

Thanatosean Episteme in Philip Ridley's Mercury Fur

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v1i147.4126>

ABSTRACT:

The shift in the critical perspective splits an episteme in two. A line of demarcation identical to the paradigm shift separates the new epistemes in a way that the critical insight should differ drastically on both sides of the line. Michel Foucault sorts these historical epistemes as Renaissance and Classical epistemes, then he included the Modern episteme as a latter historical era, and the line of distinction between one episteme and another is the critical insight that the involved mentality adopts. When it comes to the source of the influence of human behavior, the change in perspective in the consideration of the source of the influence is clarified in the comparison between the pre-Freudian versus the post-Freudian understandings of human beings. It means that with the consideration of two major depressions, the pre-Freudian thought believed that the driving forces of human beings are external. Whereas the post-Freudian understanding reconsidered the influence on human behavior as ramifications of the sub-consciousness that eventually affect the consciousness of human beings.

This paper examines Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* (2005) in terms of the Russian Formalist's defamiliarization aspects. The deployment of such techniques implicates the advancement of the dystopian irregularities on the stage over the regularly implied didactic methodologies. The use of the Foucauldian epistemes distinguishes the deployed defamiliarizing aspects as identified with a difference from the de Saussurean sign analogy. The paper concludes with the defamiliarized elements as the focal points of the plays that adopt Thanatos as their methodology.

Keywords: Thanatos, Episteme, Defamiliarization, Depression, Horror.

Introduction

Didactic calibers are the aim of drama. As drama started with morality plays and mystery cycles, those aims were more explicit and on the surface of practically every theatrical performance. As “drama is one of the most significant sources of poetic renewal and modernization witnessed by Western literature in general” (al-Zubbaidi, 2019, p. 101), the positive reinforcement continued to be the dominant attribute in theatrical interpellation due to the adaptation of drama by the church as well as the good results that it used to give when it was the sole means of entertainment.

The psychoanalytic terminologies define the god of pleasure, Eros; as the representation of positive reinforcement, and the other way around in presentation is represented by the personification of death, Thanatos. Those two, according to Peter Brooks, are the driving forces of human beings; one is either tempted or threatened to do something in his life. Hence, the theatrical presentations focused on the temptation of sending the positively reinforced moral implications through the plays.

It is known that there is nothing is as constant as change. With this maxim applied, one is inclined to predict the unstable nature of theatrical presentations. It means that the overuse of didactic and positive reinforcement tendencies normalized the message to be delivered. This normalization dispersed the reception of the audience and made the moral implications pass unnoticed, and the seats of the stage unattended. In sum, the Eroseean plays were normalized and their influence was hissed. Due to the “a sense of circumstantial and ad hoc necessity-driven, age-oriented adaptability” (al-Zubbaidi, 2019, p. 95), there was a need for a new means of communication to be adapted in order to deliver the cultural moral implications more efficiently.

Some playwrights continued with the Eroseean adoption of the plays, while Phillip Ridley, as well as other against-the-canon playwrights, sought to write with Thanatosean flavors in order to deliver daring moral implications that really needed to be heard. Since Thanatos “induces human beings to engage in risky and self-destructive acts” (Abed and Ubeid, 2020, p. 4), then Thanatosean plays are similarly engaged in risky presentation and controversial reviews.

This paper aims at dissecting Ridley's *Mercury Fur* (2005) while considering the defamiliarizing aspects. The Thanatosean elements are highlighted according to their close relationship with defamiliarization. The paper should conclude with the defamiliarized elements as the focal points of the plays that adopt Thanatos as their methodology.

Theoretical Framework

The forecourt of the Temple of Apollo is inscribed with “know thyself” (Brearley, 2017, p. 27). The Ancient philosophers at the time realized the efficiency of being content with the source rather than the target when it comes to the principal system of understanding. Referring to the ancient philosophers with training terminologies as the old masters, W. H. Auden emphasizes the undoubted significance of the ancient philosophers in understanding the immortal calibers of human beings. He opens his *Muse'e des Beaux Arts* with:

.... they were never wrong,

The old Masters: how well they understood

Its human position: how it takes place (Wood, 2005, p. 61).

