



Universidad
Zaragoza

Trabajo Fin de Grado

Empiricism, the *Scientia Umbrarum* and the
Reconciliation of the Two Cultures in Peter
Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*

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2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my grandmother, my parents and my brother for their patience and for encouraging me with their best wishes during the preparation of this dissertation and throughout my years at University.

I would also like to thank my girlfriend and companion for her continued support and for encouraging me to keep pushing through the good and the bad times.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation supervisor, Prof. Susana Onega Jaén, for her kindness and willingness, continuous support and guidance, and for making available to me her immense knowledge at all times. I could not imagine having a better supervisor for my dissertation. I also want to thank all the degree teachers who, like Susana, love what they do and strive to transmit that enthusiasm to their students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

there is no Light without Darknesse and no
substance without Shaddowe (*Hawksmoor* 5)

Peter Ackroyd, novelist, biographer, poet and critic, born in London in 1949 to a Catholic working-class family, is considered to be one of the most productive and inventive writers of the 1980s and a leading figure in contemporary English fiction. Mainly celebrated for his novels and biographies, he came to public notice after the publication of his second novel, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1985), and the second of his numerous biographies to date, devoted to T. S. Eliot (1984) (*Onega, Metafiction and Myth* 1). However, Ackroyd had started writing poetry much earlier, during his university years at Cambridge (1968-1971). As the writer himself has pointed out, “At this stage in my life I wrote nothing but poetry, and wanted only to be a poet: I saw no other future ahead of me” (“On *Notes for a new Culture*” 372). At Cambridge he published his first poetry collection, *Ouch* (1971) in a students’ magazine, and came into contact with a group of poets, including J. H. Prynne and Andrew Crozier, two practitioners of “Language poetry,” who decisively influenced Ackroyd’s heavily experimental outlook on literature and his “desire to overturn [...] neo-realist or humanist poetry” (*Onega, Metafiction and Myth* 9).

After obtaining a Double First in Literature at Cambridge, Ackroyd spend two years (1971-1973) at the University of Yale, where he completed *Notes for a New Culture: An Essay on Modernism*, an MA dissertation

published in 1976, which “casts significant light on Ackroyd’s own poetic as well as fictional practice” (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 6). The writing of this essay was motivated by Ackroyd’s conviction that English culture was on the decline, and he “was perplexed or dismayed by the lack of courage in English poetry” (Onega, “An Interview” 210). In *Notes for a New Culture*, “Ackroyd uses the terms modernism and aesthetic humanism diachronically in order to designate two main but opposed attitudes towards [self, word, and] language traceable in any period of western culture from the seventeenth century onwards” (Onega “Descent” 157), and argues that the decay of English culture stems from its attachment to humanist values and its incapacity to keep up with the modernist developments taking place elsewhere.

In the preface to the revised edition of *Notes for a New Culture*, Ackroyd displayed his “hostility to the established [and] more prominent writers of the time,” the trend of aesthetic humanism that outperformed modernism from the 1930s onwards, and he referred to the work of the most salient representatives of the Movement, the Amis-Larkin-Wain group, as “mediocre and second-rate” (372). As Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer have pointed out, certainly this neorealist trend became the mainstream in post-war English literature (10). However, critics overlooked the emergence of a “distinctive new generation” which was closer to the experimentalism emerging in other countries (11). Writers such as William Golding, Doris Lessing, Lawrence Durrell, Samuel Beckett or John Fowles were writing alongside the innovative and experimental lines advocated by French *nouveau roman*, North-American fabulation and Spanish-American magic realism, and can be said to represent “the link between modernism and postmodernism”

(Onega, *Coleccionista* 38; my translation). As early as 1968, with the publication of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1968), Fowles anticipated the features of postmodernism and became the forerunner of “the most notable current in recent English fiction” (Onega, “Historiographic Metafiction” 48): the generation of writers of historiographic metafiction which emerged in the 1980s. Linda Hutcheon coined the term to refer to “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also claim to historical events and personages” (*Metafiction and Myth* 5), and linked its emergence to “the anti-patriarchal shift in world-view that took place in the late 1960s and 1970s in the Western world and that, in the field of literature, gave rise to the development of fringe or marginal trends such as gender and ethnic literature, as well as to anti-rationalist and experimental literary trends” (1, 2).

