical and mental freedom through the medium of an urban adventure. Bennet's resolution is understood in the light that inside his house he feels sheltered, but imprisoned, at the same time. As a consequence of this, he does not follow any piece of advice from his parents. He subverts his reality in order to experience a new world,

'He'll get himself a nice room, of course, not too central. And don't have an Irish landlady.' His mother brushed his collar as he ate.

... He saw himself knocking at a lodging-house in the very centre of the city, and an Irishwoman appearing at the door. 'Good morning, madam. Have you a cheap room?' 'Cheaper than sunlight to you, Danny Boy.' She would not be more than twenty-one. 'Has it got bugs?' 'All over the walls, praise be to God.' 'I'll take it.' (245)

This conscious act of contempt that is pictured in the protagonist's mind mirrors his idealistic nature, at some times naïve. In order to accomplish his will to be autonomous he mentally ridicules his mother's words. The irony present in this fragment is seen in the hyperbolic image of a room full of bugs. Nature, portrayed by bugs, appears surviving in this imagined city as an annoying element that, in this case, should be ironically thanked to God. Additionally, a comparison between sunlight and the cost of his accommodation put a light on

the matter that, on those times, it rises to be a common belief that everything is able to have a monetary value.

At last, he leaves his home, and starts his solitary adventure. At the moment of the farewell he, once more, tries to forget his personal history, “Through the back window *he saw three strangers waving*” (246), the three strangers, that he refers in this phrase, are his mother, father and sister. He actually had said that “history is lies” (241). He is a writer, specifically a poet, as a consequence of that he wants to write his life by means of his own adventures, a history based on his conscious decisions.

He gets to London and his first impression of it is one of desolation: “Now the train was losing speed, running out of the lost country into the smoke and a tunnel of factories, puffing past the district platforms and the high houses with broken windows and underclothes dancing in the dirty yards. Children at the windows never waved their hands to the train. It might have been the wind passing.” (248). Samuel is in the search of something that even he does not know what it is; a sort of paradise lost that will be unveiled before him by going through actual world. In this part, he refers to a “lost country” that vanishes as a consequence of the smoke provoked by industries. In *The Country and the City* Williams explains that the conception of a lost country associated to a pastoral innocence is, mostly, an idealization of such period of time. That is due to the fact that even in the countryside people were under the influence of overwhelming powers, such as the feudal lord, or even bureaucratic officers. Therefore this magnification was in one sense consequence of a perspective problem (Williams 9-12). Samuel visualises this broken city as a space in which the inhabitants are invisible; the city, then, is characterised through its concreteness. The landscape of “underclothes dancing in dirty yards” opens the perspective of a city that, although it is almost naked, at the same time, it is still dancing towards the unknown.

At the moment of his arrival to the train station he placed himself in its buffet. He takes a sit on a table and delineates a portrayal of his surroundings. Samuel’s impressions regarding the train station reflect a death promoted by a mechanization of everyday life, “Time was dying all over the room... The lonely crowd went out in a *funeral procession*, leaving ash and tea-leaves and newspapers.” (251). On the one hand, everyday objects—as part of this bleak enumeration—highlight the idea of an automatized society. Routines, then, become evident on the light of those ephemeral objects. On the other hand, the oxymoronic image of a “lonely crowd”

puts an emphasis on the idea of a segregated city; a melted society that orderly flows in order to give life to its subconscious Leviathan. This soul-stirring image gains significance in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Writers began to unveil the disturbing consequences of modernity. In a way, they were giving poetic shape to Karl Marx's ideas about the consequences of a capitalist system upon human beings. He stated in his *Communist Manifesto* that: "All that is solid melts into air all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life..." (35). As a consequence of that human relationships look dying; the older feelings of companionship are left aside in order to have enough time to produce material goods. As an example of this literary integration, by *The Waste Land* T.S. Eliot depicts a similar image regarding the decaying of human relationships: "Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,/A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,/ I had no thought death had undone so many." (61-63). This solitary multitude, that walks second on second in a continuous path, puts before of our eyes a martial rhythm which marks a social decadence, by the use of the repetition of "so many". This martial rhythm brings to mind Thomas's "funeral procession" that reflects the human alienation of city life. This devastating landscape seen in both Dylan Thomas and T.S. Eliot's renderings echo Marx's stance on how the elder holy values of comradeship are little by little becoming extinct in modern world.