Episteme is a verb that is originated in Ancient Greek and it means “to know” and to be both aware and acquainted with particular knowledge. For Michel Foucault, Episteme is the “guided unconsciousness of subjectivity within a given epoch” (Foucault, 2005, p. xxiii). It refers to the non-temporal a priori knowledge that functions as a foundation for discourses. Foucault targets the historical demarcations and highlights how imperative it is to consider the intellects in regard to these demarcations. He states, “In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice” (Foucault, 2005, p. 183). It means that historical demarcations are regulated by the intellectual understandings of a particular era. In other words, it is the individuals' understanding of a specific discipline that declares the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

The idea of historical demarcation applies to philosophical revolutions. In modern philosophy, for instance, there have been three major revolutions with drastic changes. The first episteme in modern philosophy was at the age of Enlightenment when Nicolaus Copernicus proposed that humans on their Earth are the ones who go

around the sun and not the other way around. This proposal proved the geocentric concept of man's universal centrality wrong, and it began a new intellectual era that emphasizes the sun being the center of the solar system rather than man being the center of the whole universe. The second major philosophical episteme was at the age of Charles Darwin when he suggested the Chain of Being inaccurate by proposing that man is not precisely the best specie that has ever been made and his "survival-of-the-fittest credo propels ... [the] poetic discourse right from the outset" (Mahdi, 2019, p. 48). Instead, he is an evolution of a previous organic life. The third philosophical episteme took place at the time of Sigmund Freud in his clinical psychology. Freud separates man into two constituting components as consciousness and sub-consciousness. He suggests that, in contrast to the prevalent belief that man holds full responsibility for his behavior, man's apparent behavior is controlled by his sub-consciousness. In other words, with the third modern philosophical episteme, man appears to be under the control of his sub-consciousness and he loses his structural transparency.

The third major philosophical episteme distinguishes how the pre-Freudian understandings of man regarding the source of influence on man's behavior are external. It means that for them, man was constantly under the influence of natural or divine forces, and his life revolved around going through battles and attempting to defy them. However, with post-Freudian thought, the source of influence of man's behavior is redirected from the outwards to stem from within. Hence, man is empowered, as his source of influence appeared to be closer and more comprehensive.

With its role distinguished, man's inner psychology got the necessary attention that made Peter Brooks follow up with the Freudian assembly line of intellectual production and pursue his investigations in narratology to publish "Freud's Masterplot" (1977). The essay further elaborates on the major influencers on human behavior and summarizes them into Eros and Thanatos. Similar to the good versus evil principle, Eros is the god of pleasure whereas Thanatos is the representation of death. In other words, one of them is the life drive while the other one is the death drive. The reading of the situation highlights "the barrier between the world of normalcy and

the disabled” (Yousif, 2022, p. 468) as the one is related to the life drive is normalized and Thanatos is associated with disability.

Eros-oriented plays were preferred in theatrical productions due to the didactic and interpellative tendencies of drama. As the positively reinforced plays were overused, their influence was normalized and the plays grew to be less effective and influential. Therefore, the growing need for a more efficient means of message transportation necessitated going through the roads untaken. Modern playwrights wrote Thanatosean-oriented plays in order to maintain the didactic and interpellative tendencies. In this regard, a Thanatosean play “belongs to the protest literature” (Mahdi, 2019, p. 47) in a way that this belongingness is made possible by attacking the overfamiliarity of theatrical presentations.

Conclusively described as “something that lurks all around, hits us where we live, and invariably takes us by surprise” (Berger, 2004, p. 430), Victor Shklovsky presented the artistic technique of defamiliarization on stage in a way that strangely presents common things. This technique is “more a form of activism than of aesthetics” (Mahdi, 2019, 48) and it sums up the thematic overview of the evolution of literary productions and it aims at granting the audience new perspectives and decision reevaluation. As an example of defamiliarization, guerrilla communication and cultural jamming provoke subversive effects through interventions in the process of communication.

Conceptual Implementation

The first reaction to the reading or an active observation of the performance of Ridley’s *Mercury Fur* (2005) is the provocative usage of violence and images of torture. The involved members’ reaction to those images is normalized in the sense that the audience/ observer feels obliged to deviate from this destiny. These deviations have impacts which function as ripples with further implications, and those “impacts are portrayed as common subjects in modern drama” (Abed and Ubeid, 2020, p. 6), hence, by the end of the play, the entertainment-seeking spectator is left with anguishing levels of observations.

The opening scenes in the play present an anchor point through which the sense of direction is presented on the stage. The play opens

with two characters amid the darkness trying to reach an empty apartment in order to start a party.

Darren: (calling, offstage) Elliot? Ell? Where the hell are ya?

Elliot goes to front door.

Elliot: Where the hell are you?

Darren: Dunno.

Elliot: Can ya see the dead dog?

Darren: ... Yeah.

Elliot: Step over the dead dog. Turn left.