Although some of the earliest examples of British historiographic metafiction are Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-1960) and Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), “the trend did not become really productive in Britain until the 1980s” with the work of Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, Rose Tremain, Charles Palliser, William Golding, Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter and Peter Ackroyd (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 2). Indeed, Ackroyd occupies a central position within this trend. In keeping with the contradictory nature of postmodernist art (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5), historiographic metafiction “combines [...] the parodic, realism-undermining self-reflexivity of metafiction, inherited from modernism, with [...] the historical element [...] characteristic of classic realism” (Onega, “A Knack” 7). This striking combination of fiction and history evinces one of the main aims

of postmodernist art: the expression of what Jean-François Lyotard described as a generalised “incredulity toward master narratives” (24). Master narratives aim at “the representation of the historical facts from the perspective of the dominant race, class and culture” (Onega, “A Knack” 11). Therefore, they tend to create monolithic and totalitarian accounts of history while excluding many peripheral facts and liminal perspectives that evince their limitations in truth-telling. Postmodernist historiographic metafiction questions and undermines this traditional concept of history as grand or master narrative and its presupposed legitimacy to provide truthful, absolute and definitive accounts of the past by enhancing the linguistic nature of both history and literature, thus reducing them to the same status of human constructs (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 1) and by exposing history as a narrative discourse in which objectivity is sacrificed for the sake of the historian’s “own subjective creativity” (Onega, “A Knack” 8). The New Historicism, a trend of philosophers of history that emerged in the 1970s, corroborates these ideas, assuming that “literary and non-literary “texts” circulate inseparably” and “that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature” (Veese, 9). Consequently, “what provides the impulse for the writing of historiographic metafiction is [...] the discovery of the ability of literature to reveal truths that cannot be grasped from traditional history” in order “to fill in the gaps” left by totalitarian discourses and shift the focus onto the marginal, peripheral and neglected accounts of history (Onega, “A Knack” 16).

Starting from this, the Dissertation aims to provide an overall analysis of Peter Ackroyd’s third novel, *Hawksmoor* in order to demonstrate that the complex and symbolic relations between its plot and structure allow the writer

to masterfully fulfil one of the basic purposes of historiographic metafiction: the questioning of *grands récits* or master narratives. Although “Ackroyd rejects being called either a historical novelist or a postmodernist, preferring to call himself a London novelist within the Cockney visionary traditions (Higdon, 217), I contend that *Hawksmoor*’s disruption of received assumptions about historical knowledge clearly matches the postmodernist ambition to subvert dominant discourses and totalitarian and monolithic accounts of the historical past. In order to provide evidence for this working hypothesis, I will analyse the novel’s dual plot-line and narrative structure, the complementariness of the main characters, and the narrative mechanisms used to express an all-embracing sense of duality and recurrence so as to challenge and refute received assumptions on the linearity and progressiveness of time and the radical opposition between empiricism and magic imposed by the Western master narratives of Enlightenment rationalism and science. More specifically, I will concentrate on the combination and alternation of the two plot lines and the confrontation of the empirical and occultist outlooks on knowledge in each of them in order to account for the ways in which the novel manages both to establish a historical relationship between them and to undermine dominant discourses in favour of neglected and marginalised conceptions of self and world. Finally, I will connect *Hawksmoor* with the lecture delivered in 1959 by C. P. Snow on “the two cultures” in order to demonstrate that Ackroyd’s confrontation of empiricism and occultism and their final rapprochement can also be read as a response to Snow’s denunciation of the separation between science and the humanities. In the Rede Lecture at Cambridge, Snow argued that “the intellectual life of the whole of the western

society is increasingly split into two polar groups” (4). He “place[d] at one pole the literary intellectuals who represent for him ‘the traditional culture’ and, at the other, the physical scientists” (Cornut-Gentile 61), thus pointing to a conflict that “came to public notice in the fifties” (61). In this sense, Ackroyd’s reconciliation of reason and magic, two forms of knowledge radically separated in the Enlightenment, could also be said to reflect the schism between the sciences and the humanities in the twentieth century.

2. BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

In 1985, Ackroyd published *Hawksmoor*, the novel that brought him international reputation as it was short-listed for the Booker Prize and awarded with the Whitbread and Guardian Fiction Prizes. A useful way of introducing *Hawksmoor* is to bring to the fore the fundamental role that London plays not only in this novel but in Ackroyd’s work as a whole. The description of London as “the visionary city built on the accumulated wisdom of numberless generations of Londoners whose roots go back to the dawn of English civilization” (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 43) is a basic idea for the understanding of *Hawksmoor*. In fact, *Hawksmoor* has been considered a “generic London novel,” a term coined by Roz Kaveney to refer to a “purely English genre that develops around a mythical vision of London, [...] which goes back to Dickens [and of which] Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair are its principal current practitioners” (in Onega, *Peter Ackroyd* 43). As Ackroyd himself has pointed out, the inspiration for the novel came from two “disparate” sources: his London pilgrimages as a child; and his academic interest in the late

seventeenth century (“On *Hawksmoor*” 378-79). As Ackroyd himself has pointed out:

Since childhood, I had been interested in the less salubrious areas of London — Wapping, Spitalfields, Limehouse — and in the air of dilapidated gloom which they embody: if there is such a thing as the landscape of the imagination, then these darker parts of the city represented mine. [...] each street was an echo-chamber of the past in which contemporary voices mixed with those long dead. (“On *Hawksmoor*” 378)

Ackroyd’s interest in the “less salubrious” alleyways of London was reinforced by the reading of Iain Sinclair’s *Lud Heat* (1998), which, as he recognises in the Acknowledgements to the novel, “first directed my attention to the stranger characteristics of the London churches” (*Hawksmoor* 218). The first section of Book One of *Lud Heat*, entitled “Nicholas Hawksmoor, His Churches,” deals with the construction of six churches after the Great Fire of 1666 by Nicholas Hawksmoor and Christopher Wren, leading historical figures of eighteenth-century English architecture. Sinclair’s vision of London was very much in harmony with Ackroyd’s visionary ideas and he linked Nicholas Hawksmoor’s architecture with occult and esoteric rituals. Thus, we could say that Sinclair’s poem gave Ackroyd the germinal idea for the elaboration of *Hawksmoor*, its main characters and also its plot.

Referring to his interest in the Age of Reason, the writer has stated that:

at university, I was most intrigued by that period at the end of the seventeenth century when the ‘New Philosophy’ (which one might define, in shorthand, as embodying scientific rationalism and a belief in human progress) seemed about to displace a set of older and more complex cultural allegiances which vigorously tried to resist the threat. (Ackroyd “On *Hawksmoor*” 379)

Ackroyd’s decision to recreate the Age of Reason and the twentieth century in alternative chapters echoes the tendency of historiographic metafiction to imagine the past in order to illuminate the present and is crucial for the understanding of *Hawksmoor*, since “The Augustan Age, with its well-known polarities of reason and passion, order and chaos, logic and magic, expresses like no other the contradiction between the official culture of rationalism and [...] more ancestral, obscurantist and irrational [practices]” (Onega, “Historiographic Metafiction” 56). Thus, by placing the action in London and juxtaposing the Age of Reason to the twentieth century, Ackroyd was able to imagine the landscape of a novel which, as I will attempt to demonstrate, fulfils the main aims of historiographic metafiction, especially the interrogation of received notions of time and the binary opposition between reason and magic, thus providing an innovative outlook both on the Enlightenment period and on the twentieth century in terms that echo C. P. Snow’s lament on the separation of “the two cultures.” As Onega puts it:

in novels like Peter Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor* [...] the attempt to recreate a concrete historical period in traditional terms is only a

pretext for a much more interesting and disturbing aim, which is to enter the tunnel of time in order to recover the other, suppressed, half of Western civilization and history: the mythical, esoteric, gnostic and cabalistic elements which once formed an inextricable unity with reason and logic, and which have been progressively repressed and muffled since the Middle Ages by the mainstream of rationalism. (“Historiographic Metafiction” 57)