After this dying rendition of London, Samuel Bennet does not seem discouraged; on the contrary he is still looking for an unknown future. Because of that, his adventure still seems idealistic: "One pleasure is, Samuel said to himself, that I do not know what I expect to happen to me... as I walked into London for the first time, rattling my fortune, fresh as Copperfield. I could count the straws in my hair with one hand." (253). Like David Copperfield, he inhabits London as an orphan. Bennet witnesses London from the eyes of a child, his orphanage, unlike David's, is self-imposed. Therefore, Samuel is conscious of his chances. Currently, he is no longer a kid, but he still bears a childish approach to London. He does not really care about what he can get by his freedom, "One pleasure is ... that I do not know what I expect happen to me". Samuel's pleasure is supported by his own will to be out of the system. That is understood at the basis of a direct opposition to the materialistic delight promoted by the capitalist human being of those times: "enjoyment is subordinated to capital and the pleasure-loving individual is subordinated to the capital-accumulating individual" (Marx qtd. in Giddens 15). Bennet's small fortune works as a means to dislocate the current economic viewpoint. As seen previously in the

breakfast chatting, he is aware of the tenets of the city—his mother advised him about them—nonetheless, he is also mindful about his own aim. At this moment, Samuel only wants to experience the vast urban space in solitude, as an orphan that strives to survive an adverse environment. His current economic freedom gives him a tool to look into the city with both individual and social assurance.

## 2. The recreation of a myth in a modernized city

Before a deeper literary exploration of Samuel's London, Thomas's unpublished short story "Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar", written before *The Adventure in the Skin Trade*, will illustrate Thomas's worst suspicions about city life. Moreover, this short narration, which is in the process of editing<sup>2</sup>, portrays a warfare in which obscurity and death are spread all over the island. Hence, a dissolute urban setting is put on scene: "The men in the cities raced for shelter, fixing their leather masks [upon their masks of flesh], their trousers unbuttoned as they scampered out of the urinals, their hair uncombed as they climbed out of a purchased sleep ..." (355). This metropolis looks bleak, its inhabitants are fragmented, and the urban setting does not provide shelter to anyone. The rationalization of human experiences denoted by the expansive image of "leather masks" and "masks of flesh" exposes how society has lost their own identity. Persons, understood by their etymological root, are mere masks expecting to fill a space in the theatre of life. Therefore, the "leather masks", and the "purchased sleep" describe some everyday actions that point out how society has been finally shaped by the capitalist idea that everything can be bought; even dreaming—an utterly personal experience—is restrained by the never-ending will to obtain some monetary earning in the background of city life.

Beyond this ominous first approach to the experience of urbanity the title of this narration remits, in a straight line, to the Christian myth of *The Magi*. Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar were the names of the Three Kings that accompanied Mary after her delivery. In a different way to the biblical narration this story is recreated in the setting of an agonizing modern city, in which holy beliefs would seem to be erased from earth. Nevertheless, the myth seems to be still alive in Thomas's impressions upon city life, as Jean-Luc Nancy claims "myth is simply the invention of literature. Literature, which interrupts myth, will not cease until it has re-established

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<sup>2</sup> This unfinished story draft contains some further deletions and additions. In order to have a proper understanding of those, square brackets will denote deletions and italics will indicate additions, respectively.



a continuity beyond this interruption.” (72). This literary recreation, thus, tries to *re-establish* that essential flow present in the myth. This obscure urban scenery sheds a light on the idea of humankind supported by two great columns, one of emotions denoted by an ever living tradition, and one of reason expressed by an industrialised society full of opportunities. This lack of grounding is depicted by the current absence of those colossal supporters. This absence is seen by the image of “printing presses silent” (256), in which the idea of an empty society, with neither future nor past, is emphasised, setting forth a hyperbolic image of the possible outcomes of a mechanised city life. Under this perspective, Samuel’s will to become an autonomous being within the city is contrasted to both physical and mental restraints, which have imposed homogeneity upon city dwellers in this over-controlled space. That is because, he is aware, firstly, that the urban space offers him indescribable opportunities, and secondly, that a human tradition of companionship will be still a supporter of his adventure.

Furthermore, this degraded city remains to be a space of disjunctions, “There was love and hate in the island ...” (355). On the one hand, love is represented by the close rapport between a mother and her new-born. And on the other hand, hate emerges personified by a war that is never explained. Accordingly, the infant is born in this antagonistic space, and the protagonist of the story is finally unveiled as part of this fostered myth: “[Kneeling] I *knelt* where I stood [I] *and* felt the new joy of pain as a bullet drove into my [lung] *breast*. I fell upon the pavement near the two lifted arms, and [, bitter as myrrh,] my [bitter] blood streamed *bitterly* on to the [mother’s feet] emerging head.” (357). The main character took the role of Melchior, however in this case the wise man did not give only a material good, but his own life was also contributed to the small child. Hence, death and birth are suggested as part of a never ending experience where the main characters—the wise man, the mother, and the newborn—are seen as a pivotal triad that stands for a whole new communion, putting forward the idea of a holistic myth. Moreover, Thomas’s deletions, such as the one that directly refers to myrrh puts forward the special care that this Welsh writer has in order to recreate<sup>3</sup> that Christian myth. Nevertheless, according to Nancy literature does not produce myths, but it is a consequence of a weighty discontinuity: “*Literature* ... only knows that it inaugurates itself with one stroke, one incision,