(Ridley, 2005, p. 131; emphasis in original)

The image of the dead animal in the front yard of the apartment is normalized in the sense that it became an anchor point through which one can know the directions. The defamiliarizing aspect of this incident is that the audience feels involved as this dystopian image in the future is not yet normalized, and the fear of normalizing such an image gives the observer a disturbing feeling. This normalization is read as a “feature that self-identifies an author as a recognizable person versus an identification by negation” (Yousif, 2022, p. 467) which leads to casting-off the idea of accepting the attempt of normalizing scattered dead animals in the residential spaces in order to be considered as markers of direction.

On a lower level than indifference to animal abuse, the sense of direction in *Mercury Fur* (2005) seems to find its way in images with negative connotations constantly.

Naz: Elliot knows me! He drives the ice-cream van down to the flyover. That’s where I used to live before. *Second burnt out car on the left*. The flyover is one of Elliot’s stops. (Ridley, 2005, p. 154; emphasis added)

The description reestablishes the “poetics that valorizes alterity and non-normative experience” (Yousif, 2022, p. 472) by making it obvious how used to the destruction the characters of the play are. In the long run, the ghost figure of any character can synchronize with the audience; the latter, in turn, feels involved, and the destruction is felt closer to home than expected.

The turning point of the background story in *Mercury Fur* (2005) is based on the consumption of butterflies as an alternative to drugs.

Lola: There was a storm. One night. Years ago. A very violent storm. In the morning I looked out of my window and saw ... sand. A layer of sand over everything.

...

Lola: Something's sparkling on my windowsill. It looks like a diamond. I pick it up. It moves.

...

Lola: It's an insect. A big butterfly. It's white.

(Ridley, 2005, p. 198-9)

The consequence of finding those butterflies is confirmed in lines like "People are eating butterflies" (Ridley, 2005, p. 236) as well as frequent questions like "Have you eaten a butterfly?" (Ridley, 2005, p. 134). Ever since, butterflies gave consumers long-term false memories of the violent nature of rape or assassination.

Those memories are maintained with the continuous butterfly consumption in a way that the involved characters wonder about the butterflies "If ya stop taking 'em, do memories come back?" (Ridley, 2005, p. 201). The answer to such an inquiry is inconclusive due to the oxygenator attribute of the butterflies. It means that the butterflies do not have an addictive appearance; rather, life looks inhabitable without taking them. The narrative technique in this play cultures the foundation for the coming defamiliarized incidents. It means that the involved characters in the play are in the position of post-interpellated subjects who are unable to grasp the point of demarcation with the previous normal life.

The dystopic image of the future describes two major human elements that have been perverted: love and intellect. It means that the dystopic scenery in *Mercury Fur* (2005) is the result of the attack on the humanitarian controlling units: the brain and heart of the subjects. It is possible to state that without these two units, it is easier to control the youth in any generation.

When it comes to controlling the brain of the subjects, it is inevitable to notice that the involved youth in the play are distorted intellectually. Lines like "Not Butterfly-Man-In-The-Ice-Cream-Van Elliot?" (Ridley, 2005, p. 154) consider cunning and manipulation as positive attributes within the dystopian setting.

Furthermore, friendly arguments about ancient civilizations and unignorably obvious mummifications uncover the primitive knowledge of the youth of the dystopian setting.

Elliot: Tell me, Naz, when you were taking your pickings from the museum, did you happen to pass through what was left of the ancient Egyptian galleries?

Naz: Dunno.

Elliot: Bodies wrapped in bandages?

Naz: A hospital?

Elliot: Mummies, for fuck's sake! You must have heard of fucking mummies. Pyramids. The sun god Ra. Tutankhamun. Surely some of this rings some fucking bell somewhere.

Naz: ... No. (Ridley, 2005, p. 158)

The inability to recognize mummies and mistake them for wrapped bodies in bondages shows the youth's illiteracy in recognizing things that are considered given to the audience. This defamiliarizing incident can be read as a trigger for the audience that this illiteracy can be investigated in the near future in the audience's offspring or relatives.

Furthermore, with the authoritarian neglect of cultural monuments, the youth grow increasingly illiteracy about the purposes as well as usages of those monuments. Instead of maintaining the previous generations' efforts in reconstructing those monuments, the youth start acquiring negative knowledge about their cultural monuments.

Elliot: Ain't you ever been to a zoo, for fuck's sake?

Naz: Nah.

Darren: It's where they keep the dead animals.

Elliot: They weren't always dead.

Naz: What were they, then?

Elliot: Alive, for fuck's sake! They were alive! (Ridley, 2005, p. 159)

The zoo argument uncovers the mentality of one of the young characters who has never seen a properly functioning cultural monument.