2.1. Plot and Structure

One of the basic ways in which Ackroyd challenges historical knowledge about the Enlightenment is its dual plot and structure. The author has described the novel as follows:

[*Hawksmoor* is] a story half-situated in the early eighteenth century and half-situated in the twentieth; it is concerned with the activities of a certain eighteenth-century architect [Nicholas Dyer] , and the investigations of a contemporary detective [Nicholas Hawksmoor] who discovers that ‘time’ is perhaps an ambiguous or uncertain dimension. As a result, I do not know if *Hawksmoor* is a contemporary novel set in the past or a historical novel set in the present. (Ackroyd, “On *Hawksmoor*” 379)

In keeping with this, the novel is divided into two untitled parts, a Prologue and an Acknowledgements section, and divided into twelve untitled chapters; chapters 1 to 5 constitute the first part of the book and chapters 6 to

12 the second. Significantly, the Prologue does not only contextualize the beginning of Dyer's involvement in the construction of the churches, it also suggests the clash between his procedures and those of other architects: "His colleagues would have employed a skilled joiner to complete such a task, but Dyer preferred to work with his own hands" (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 1). The first plot line, narrated by Dyer in the eighteenth century, is situated in the odd-numbered chapters. Correspondingly, the second plot line, which is narrated by an external narrator and takes place in Detective Hawksmoor's twentieth century, is situated in the even-numbered chapters.

The first plot line takes the form of a diary written by the main character, Nicholas Dyer, addressed to his assistant Walter Payne. In it we learn that after the Plague that preceded the Great Fire of London, Dyer, who was then only a child, became an orphan and was saved from starvation by Mirabilis, the leader of a hermetic society called the Enthusiastiks, through which Dyer was initiated into the *Scientia Umbrarum*. This occult society believed that Satan is the ruler of this world and that the human race is condemned to eternally err and transmigrate from body to body (Onega, *Peter Ackroyd* 45). According to Dyer's doctrine, reality is only knowable through occult knowledge, gained by means of intuition —the *nous* (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 48)— not reason or logic; while his circular, or rather cyclical conception of time points to Dyer's belief in reincarnation. After his conversion, Dyer becomes a prominent architect who, with his assistant Walter Payne, constructs churches as a pretext for a much more obscure purpose. Besides the consecration of the temples with human sacrifices, Dyer arranges his seven churches symmetrically so as "to build a huge power-concentrating talisman [...] that would function as a magical

ladder to heaven” (Onega, *Peter Ackroyd* 45). By so doing, he expects to transcend this *mundus tenebrosus* and escape from the never-ending cycle of reincarnations of life in time. Finally he completes his seventh church, Little St Hugh, and disappears in it.

The second plot line is told by a traditional external (or in Gérard Genette’s terms, heterodiegetic-extradiegetic) narrator. In chapters 2 and 4, the narrator tells the events from the perspective of Thomas and Ned, respectively the victims of the crimes committed in the second and fourth chapters. In the other even-numbered chapters, the narrator focalises the action from the perspective of inspector Nicholas Hawksmoor. Thus, the two plot lines are juxtaposed to each other, and stand at the same narrative level. This second plot line elaborates on DCS Hawksmoor’s investigation of a series of crimes committed in twentieth-century London. These crimes are odd and strikingly resemble those committed by Dyer centuries ago. What is more, there is a striking pattern of reduplication of names, places and events. For example, some of the victims investigated by Hawksmoor are Thomas, a teenage boy who dies in the catacombs of Spitalfields; Ned, a tramp found dead in Limehouse; and Hayes, a boy whose corpse appeared in St Mary Woolnoth. Strikingly, in the eighteenth century, Dyer had also killed a boy named Thomas, a tramp called Ned, and Hayes, his co-worker, in the very same churches. Besides, most are murders by strangulation, which was Dyer’s preferred *modus operandi*, and none of them left any kind of identifying traces. This impression of duality and circularity is enhanced by the fact that, as Anke Grundmann states, “each of the two plots has its own starting point which is divided by temporal distance of approximately 270 years but they share a common end”

(3). This common end is Little St Hugh, the seventh church. Finally, another aspect that contributes to the overall duality and circularity of the novel is the use of the same words to end and begin contiguous chapters. For example, chapter 1 ends: “I have gone so deep that I can see the brightness of the Starres at Noon” (25); and chapter 2 begins: “AT NOON they were approaching the church in Spitalfields” (26). With the only, ineffectual help of his assistant Walter Payne, isolated from society, and unable to comprehend the nature of the crimes, inspector Nicholas Hawksmoor is eventually forced to rely on intuition rather than on scientific methodology to solve the mystery of these murders.