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<sup>3</sup> “recreation” is understood from its Latin root, *recreare*, that refers to a refreshment, restoration, invigoration, or the making anew of an entity (“recreation”). In this case, Thomas’s short story, as a refreshment of the Christian myth of Magi, emphasizes the integration between an interrupted myth and the literary sphere.

and it names "myth" that which it represents to itself as having been present before this stroke." (72). Dylan Thomas through this short account presents his own views about a well-known Christian narration, and as a consequence the city is depicted in distress. Nonetheless, in the end of the story that myth appears as the element that unites and gives sense to the progression of events. Jean-Luc Nancy claims that literature is unaware of interrupting the myth. Language, then, in its ambiguity offers to the writer, at least, the chance of looking inside the essential myth. As expressed previously, Nancy claims that Myth *is* interrupted in literature, however, this interruption will be understood as the igniter of literature, and alike to the "bitter blood streamed on the emerging head" myth, from this point onwards, should nurture the literary domain with the will to invigorate and consequently honour that dead entity.

### **3. City dwellers: *homoeconomicus* and *homoreligious***

However, the actual city life portrayed by Samuel's experiences in London opens to view a rather more realistic account of the city when compared to the previous story. In the course of his adventure Samuel meets some characters that mirror city life. One of them is Allingham, a furniture dealer that at the beginning is deployed as a rational character who questioned Samuel's careless attitude:

'Let's get the first thing straight. People who have come must go. People must know where they're going, otherwise the world could not be conducted on a sane basis. The streets would be full of people just wandering about, wouldn't they? Wandering about and having useless arguments with people who know where they're going. My name is Allingham, I live in Sewell Street off Praed Street, and I'm a furniture dealer. That's simple, isn't it? There's no need to complicate things if you keep your head and know who you are' (254).

The city promotes a rationalization of human experiences. *Reason* is going to be the ruler of the Western world from modernity onwards. From this perspective, individuals will be seen as fixed elements in a setting that encourages habits and routines. Allingham is an example of this rationalization. He introduces himself by means of his role in the city, a furniture dealer; by doing that, he makes known his level of internalization regarding money economy which denaturalizes the complexity of human experience. He understands himself only as a title in

function of city life. Moreover, he, additionally, questions Samuel's outwardly irrational attitude. As stated before, the city resembles a machinery, as a consequence of that its inhabitants are compelled to play a role in order to keep the non-stop progress of this space. Samuel, by his attitudes, dislocates the current flow of living that persons such Allingham takes for granted.

As a consequence of that, the narration seems to be developed from antagonistic perspectives, at this stage. Allingham wants to rationalise Samuel's demeanour. However Thomas's hero is unattainable for the furniture dealer, at this moment:

... What did you expect to happen?

'I don't know ... 'Anyone might come up,' he said ... A clerk from the Crescent a dozen doors away; a cold, ordinary woman from Birmingham, driven off by a wink; *anybody, anybody*; a deacon from the Valleys on a mean blind, with his pocket-book sewn in his combs ....

'Oh, anyone of course. Janet Gaynor,' Mr. Allingham said. 'Marion Davies and Kay Francis and ...'

'You don't understand. I don't expect that kind (255)

Allingham is still stuck in an imagined reality in which the city dwellers do not want to know *anybody*, but they want to meet celebrities such as *Janet Gaynor* or *Marion Davies*. Otherwise, Samuel's main goal is to get to know the metropolis as a whole. The city, for him, is more complex than streets, huge buildings, and celebrities. By an enumeration of diverse kinds of persons Samuel emphasises the way in which the commons give birth to the urban space. Samuel's motivation, thus, is to find a cosmos within a seemingly ordered setting that arbitrarily provokes chaotic human experiences. Urbanites look for a singularity in a space that promotes habits, and a general homogeneity. This disruption between the individual and the multitude will be seen by the bard as a chance to find unity. In the light of that, Samuel Bennet would characterize a *homoreligious*, understood as a consequence of a "... religious nostalgia [that] expresses *the desire to live in a pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning*" (Eliade 65). Such as Welles & Warren expresses in the theoretical framework, poets' main objective is to recreate myth in order to find a communal feeling between world and humanity.