In another instance, the inability to appropriately describe the museum provokes is set to provoke the audience into questioning their

educational goals and maintain a follow-up in order not to end up like the example on stage.

Naz: I got it from the statue place.

Elliot: What?

Darren: Describe the statue place. I bet he knows it.

Naz: Big building up West. Glass roof. They set fire to it.

Elliot: The British Museum. (Ridley, 2005, p. 156)

The young thief in this instance has stolen a prehistoric piece of art from the museum. However, his sincere understanding of the place from which he stole the piece is that it has a statue and glass rooftop.

Furthermore, as a consequence of consuming a butterfly wing via sniffing, one of the characters has experienced the memory of the assassination of political leaders, namely John F. Kennedy. The experience is described to be worthy of the risk of having to go through the process of assassination in person.

Darren: It only works if you've got a memory of an assassination in ya somewhere.

Naz: Don't think I've got anything like that.

Darren: It can be from telly. Or old photos. Just look at as much of it as ya can before ya take one and – bingo!

Naz: So you kill this ... whoever it is?

Darren: Political leaders. Usually, yeah. But not always. Sometimes you're the political leader getting assassinated.

Naz: You snuff it?

Darren: Yeah.

Naz: What's it like?

Darren: The best, mate! (Ridley, 2005, p. 174)

The narrative style makes it inconclusive whether the memory itself is distorted or the person experiencing this memory is misguided. In the following scene, a character experiences the murder of Kennedy. The totality of true information that he is capable of grasping is that the victim of this assassination used to be a political leader. However, the true information in this regard is contaminated with blurry stances that are true on their own, and are not true in relation to the biography and achievements of Kennedy.

Darren: Listen, mate, don't knock it. I saw the Dallas splathead Kennedy get wasted this morning.

Naz: Dallas splat-head Kennedy?

Darren: He used to be President. He was married to this blonde tart called Marilyn Monroe. They went to Germany for a visit and they met this guy called Hitler. This Hitler liked blonde people so he tried to give it to this Marilyn Monroe up the arse, didn't he? Kennedy got the right 'ump. He said, 'The only one who's gonna give Marilyn an arse fuck is me!' He declared war on Germany and started dropping all this napalm and stuff all over the joint. Hitler didn't have any napalm so he ... he ...

Naz: What, what?

Darren: Fuck knows. Who cares? All I know is Kennedy won the war. I think he dropped a couple of atom bombs or something and turned all the Germans into Chinkies. He dumped the blonde tart for causing so much grief and started to go out with this dark-haired girl who lived in Camelot or something. And one day they decide to pay a visit to this place called Dallas. This is where it gets good. Ya listening, mate?

Naz: Yeah, mate. (Ridley, 2005, p. 174-5).

The memory of Kennedy is distorted on three levels. The defamiliarization might not apply to all of the three levels; however, within the third level lies the intellectually provocative scene that moves something within the audience.

The first level of memory distortion is detected in relating Kennedy to Monroe and disregarding the multiple sources about Monroe's biography that announce the improbability of the affair. The second level of memory distortion is sensed in the way the Great War ended. The memory describes the war to have ended with dropping an atomic bomb (or something) on Germany. This memory is the perversion of the two atomic bombs that actually ended the Great War; the ones that targeted Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. Within the shift from the second to the third level of memory distortion lies the provocative part of guerrilla communication. The third level is highlighted with the causes of war. World War II in the dystopic scene deviated from its political and economic causes to be glorified with honor and Helens like the Trojan wars. Monroe's honor to be the cause of such a recent war to the audience provokes the transportation of cultural records for the coming generations. The sample of such a recent war serves as an example of the way cultural archaeology are received in the future.

In addition to the perception of the current cultural history in the context of the coming generations; the same event calls for an intellectual review in retrospect that the previous glorified wars that are presented at the current time of the audience in their context might be perverted already and their accuracy is to be questioned.

The second youth-controlling aspect in the play is the heart of the subjects. The perverted image of love and the distorted functionality of emotional exposure summons the reconciliation of opposites. Normally, love is not to be aligned together with images of murder and violence as love is the quite opposite of those images per se. Hence, the reconciliation of love with its opposite is a heterogeneous combination that the audience is unable to digest. This indigestion is the aim behind this presentation because it is the responsible spark for the self-assessment on part of the audience.

The point of departure from the recent attitude towards love is manifested in the play during an argument that criticizes the double standard behavior of the person from the previous generation. The double standard behavior in this particular off-stage character is shown in the way that she is emotionally affected in a relatively naïve incident, whereas she is stone-cold in another situation that requires real emotional demonstration.