2.2. Characters

The two fictional protagonists of the novel, Nicholas Dyer and Nicholas Hawksmoor, are based on the same historical personage, architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, a leading figure of English architecture in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Therefore, for all their differences, the two protagonists share striking features in common. In 1711, the real Hawksmoor was appointed by the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches to rebuild six of the churches destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666 in London and Westminster. Echoing this, Nicholas Dyer, the narrator of the odd chapters, is an architect born in London in 1654, who is also employed to build some churches in 1711 after the Great Fire of 1666. However, while the historical architect built six churches —St Alfege’s, Greenwich; St Anne’s, Limehouse; St George’s-in-the-East; Christ Church, Spitalfields; St George’s, Bloomsbury; and St Mary Woolnoth—, Dyer builds seven, the last one, Little St Hugh, being

a fictional invention of Ackroyd's. Given his firm belief in occultism and black magic and his involvement in Satanic practices, Dyer has to make human sacrifices in order to consecrate the churches, the building of which is only a pretext for a much more obscure and ambitious purpose.

As in the historical past, Dyer is employed and supervised by Sir Christopher Wren, one of the most highly acclaimed English architects in history. Wren is an inveterate defender of reason, logic and empiricism and a member of the Royal Society of London, "the oldest and most prestigious scientific society in Britain [...] formed by followers of Francis Bacon to promote scientific discussion [...] in 1662" (Oxford Dictionary). Thus, it can be said that Christopher Wren is the paragon of the virtues related to scientific progress promoted by the Age of Enlightenment and embodies everything Dyer despises and rejects. As already pointed out, Detective Chief Superintendent Nicholas Hawksmoor is in charge of investigating a series of mysterious and unfathomable murders that have taken place near the churches built by Dyer, presumably in the 1980s. Isolated and exhausted by the bizarre nature of the crimes, DCS Hawksmoor bears more resemblances to Dyer than just their Christian names, and he will have to increase them if he is to make sense of the crimes (just as readers will have to understand Dyer's ideas and behaviour in order to make sense of the novel).

Just as Dyer stands side by side Sir Christopher Wren, so Nicholas Hawksmoor stands side by side "The Architect," the fourth main character in the novel despite his small and abstruse participation in the plot. He is a tramp who draws Hawksmoor's attention during an investigation in St Mary Woolnoth because he is sitting in the street drawing with white chalk "the figure

of a man who had put a circular object up to his right eye” (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 162). Later on, Hawksmoor finds a letter in his desk with the phrase “DON’T FORGET” (166) and a device with four crosses on the front side of the page resembling the location of the churches he has investigated so far. On the back side, he finds the same drawing he had seen the tramp sketching and beneath it the signature: “THE UNIVERSAL ARCHITECT” (166). Consequently, Hawksmoor starts chasing The Architect as the main suspect until he eventually finds him in Little St Hugh, thus putting an end at last not only to his investigation but also to a supernatural plan initiated centuries before by Dyer.

3. EMPIRICISM AND THE *SCIENTIA UMBRARUM* IN *HAWKSMOOR*

Modern Western culture “is based on the assumption, inherited from the Enlightenment, that man should reject the obscurantist forces of irrational mythologizing, in favour of a rational explanation of man and the world” (Onega, *Scientia Umbrarum* 117). This position is the result of centuries of debate between the irrational, “in which the harsh realities of existence were represented and dealt with at the level of abstractions,” and the rational, “based on observation, classification and categorization of past experience and on its reduction to formulae capable of predicting similar phenomena in the future” (117). Given the imperative supremacy of rationalism in contemporary Western culture, “we tend to forget that the rationalist attitude [...] has always [...] co-existed, and still co-exists, with other more or less subterranean currents that are anti-rational, intuitive and symbolic” (117). To illustrate this, Onega