The *homoreligious* rises as a character that subverts the status quo in the metropolis; the rush of modern life has translated elder sacred objects into profane tools that allow citizens to obtain a social status. The city, understood as machinery, has desacralized human experiences. At first sight, Allingham represents the typical Londoner of those times, a *homoeconomicus* that feels stout, safe, and confident—such as Samuel’s mother wandering in her town—by his routines, and personal goods and chattels. Nevertheless, he establishes a bond that goes beyond mere rationality with Samuel, “‘Come on. We’re going.’ Mr. Allingham scraped back his chair. ‘Where to?’ ‘Never you mind. It’s I’m making things happen, isn’t it?’” (257). The sentence “never you mind” characterises this new status of Allingham; the *mind*, and consequently a rational understanding will not be the focus from this point onwards. Such as Samuel stated previously, the city is going to connect with him by means of ordinary people. Allingham, then, will be Bennet’s first guide into city life. Nevertheless, city life is not that different to his old town: “Mr. Allingham said. ‘This is my street. This is Sewell Street. It’s dull, isn’t it?’ ‘It’s like the streets at home.’” (257). Because of that, London will not be only understood by its buildings, and constructions, that is because they are seen as mere forms without content. On the opposite path, persons that live in this artificial setting will be the unveilers of the content of city life; the city dwellers and their imagined communities, portray a mental and physical rendition of the urban milieu.

It is in this manner, that urbanity arises as an unlimited space where citizens are unable of configuring a common identity per se, as a consequence of that it was necessary for inhabitants to imagine a common reality, in words of Benedict Anderson: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (49). Samuel gets to Allingham’s home, and it is exceptional. A furniture dealer’s house is expected to be surrounded by a great amount of pieces of furniture. However this is hyperbolically enclosed by them: “Every inch of the room was covered with furniture. Chairs stood on couches that lay on tables; mirrors nearly the height of the door were propped, back to back, against the walls, reflecting and making endless the hills of desks and chairs with their legs in the air, sideboards, dressing tables, chests-of-drawers, more mirrors, empty bookcases, washbasins, clothes cupboards.” (258). An expansive image is found in this description, “hills of desks”, “legs in the air”. This image depicts a new territory, one that is inhabited by common objects that because of

their lack of use would seem asleep living entities—they are meant to be everyday objects, therefore, they should be in constant use—. However in this space they have not got owners, they are just piled up.

Furthermore, this plenty of furniture chamber appears not only as a chaotic space, but it is additionally depicted as “the fullest room in England.”(262). This room takes the shape of an analogy between those seemingly infinite everyday objects, and the endless manufacturing rhythm of great cities. Metropolis, then, are seen as factories where an overproduction of material goods exemplify a lack of individual’s awareness about their belongings. They only accumulate objects in order to be seen as exemplary citizens. As a consequence of this, the furniture dealer takes a stance about this issue, by means of a slow pace rendering of this background: “How many hundreds of houses had been spilt in here [?] ... Rose, with her comb like the prow of a ship, driving into their darkness and lying all night motionless and silent where she struck. Now she was dead still on a sunk bed between the column of chairs, buried alive, soft and fat and *lost in a grave in a house.*” (262). Rose, Allingham’s wife, is “buried alive” in this hyperbolic analogy of London. She reflects the way in which city dwellers are suffocated by their own amassing of wealth by the need of being accepted in a society of appearances. She is even depicted “lost in a grave in a house”; this tragic account rises again in the light of this capitalist system. The lack of bonds, mental and physical ones, makes even the most elementary devices of conventional life insubstantial.

As a consequence of that, Rose is regarded as a replication of an internalised money economy that promotes a blasé attitude; a construct that presents objects as insubstantial entities (Simmel 178). This mindset has been usually reproduced in the modern city, however in the course of this narration Rose, and her unmanageable will to get more furniture in her home, will be the one who will play the part of that ostensibly automatized character: ““Whenever I say “That’s enough now,” in she comes with her “Plenty more room, plenty more room.”” (258). The repetition of “plenty more room” works as command to Allingham. Repetition usually denotes a mechanical way to face the world. Rose, likewise the people in the post office, becomes part of this sense of alienation in the city. She believes that “only the objective measurable achievement is of interest” (Simmel 176), therefore, the enormous amount of pieces

of furniture inside her house demonstrates an absence of order in that space, which had remained as one of the last bastion of a sacred recreation.

As expressed previously, this house would seem to be an analogy to city life. That is because, even in the core of this space, the persons reckon it as an unmeasurable one: “Perhaps the room was crowded at night with people who could not see each other, stretched under chairs, under sofas, dizzily asleep on the tops of raised tables, waking up every morning...” (262). Alienation is supported by the intrusion of artificial elements which blur human contact. On the one hand, in the city of London these elements would be exemplified by streets and buildings. On the other hand, in a similar way to the urban concreteness, tables, sofas, and chairs are the barriers of this area, providing, in this way, a covert atmosphere. Moreover, this crowded room seems to have its own routines, everyone has waked up every morning in order to fill their roles. The room, then, is only the carcass of a system that never rests. Buildings and streets are the shelter of a way of living that survives by the action of its citizens.