Naz: Old people get like that sometimes. Take my mum. I remember she told me she made a snowman once. Her and some mates pushed all this snow together and made it into a shape of a bloke. Mum said they pushed black buttons into the snow for eyes. And stuck something else on for the nose. Wrapped a scarf round its neck and everything. Mum said she talked to this snowman. Talked to it like it was really alive. And then the sun come out or something and all the snow melted. Mum said she cried and cried. Even when she told me about it she was crying. When our next-door neighbours got chopped up Mum didn't cry. She just said, 'We best get out of this fucking block pronto.' But a melting snowman – the full fucking waterworks. (Ridley, 2005, p. 165)

The detailed segment discusses how the previous generations, labeled as “old people” (Ridley, 2005, p. 165), had a normal and healthy emotional demonstration as they have shown no hesitation when the opportunity of expressing their emotions passed by.

The dystopic atmosphere in *Mercury Fur* (2005), as presented in the quoted segment, has successfully contaminated the attitude of the raw models for the young generation. It means that the contagious nature of the perverted emotional understanding has infected the ones that are supposed to function as raw models for the young generation in the play. The infected previous generation character in this context, the mother, has previously shown emotional signs regarding the melting of the snowman that they have built before during her days of youth. However, during the context of the narration, the mother has encountered a complicated through which a person with such an expressive emotional history is expected to display higher levels of emotional expression that match the complicated situation. The complicated situation in the context of the narration is described as the neighbor next door suffocated until death.

Such a scenario provokes the emotional receptors within the audience because even if the neighbor is not on good terms with the main character in this scenario, the latter must have gotten used to seeing this neighbor. Hence, the death of this neighbor, in normal situations, has its own ramifications on the character. The mother's behavior in this context implicitly calls the audience to supervise the development of their emotional understanding of their surroundings critically.

The discussed segment about the mother in this part of the play functions as an opening for enlisting the topic of love in modern times. The topic is structured in a way that it starts with a sample from the previous generation and the contrast is highlighted between their reactions to emotional slots in the past versus their reaction in the age of butterfly consumption. Then the reactions of the young generations are replenished and the gradual development of those reactions is considered the body of this topic. Finally, the attitude of the young generation in post-contextual situations is presented as a closing statement for the whole topic.

The next level in the structuring of the modern love problematique is what the young generation in *Mercury Fur* (2005) calls "love scars" (Ridley, 2005, p. 178). Those so-called love scars are the remains of the previous torture that has been applied against them and it left a permanent physical mark on their bodies. As an example of this physical abuse that has been relabeled as love scars,

one of the young characters has a dent in his skull, and he explains that it is caused by a hammer.

Naz: That's some hole, man.

Darren: *It's a dent, not a hole.*

Naz: Did ya brains spurt out?

....

Naz: How'd it happen?

Darren: Someone hit me.

Naz: With what?

Darren: A hammer. (Ridley, 2005, p. 178; emphasis added)

The first thing that comes to mind upon having the disclosure over this confession is that it is analyzed in terms of hatred. A person must have extreme levels of hatred that they commit such physical abuse with a hammer that leaves permanent physical marks on the body of the victim. To the audience's surprise, when the analysis of this incident is discussed, the victim disregards the current logical agreed-upon norms and considers it quite the opposite of what it looks like.

Naz: Fuck me, they must've hated your guts

Darren: It wasn't hate! It was the opposite of hate. They hit me cos they loved me. Okay? They loved me so much they wanted to save me from ... from bad things. That sort of love don't exist any more. It's prehistoric. I'm lucky, me. I've experienced it. I've got that inside me head and no one can ever take it away from me. (Ridley, 2005, p. 179)

Above accepting the physical abuse that had left permanent marks and scars, the victim in this case considers himself lucky for having to go through this experience that is regarded as the direct expression of love. Critics regard this incident as witnessing the last bits of love in a dystopic context that is no longer existent. The reason for appreciating the perverted results of expressing love is that the next dominated phase has no emotional expression indefinitely.

Insecurity is the dominant attribute of *Mercury Fur's* dystopian narrative. When it comes to doing something about this constant feeling of insecurity, the helpless characters think of killing one another when they have the power to do so. The discussion about doing something as long as power is in hand brings the opposite of not having the power to do something instantaneously within the frame of

mind of the audience. It means that according to the Derridean argument about the definition by the opposition, the frame of mind of the audience summons the consequences of inaction in this context and what would have happened if the characters did not kill one another when they had the power to. This idea grows increasing sense of insecurity against the youth-surrounding atmosphere.