explains that since ancient times, when Gnosticism emerged in the Western world as an alternative to a rational explanation of reality, “magic and science have always co-existed [...] alternately coming to the surface and receding underground according to the period, with the suppressed tendency impregnating and suffusing the dominant one” (118). In the Middle Ages the dominance of Christianity provoked the persecution of Gnosticism and magical practices. However, far from disappearing, they remained underground, in the shadow of the mainstream. Similarly, in the Renaissance, the appearance of the *Corpus Hermeticum* [or: the *Hermetica*] “a collection of fifteen dialogues [...] concerned with astrology and the occult sciences” (119), brought about the widespread acceptance of gnostic and cabalistic occultism all across Europe. However, with the rise of the Enlightenment, the authority of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the influence of obscurantism decreased, yielding to the overwhelming hegemony of empiricism and the disrepute of magic which is still in force today. Thus, contrary to the assumptions that rule the contemporary Western world, “the two forms of knowledge [...] have always co-existed with each other through the centuries until they were drastically separated in the Enlightenment” (138).

Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor* fictionalises the clash between reason and magic at the moment of the powerful emergence of the New Science developed by Enlightenment rationalism as an alternative to the anti-rational forms of knowledge, thus relegating magical practices to darkness and secrecy. To illustrate this conflict, the novel describes the period from both the perspective of empiricism, the predominant scientific discourse, represented by Sir Christopher Wren and the Royal Society; and that of the suppressed occult

minorities, known in the novel as the *Scientia Umbrarum*, embodied by Nicholas Dyer. The clash between these two forms of knowledge is constantly brought to the fore throughout the novel. For example, on one occasion Sir Chris is requested to provide assistance in the study of a corpse found in the Thames because, according to Dyer, he “was well known to those impanelled as Coroners to be a Man who understood the Anatomical Administration of the Humane Body, by means of his geometrical and mechanical Speculations” (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 95). In agreement with his forensic scientific principles, Sir Chris surveyed the corpse, prepared his surgeon tools and made an autopsy. By means of reason and methodical dissection, he concluded that:

It was not self-murder [...] and I am induced to believe that she was knocked down with a Blow on her left Ear, from the large Settlement of Blood there [...]. She is not long Dead, *he continu'd*, for although she was found floating upon the Thames, I find no Water in the Stomach, Intestines, Abdomens, Lungs, or cavity of the Thorax. (97; emphasis in the original)

In total disagreement with Wren's methods and judgements, Dyer reaches a much more accurate conclusion by means of his intuition, without even touching the woman's body:

I survey'd the woman's Face, flinching as if my own Body had felt the Blows she endured, and then I saw what she had seen: [...]. And I saw the first Blow and suffer'd the first Agonie of her Pain. He

has taken a white Cloath from his Breeches, looks at it, then throws it upon the Ground and his Hand goes around my Throat: You need not be afraid, *he whispers* [...]. And now I feel the Torrents of my own Blood surging in my Head. (98; emphasis in the original)

Another example takes place when Dyer visits the Royal Society, disparagingly described by Dyer as the place where the “Fellows [...], or Virtuosi, or Mountebanks, or Dogs, dissect the Mites in Cheese and discourse upon Atomes” (137). There, Dyer is shown “the Relics of many of Nature’s kingdoms” (139), that is, dissected and preserved animals and insects, such as a bird, a serpent, a monkey, or flies and bugs. For the scientists, these are just experiments with which “the Mysteries of Nature will soon be Mysteries no more” (139). However, since the serpent, the monkey, and the fly are important symbols in occultism, for Dyer the collection “acquires a deeper meaning: the announcement of the annihilation of the *Scientia Umbrarum* by the New empirical Science” (Onega, *Scientia Umbrarum* 133). This is confirmed by Dyer’s stupor and shock when Wren makes an experiment with a black cat. Sir Chris nearly kills the cat when he exhausts the air out of a glass chamber with the cat in it, which for a gnostic like Dyer symbolizes the murder of Satan.