Through the medium of the previous examples, Allingham’s house has been characterised as a chaotic space in which city life is condensed. The incredible number of pieces of furniture, and the apparent mystery in which it is involved set forth another attitude in Dylan’s hero. Samuel looks at ease, and the individuals that inhabit this surreal space establish some bonds that go beyond simple courtesy: ““Is this the first time you’ve come to London? I felt like that when I came up first, too. Years and years ago. I felt there was something I must find, I can’t explain it. Something just round the corner. I searched and searched. I was so innocent. I felt like a sort of knight.””(261). This new companion unveils another layer of our hero. In this fragment, repetition is linked with a positive impulse to establish a connection with the other, “years and years” sheds a light on the temporal expansive image that portrays an approach to medieval values. Samuel resembles a medieval knight, in the sense that he is, overtly, in the search of an idealised woman. Additionally, the repetition of “I searched and searched” sympathises with both the idea of an endless reality, and the searching of courtly love. Courtly love and the chivalric values of loyalty and honour may characterise Bennet’s extemporal way of living, at this stage. That is because the first approach to the city newcomer is to find a goal in order to fill in a place. The urban space is full of opportunities and the individuals that walk in the metropolis are aware of that. However, the disposition that city promotes—alienation, blasé attitude,

accumulation of material goods, and so on—are going to be a first barrier to the persons that bring with themselves some older values. The ones that survived as sacred all along human history. Samuel’s idealised lady will be the spinal cord of his first adventure in the city, “I thought perhaps she might be a sort of Holy Grail. You know what I mean. A sort of ideal.”(261). She is going to be a sort of Holy Grail, a symbol that is not simply focused on the object itself, but on the path that the hero would have to trudge through in order to gain new awareness about his position in the world.

As we discussed before, Samuel would characterise the *homoreligious*, in this mode he wants to create his sacred space in the city in order “to acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to found ‘the world’ and to live in a real sense” (Eliade 23). Poetry is going to be a point of union, a place in which the characters visualise themselves as part of a whole tradition:

‘Goodie goodie! It’s so exciting to find someone who knows about poetry. “The voices faded and the hills slept.” Isn’t that beautiful? The voices faded ...? I can read poetry for hours, can’t I, Donald? I don’t care what kind of poetry it is, I love it all. Do you know, “Is there anybody there, said the traveller?” Where do you put the emphasis, Mr. Bennet? Can I call you Sam? Do you say, “Is there anybody there” or “Is there anybody there?”’ (263)

It is well-known the paradoxical nature of language that, on the one hand, it may establish a point of communion among human beings, and on the other one, it may blur human understanding. Language, then, is thought unattainable; it is because of its never-ending advance. However, language will become a distorted entity in this infinite space, as well. Language, such as the urban setting, is going to be a mental construct by which the city dweller will have the chance to be either connected or stunned. Poetry, as consequence of that strand of thinking, may have the role of weaving human beings together. The personal perspective that poetry conveyed is reflected by means of subjectivities. This subjectivity is expressed by means of the great amount of questions that George Ring, Samuel’s new companion, utters. Hence, poetry shall play its part towards communion, and language itself will enclose them in its endless nuances. By means of the repetition of: “is there anybody there?”, Dylan Thomas will exemplify the way in which language cannot be only experienced through written texts, language is a living construct. Then, it is necessary to take into account its sonority, as well.

Samuel Bennet has become a point of union among these persons. They have been resituated in their own habitual space, by means of Samuel hopeful and seemingly distant metropolitan demeanour. Therefore, they want to establish a bond with this odd new citizen, in order to understand his motto. In the light of this, they—the dwellers of Allingham’s house— go out their vital space in order to introduce Samuel the city of London. Their first stop is a restaurant. In this space Thomas’s protagonist meets a charming girl, Mary, “‘What’s your name?’ ‘Sam.’ ‘Mine’s Mary. But they call me Polly for short.’ ‘It isn’t much shorter, is it?’ ‘No, it’s exactly the same length.’ (268). Mary was re-baptised with the name of Polly. Polly is the typical English name to parrots. In this sense, this new companion mirrors one of the birds that seem to be able to speak like human beings. According to Ferber’s dictionary of symbols birds stand for a spirit of independence (25), such as the autonomous demeanour that Samuel enlivens. “Birds are given human Christian names” (e.g. Polly, Robin, Bob) “because they can be permitted to resemble men for the very reason that they are so different. . . they form a community which is independent of our own but, precisely because of this independence, appears to us like another society” (Levi-Strauss qtd. in Ferber 26). The city is not only settled by human beings, as seen before everyday objects, at times, seem to be supporting the form of that space. Additionally some animals, such as birds, shed light on the idea that metropolis were built in former natural settings. Such as *herba benedicta*, birds resemble the autonomous essence of nature. This idea is contrasted with a modernised city that promotes a burying of nature in favour of an urban realm. However, by means of the veiling of wildlife, and everyday objects it is shed a different light on the layers that city life supports. One of those layers, for instance, is the one that regards premodernity. That is because the term modernity relates itself to a past epoch (Habermas 3). This allows Samuel to reappropriate some premodern values, such as community, from the standpoint of his own experience of city life.