Elliot: But if things ... if things got so bad I was afraid people might hurt you ... Hurt you and Darren and ... I couldn't stand that ... You know, I made a promise to Darren. *I'd kill you both before I let anyone hurt you.* I'd shoot you while you slept or something. It's like a ... like a comfort to think of it. *The power's still in our hands,* Lol. Don't you see? We can decide ... not to carry on. We can decide to ... disappear.

(Ridley, 2005, p. 208; emphasis added)

The overprotective love that is demonstrated in this segment split the room of criticism into a group that considers this promise justified, and another group that considers the love possessive.

The promise to kill one another before things get out of control is a conditional threat. It means that due to the conditions' inapplicability over the contextual narrative as well as the overprotective probability, the promise does not cause an actual active threat. In another stance; however, love is annexed to negative connotations in a way that love appears to be the condition for deploying these connotations.

Elliot: I love you so much I could kick you and punch you.

Darren: I love you so much I could punch you and kick you.

Elliot: I love you so much I could make you bleed and bleed.

Darren: I love you so much I could kill you and kill you.

Elliot: I love you so much I could burst into flames.

Darren: I love you so much I could burst into flames.

Elliot and Darren embrace. (Ridley, 2005, p. 146)

The discourse analysis of the quoted segment highlights the conditionality of love with its opposites. The acts of kicking, punching, bleeding a person, killing, and bursting into flames are not associated with love in the audience's context. In this regard, having a contrasting context to the one presented on stage makes the audience ghosted in a similar scenario and lists the love conditionality in his

narrative. Consequently, the audience is interpellated into enhancing the things to be conditioned with explicit emotions like love.

By the end of the play, the promise is activated. The situation goes out of hand and noises of fire and bombing grow louder than the voice of the speaking personae. The sense of danger is provoked within the audience and the postponed disaster about the promise, that obligates characters to kill one another before things go out of control, is on its due.

The fire has been getting louder and brighter.

The bombing has been getting louder.

The sound has almost drowned out Darren's voice.

Darren (shouting above noise) I love you so much I could –
Elliot aims gun at Darren's head.

(Ridley, 2005, p. 287; emphasis in original)

Without actually having to depict the gun shooting and people dying, a loaded gun is aimed at the head of a beloved one, a character yells back the promise that they have made earlier. On the part of the audience, this scene serves as a reminder that the conditional attributes will be dispatched eventually.

The closing statement of the modern love problematique is the consequence of narrating hard times. Normally, after a breakthrough and a confession or a memory recall, the character is thirsty to explicitly express emotions in order to vent the inner cosmos healthily. Yet, in the toxic atmosphere of *Mercury Fur*, feelings are suppressed and one can recall then narrate an extremely horrible memory with a stone-cold heart, as well as the inconsequential thirst for emotional expression.

Naz: Yeah! We was in the supermarket. Me. Mum. And ...
Stacey! That's her name! Stace! She's younger than me. She only comes up to about here. Mum still calls her 'baby'. There's not much food on the shelves. I hear a noise. A gang's rushing down the aisles. About ten of 'em. Couple are about my age. They've got paint or something on their faces. Bits of meat hanging round their necks. They're screaming and waving these big knife things. Ya know?

....

Lots of blades go swish. Sort of helicopter feeling. Stuff gets in my eyes. Blood. Wipe it away. Look up and see one of the gang holding Mum's head. He's cut it off. He's holding it by the hair.

....

The crying is real close. It seems to be coming from this big smashed fruit. It's all red inside and very juicy. It's a got an eye. It's Stace! The gang has stomped on her head. One of her arms is gone. The gang drag her away and pull off her knickers.

....

I think Stace must be dead now. She ain't moving. I get right to the back of the shelf. I stay there for ages.

Slight pause.

Is the ice-cream van and stuff yours? (Ridley, 2005, p. 168-9; emphasis in original)

The slight pause at the end of the tragic narration postpones the process of perception and activates the state of disbelief about the regular passage of such a horrible event without a satisfying resolution. The fast-paced rising actions in the memory recollection of how a mother was unable to protect her own children nor herself from the gang members grows increasing emotional suffocation in the back of the mind of the listener to such a recollection. This emotional suffocation is regarded as a “dysfunctional behavior [that] may be too strong to allow any healing and growing to be accomplished” (Fellizar, 2019, p. N/A). In other words, the audience expects that either the story has a better ending, or at least it should be concluded with an emotional vent.