Samuel has been most of the narration with a bottle stuck in one of his fingers; an attachment that he got in the train station buffet. In the current setting, the restaurant, Polly was offered as the person who can provide some help to Bennet’s hand. In order to accomplish this task she goes with him to the bathroom. In this intimate space, Polly and Samuel produce a flirting. Bennet takes off his clothes and gets into the bathtub, in this moment Polly deceives Samuel giving him cologne instead of brandy. Samuel gets drunk, and he is left in this space defenceless, “...naked as a baby.” (272). By this image, he takes the shape of a newborn who



was cleansed of his impurities, a sort of baptism that gives Samuel a new skin, one that brings to mind a shield against his naivety. He depicts himself impotent: “Come and have a look at impotent Samuel Bennet from Mortimer Street off Stanley’s Grove trembling to death in a cold bath in the dark near Paddington Station. I am lost in the metropolis with a rubber duck and a girl I cannot see pouring brandy into a tooth-glass.” (272). Moreover, he describes himself in third person, as if he were an external witness of his misfortune. He begins this depiction by the formula “come and have a look”, one that looks similar to the one expressed at the beginning of the novel “come and see”. In this mode, he incarnates a new human being that understands his place in this adverse setting. He felt “lost” and by the radical image of “a rubber duck” he reckons and leaves behind Samuel’s childish beliefs. The metropolis will have a different skin since now.

#### **4. Dancing in the imagined city**

After this unfortunate event, Bennet is deployed in a more mature perspective. “London is happening everywhere” (277), Samuel claims as they walk by the streets of the great metropolis. He and his companions become part of a heavy rain during this wandering. They integrate the metropolis, as nature and artificiality is intertwined in the body of these walkers by means of its streets and the drops of water. “Look at London flying by me, buses and glow-worms, umbrellas and lamp posts, cigarettes and eyes under the water doorways, I am dancing with three strangers down Edgware Road in the rain, cried Samuel to the gliding boy around him. Light and without will as a suit of feathers, he held on to their arms, and the umbrella rode above them like a bird.” (278). Literature, as a sphere of human knowledge, has been seen as the interruption of myth. As a consequence of that, myth bears the image of a dream depicted by an event that Simmel calls adventure. This experience takes the shape of a reminiscence that is re-woven (in the vital tissue) in a writing process that interrupts a being-in-the-space-and-time, the writing fades out in its own necessity of telling actions. The four dancers of this scene sheds light on the idea of Nietzsche’s concerns and possibilities about human experience, “el bailarín hace del juego un riesgo permanente, se pasea por la *cuerda floja del devenir*, hace de su vida un continuo” (Alba 195). It has been said that city life promotes alienation, and at the same time that it provides an endless amount of possibilities. Therefore, this modern human being on his/her own awareness is in charge of dislocating their realities in order to become autonomous, such as

Samuel intends by his journey. Samuel, then, is aligned to a premodern perspective of life, one that allows community in any place, even in the modernized city. Furthermore, he is visualized as part of a dreaming that recreates an older myth in which human actions are motivated by a religious attitude of human essential union. This dislocation has been buried in modernity; however this does not mean that it cannot be opened in Thomas's fictional rendition of city life.

Dancing, thus, is going to be another way to find communion in the city. Dancing has been present in human development practically during all its history. Because of that, this artistic expression will get people a real touch of the other. Human beings feel, at last, an actual freedom in this event; and the experience in the city—or even in any human construct—seems to be irrelevant. A real comradeship is found by those kinds of events. George and Samuel experienced this unity by dancing at a bar, “He put his arm round Samuel's waist and danced him away from the bar. The band began again though none of the couples had stopped dancing. “But we're two men,” Samuel said. ‘Is this a waltz?’ ‘They never play waltzes here, it's just self-expression. Look, there's two other men dancing.’ ‘I thought they were girls.’ ‘My friend thought you were a couple of girls,’ George Ring said in a loud voice as they danced past them.”(286-287). To the *homoreligious* there is no act able to be portrayed only as physiological or a mere entertaining one, but “it is, or can become, a sacrament, that is, a communion with the sacred” (Eliade 14). Community is found in some essential states of being. It is not a lost space as has been claimed by some scholars, but it is an attitude, a perspective towards human understandings and feelings. Therefore, through the re-sacralization of human experiences mankind is able to recreate a communal attitude that can be found everywhere.

It is in the light of this, that Jean-Luc Nancy claims that in literature human beings are able to visualise this communal attitude: “*Literary Communism...* is the articulation of community. "Articulation" means, in some way, "writing," which is to say, the inscription of a meaning whose transcendence or presence is indefinitely and constitutively deferred. "Community" means, in some way, the presence of a being-together whose immanence is impossible except as its death-work.” (80). Community is, finally, visualised in its absence of everyday actions. The feeling of desolation, as looking an automatized city, is a reflection of that veiled state. It is because of that that Samuel looks down-hearted about his impression of city life. He is in the search of a Holy Grail that will give peace to his journey. At the end of this

unfinished narration Bennet compares and assimilates the environment of white and black people: “The men and women drinking and dancing looked like the older brothers and sisters of the drinkers and dancers in the club round the corner, but no one was black... ‘All white people here,’ Samuel said. ‘The salt of the earth,’ Mr. Allingham said. ‘The foul salt of the earth. Drunk as a pig. Ever seen a pig drunk? Ever seen a monkey dancing like a man? ...’” (290). These drinkers and dancer are portrayed as animals that survive only by their instincts. However, in this city actual animals are detached from the usual scenes, due to the fact that they are only language replications, metaphors that unveiled the thoughtless attitude of those individuals. Their lack of awareness detached them from his cultural tradition and communion.

## **IV. Conclusions**

The tower fell, down fell the city of words, the walls of a poem,  
the symmetrical letters...

'Image, all image', he cried to the fallen as the night came on.

-- Dylan Thomas

In Dylan Thomas's short story "The Orchard" the homonymous protagonist<sup>4</sup> makes a dreamy landscape out of his actual bedroom. The falling tower takes the shape of a mystical metaphor in which a pencil encloses the vivid images of a sensory writer. The literary world, then, invigorates the actual perspective of this imaginative author. In a similar manner, Samuel left his natal town in order to dwell a space—the city—that would allow him unknown possibilities. He, as a poet, wants to create a new world by his experiences. The modern city is used as a novel background in which Bennet's idealistic impressions confronts some premodern notions, such as community and myth, with actual urban life. The sacred has been veiled by a modern thought that little by little has been rationalizing the world. Moreover, the metropolis—the artificial progression of a city—has been the concrete product of a rampant capitalism that buries nature in order to create an artificial landscape. The physical and mental human space has been disrupted by this aggressive stance, from modern times onwards.

As a consequence of this temporal contextualization, Dylan Thomas's writings can be perceived from another perspective. *Adventures in the Skin Trade* was published in 1941. However, as stated previously, this novel was unfinished, the Welsh bard stopped writing at the time of World War II. Vernon Watkins attributes this to the impact of war on him, "he was able to reconstruct out of joy the truth of his childhood ... but what was only half real, half fictional, he had to abandon" (Watkins qtd. in Ackerman 114). Therefore, it may be implied that Samuel's idealistic attitude towards city life—and modern experience in general—was slaughtered by the dying human scenery that the Second World War was portraying on those times. He believed on human spirit. However, at the moment of the conflict Thomas realizes that Samuel's adventure could not be fulfilled honestly; he was not able to reconstruct out of joy an honest rendition of this epoch. In conjunction to Henry James's ideas, he thought that "the only condition ... to the composition of a novel is sincerity" (James 26). Hence, Dylan Thomas bears the figure of a modernist writer that weighs up the belief that literary texts are part of an integration and reformulation of a literary tradition, in which writings are part of a palimpsest that concocts itself

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<sup>4</sup> The name of the protagonist is Marlais, Dylan Thomas's second name.

endlessly. He, then, stopped the narration in order to be honest with his essentialist literary tradition. He did not want to smear his literary practice by the image of a decadent human being, but he wanted to recreate a communal attitude that would portray his naturalistic and religious essence.