This emotional suffocation is a piece of evidence that within this dystopian setting in *Mercury Fur* (2005), the understanding of emotional expressibility has been redefined. This redefinition leads to a state that when the situation calls for an expressive set of emotions, the subject is not experienced enough to initiate the practice of emotional expressibility which is a given to the audience. Similar to the psychologically targeted patients whose diagnosis is “paired with the tendency not to share [their] emotions with others” (Pederson and Denollet, 2006, p. 205). Therefore, the subject rather shifts the topic of conversation into something more interactive and communicative.

The consequence of living in the described atmosphere is a perverted grey area between the neither and nor, or that one that lies between either and or. On multiple occasions, a character of a blind duchess makes a unique toast that combines two different and heterogeneous calibers. The toast is made “To roses and nuclear

weapons” (Ridley, 2005, p. 218). Despite showing the feature of the reconciliation of opposites, this toast summarizes the outline of living in such conditions and its influence on the mentality of the young generation who is responsible for receiving that influence, processing it further, and passing it on to their next generation, and so on.

When it comes to redemption, people usually tend to reemploy their memories of previous experiences and the good times that they had in order to imagine the possibility of having those good times back once again. It is possible to overcome the contextual hard times when the subject is given the ability to oversee the previous achievements or good times through memory recollection. However, the case of *Mercury Fur* (2005) differs in a way nearly identical to T. S. Eliot’s opening of “The Waste Land” when he led the argument against spring through its representative, April.

April is the cruelest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot, “The Waste Land”, Lines 1-

4)

Critics argue that Eliot’s argument was not aimed against the Aprilness per se. Rather, in the non-wasteland, April is indeed the time of the renewal representation as in spring as it comprises sceneries of melting snow, growing flowers, and people planting their crops and looking forward to an eventual harvest. However, in the scenario of the Thanatosean domination that is described by Eliot, there is nothing crueller than hope as it functions as the only lead to disappointment, and in a way, it only leads to the same destination. Furthermore, within the general tone of the poem, the reader/ listener catches the glimmer of the faint possibility of hope. Similarly, the memory recollection in *Mercury Fur* (2005) appears to be an extreme negative caliber despite the fact that it can be regarded as the sole element of repentance in this context.

Eliot: It’s easier for the young. Naz. Darren. They remember less of ... how it was. I wish I don’t remember so much. Don’t you? I wish I could just bash all the good stuff out of my fucking skull. It’s the good stuff that fucks you up! (Ridley, 2005, p. 207)

The argument highlights the comparison between two levels of realization amongst the youth in the context of *Mercury Fur* (2005).

The first level comprises the ones who have conflicting memories about the pre-Thanatosean domination, whereas the second level comprises subjects who have not been exposed to pre-contextual experiences that leave permanent memories. On the apparent level for the audience, the luckiest party is that one which has experienced prior memories through which he can compare and show nostalgia. On the stage of *Mercury Fur* (2005), the unexpected carries dominant manifestations, and the fresh minds who have not been exposed to the good times are regarded as the lucky ones.

With such a sole element of repentance and a way out of the Thanatosean context disregarded or considered as a negative aspect in a way that it is repelled, the situation is read according to two possibilities. The first possibility is that the involved subjects are going through the Eureka Effect in which they are overly aware of the Thanatosean attributes of their context; therefore, they are repelled from the slightest possibilities of repentance. Whereas the second possibility is that they are sinking in their depression to the extent that they have come to terms with their contextual Thanatos and the case of reformation is irrelevant to them.

Theoretical assumptions in theatrical representations are often followed by practical pieces of evidence. Ridley follows the same procedure and annexes an example with the theoretical assumption that he presents in *Mercury Fur* (2005). The theoretical assumption he presents is the idea of people misusing the means of repentance as well as the means through which they can get out of the Thanatosean atmosphere. In certain scenarios, repentance representatives are demonstrated with natural elements because those elements are neutral and even their monstrous motifs are majorly caused by the urgent need for nutrition or self-defense. In other words, natural elements are harmless, and they can turn into otherwise only when they are absolutely forced to do so. In the Thanatosean atmosphere of *Mercury Fur* (2005), a zebra finds its way amongst the young subjects. Instead of signs of astonishment and appreciation for the appearance of such a natural element in the artificial life of *Mercury Fur* (2005), the young subjects treat that zebra in every possible inappreciative way.

Elliot I'm heading for Brick Lane. What's that? A horse. No. It's a zebra. How's that get here? Kids are chasing it. Corner it. Stab it

with knives. Broken bottles. Someone throws petrol. Someone strikes a match. The zebra bursts into flame. (Ridley, 2005, p. 194)

The kids in the context chase and corner the zebra, and start stabbing it with knives and other sharp objects they can have their hands on. Not having enough violence, they throw the zebra with a flammable liquid and then throw a match so that the zebra is lit and bursts into flame.