As a consequence of this, Dylan's accounts about the modern urban landscape—visualized as an attempt to recreate a myth that was interrupted—seems to collide with Nancy's concept of *literary communism*. That is because, on the one hand, Thomas's insights regarding community seem to be noticeably portrayed by his fictional accounts regarding modern city. Nevertheless, on the other hand, it is in the light of an honest writing that Thomas did not want to go through this narrative. Therefore, One of the possible endings of this adventure could have been that Samuel Bennet were consumed by city life, he would have been automatized within a capitalistic stance, in which adventure has no ground to be developed. As a consequence of this scenery, Samuel would not have the will to make anew the essential myth. Therefore, his everlasting dream would be over. Furthermore, the actual disruption of this novel sheds a light on the problem that has leded this study—the possibility of recreating a communal attitude in Dylan Thomas's impressions of modern city—. On the one hand, his impressions have been seen toward a fictional recreation of a communal attitude within this adverse landscape. However, on the other hand, the novel was unfinished, interrupted in a way. Therefore, this literary space did not allow an appropriate development of community in the modern city. This Welsh writer did not want to recreate an interrupted myth, but to portray an attitude that was dazzled by modernity.

Therefore, it has been assumed that Dylan Thomas's impressions of modern city intended to recreate a communal attitude —understood as an essential religious bond among human beings and both the spiritual and physical world—. The sacred, then, tried to be unveiled by the Welsh poet by means of his unfinished novel. Samuel, as the protagonist of it, was the point of union among the characters. He presented the social disaffections of modern city life in order to subvert it. The profane attitude that modernity promotes would be dislocated by Thomas's attitude towards human experience. As Karl Shapiro claims: "Religion, such as he [, Dylan Thomas,] knew it, was direct and natural; the symbolism of religion, as he uses it, is poetry, direct knowledge. Religion is not to be used, it is simply part of life, part of himself" (Shapiro qtd. in

Ackerman 2). As a consequence of that, Thomas's writings can be inferred as a religious experience in which he intended to celebrate some premodern and transcendental values such as community and myth by his writings.

Furthermore, this premodern attitude has been examined by means of a close-reading which was supported by Wellek, & Warren's literary theory. Working with formalism gave a suitable foundation to this study, in which figurative language could allow a visual approach to the modern city. In the light of this, images were pivotal in the rendition of this landscape, particularly the radical image that conveyed an unpoetic scenery through the medium of this utilitarian device. However, it was evident the lack of metaphors during this narration. It can be implied that the close-knit relationship that exists between image and metaphor cannot draw a perceptible distinction between those tropes. In this case, the whole series (image, metaphor, symbol, myth), provided by Wellek & Warren, is integrated within the novel. This sequence was, initially, thought to describe a lyrical work of art, because of that, the less poetical category, the radical image, seems to have this substantial presence. The image did not get the traits of a metaphor, but it sometimes resembled a symbol that at a slow pace comes to be a myth in progress. Then, the two extremes of the series –image and metaphor– were the vestiges of that progression, in order to portray Thomas's *felt need for communion with his society*.

Furthermore, Fish's reader-response theory could be integrated to formalism, adequately. In this particular case, Dylan's rendition of a modern configuration of urban settings granted to the writer a proper space to experience the writable text. The writable text, according to Terry Eagleton is: "usually a modernist one [, and it takes] a plural and diffuse [form]" (119). Therefore, reader's perspective may either affect or be affected by the way in which modernity enlivens their own vital surroundings. As a consequence of this, it would be necessary to explore the different nuances among reader's perceptions in order to note in what manners modernity has naturalized some stances, such as a capitalistic one. This is due to the fact that in these current times, the figure of the *homoeconomicus* seems to be a natural way to survive the modern world. According to Stanley Fish: "the form of the reader's experience, formal units, and the structure of intention are one..." (2083). The reader experience reflects the intentions of him/her, and it reveals a political stance of the reader by means of the formal units. To find a political stance may be a good niche to explore by literary critics the development of the analysis of literary

works. This would be an integration of the literary sphere and the critical discourse sphere. In order to obtain a meta-analysis of a written work by reader's perceptions the critic would have to weigh up different viewpoints at diverse levels, implying a multidisciplinary approach to the literary text.

Additionally, as presented in this study, there has been a diverse integration among different writers that have got subverted modes to approach the urban landscape. It would be fascinating to study, from a critical viewpoint, that kind of authors, in order to get a closer and more general picture of the urban modern setting. For instance, in Jack Kerouac's works a new American seems to be depicted; a nomad citizen that understands their territory as a space in which you can follow your own ideals. Modernity would be confronted by a human being who drops himself out of the quotidian. He, therefore, would be able to survive as a self-exiled character, who disagrees with a system that imprisons him in artificiality. Another writer that would be interesting to examine would be Jorge Teillier, he by means of his *poetry of the hearth*, would portray another attitude regarding city life. He would seem to be looking for an invigoration of the last remnants of nature life in city life, with the aim to refresh a myth that looks buried in modernity. The city, then, would allow a great diversity of characters, and the role of the literary critic would be to shed some light on the ones that were veiled by his/her current social and cultural norms. Community, a term that is associated to a premodern thinking, would be the spinal cord that may problematize the outcomes of modern city life.



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