Besides violence, the inappreciative treatment of the natural element functions as a direct message that the participating subjects are coming to terms with the Thanatosean context of theirs and they are willing to decline any offer that takes them out of such a context. Above all, the situation seems to be exacerbating in the sense that this violent act against the zebra can be regarded as an initial action and a raw model for the younger generations to come.

There is a prospect of leading a plan to change the Thanatosean atmosphere into an Eroseean one. As planning for such a heist requires intelligence, the implicit Big Brother idea that is dominant in the setting of *Mercury Fur* (2005) assures that the signs of intelligence are targeted and their initiators are murdered. There are certain wordings that leave the audience in contemplation. Lines like “Oi! Sarcasm’ll get ya shot” (Ridley, 2005, p. 183) show the meta-sarcasm mechanisms that indicate the process of formation as well as consequences for sarcasm within the narrative. Sarcasm is an explicit sign of intelligence. Upon its detection, the subject senses the summoned danger and encourages one another to cease their demonstration if not total cancellation.

Upon the closing defamiliarizing elements, Ridley reminds the audience that the gyre of civilizations is non-stop, and everyone involved is eventually dismissed alongside their accomplishments.

Eliot: And when the pharaoh was buried –and this is the point I’ve been trying to fucking make!- *everyone who knew the secret had to be buried along with him*. They had the privilege of helping building this tomb for the pharaoh. But the price they paid was death. Get me? (Ridley, 2005, p. 160; emphasis added)

Through the example of the ancient Egyptians and the pharaoh’s burial, Ridley addresses the audience into the self-realization of how the subjects, as well as the audience, are buried

alongside their achievements at practically every possible spot in the civilization timeline.

In other words, the “detestable symbol of death” (Abed and Ubeid, 2020, p. 5) that is seen in the example of the burial functions as a warning on two levels. The subjects, that are involved in the play, are the targets of the first level of warning. This warning is situated strategically in the part in which the characters are preparing for a party through which they bring a living boy and torture him while running a recording camera. The pharaoh burial example is deployed as a foreshadowing for the things that are about to backfire on them. By the end of the play when the boy seems to be unconscious, the party lords realize that the search for a new boy at the moment seems to be futile. Hence, they decide to take one of the party’s organizing subjects to fill the place of the party boy and torture him instead.

The second level of warning targets the audience of *Mercury Fur* (2005). As much as this warning is implicit, it is deep and it can be analyzed on multiple criteria. As long as the accomplishment of civilization is regarded as the pride of the current audience, the shift “from eternity to eternity expresses the futility and the tragedy of the mediocre spirit” (Diyaiy, 2009, p. 23) and with this spirit, Ridley criticizes it by dispositioning the initiators and the celebrators of civilizations.

In other words, he shows the difference between the ones who are responsible for setting the foundations for the running civilization; yet, the ones who will be celebrating this civilized accomplishment might not have relevant viewpoints to the initiators of this civilization, nor might they be participating in its progress in the first place. The bottom line of the implicit warning can be read as a call for action. Pushing through the progress of civilization is essential in a way that assures that the contextual civilization remains constant with the initiators’ guidelines.

Conclusions

Leveling with the third Delphic maxim that states “certainty brings ruin” (Brearley, 2017, p. 27), Philip Ridley highlights the negative connotations and consequences of intellectual normalization. Normalizing sovereignty aims at controlling the youth by interpellating them with negative knowledge that influences their brains and hearts. In regard to certainty, the narrated ongoing events in

Mercury Fur (2005) are the consequences of confident predecessors who wanted to best for their successors. The ripples of this maxim reach the shores of the intellectual turning point in the adoption of Thanatos on stage.

The critical analysis of normalized stances results in both explicit and implicit notes of warnings that replace the functionality of moral lessons of the ancient plays that were mainly didactic in their purpose of performance. Those warnings serve as trigger points for the post-behavioral influence of the Thanatosean Episteme. Dramatic techniques, like character ghosting as well as audience-stage impersonation, pinpoint the Thanatosean Epistemic self-realization as well as responsibility awareness.

With the eradication of Eroean elements, the summing warning message of the play is interpreted as the irresponsibility of the youth. Similar to the way the 19th Century problem plays exposed the social ills and malfunctions, Ridley charges the responsibility of taking action. The dystopian irregularities show the consequences of following the noninvolvement policy by directly demonstrating on stage the youths' inability to distinguish the reformation prospects.

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