Thus, for the most part, the novel presents both philosophies in dialectical opposition in an attempt to recreate the atmosphere of the period. This is clear when Dyer finds an offensive note about Moses, “the reputed founder of the Cabbala” (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 49) in a scientific book at the Royal Society: “I took down from its Shelf Dr Burnet’s *New System of*

the World, and saw that some skilful Philosopher had written upon the Frontispiece, IN CONFUTATION OF MOSES” (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 138).

3.1. Challenges to Received Assumptions on Empiricism and Magic in *Hawksmoor*

Although *Hawksmoor* depicts the apparently intractable contrariness of logic and magic and the presumed superiority of the former inherited from the Age of Reason, Ackroyd challenges this historical assumption through an overall duality expressed at many levels in the novel. Regarding the structure, duality is suggested by the combination of two plot lines which are basically different and separated in time by a span of three centuries. Whereas Dyer’s early eighteenth-century society is still engaged in debates about the relationship of empiricism and magic, Hawksmoor’s late twentieth-century world is already completely reason-ridden. Nevertheless, the two stories are intrinsically linked by the fact that both take place in the same space, London, and revolve around a series of murders committed in the same churches. Together with this, both plots are told in alternate order and simultaneously, thus granting each of them the same importance and validity. This equivalence is reinforced by the fact that, even though each story has a different temporal starting point, both universes are finally brought together in the last chapter, as will be later explained. Yet another aspect that connects Dyer’s and Hawksmoor’s separate worlds (and ideologies) is the use of the same words to finish and begin contiguous chapters, establishing “semantic connections [which] may be said to function as temporal bridges, rendering ineffectual the time gaps that logically exist between the two stories” (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 47).

Finally, the constant reduplication of names and events, not only from the first to the second plot line but also conversely, intertwines both stories, suggesting a duality and complementarity which will also apply to the conflict between empiricism and the *Scientia Umbrarum* and the relationship between Dyer and Hawksmoor, the magus and murderer, and the rational detective, respectively. As Susana Onega claims, all these parallelisms, repetitions and crisscrossing of references allow Ackroyd to challenge and refute received assumptions of time through the disruption of “traditional notions of chronological linearity in favour of a circular, or mythical conception of time” (*Metafiction and Myth* 47).

But perhaps, the most significant sign of duality lies in the overall parallelism between Dyer and Hawksmoor. Whereas Dyer’s allegiance to the dark arts is clear, DCS Hawksmoor stands for the use of reason and logic in the search for truth. This is demonstrated by the similarities between his lecture in the police station (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 159) and that of Sir Chris in the Royal Society (140). Compare Hawksmoor’s reflection:

It has often been said that the more unusual the murder the easier it is to solve, but this is a theory I don’t believe. Nothing is easy, nothing is simple, and you should think of your investigation as a complicated experiment: look at what remains constant and look at what changes, ask the right questions and don’t be afraid of wrong answers, and above all rely on observation and rely on experience.
(159)

to that of Sir Christopher Wren:

we have learned that the Experimentall Philosophy is an Instrument for Mankind's domination of Darknesse and Superstition [...]. We proceed by Rationall Experiment and the Observation of Cause and Effect [...] the only things that can stick into the Mind of Man are built upon impregnable Foundations of Geometry and Arithmetick: the rest is indigested Heaps and Labyrinths. (140)

Hawksmoor also shares with Dyer a complementarity based on much more than their shared Christian name. Apart from the fact that “the surname “Dyer” already suggests the existence between them of [a] doppelgänger relationship” (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 45), both are alienated from society, have similar physical looks, and their assistants share the same name: Walter Payne. According to Dyer's occultism, time is cyclical and we are condemned to an eternal round of reincarnations. Therefore, in order to transcend his material and human condition, which, as a Satanist, Dyer considers to be a punishment, he needs to build a talisman with which “to cross the seven intermediate planetary spheres separating the earth from the Pleiades, controlled, as he believes, by seven star-daemons whose task is precisely to prevent this ascent to the spiritual realm” (Onega, *Metafiction and Myth* 51). Consequently, when Dyer finishes his seventh church, Little St Hugh, he gets into it and disappears: “I have built an everlasting Order, which I may run through laughing: no one can catch me now” (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor*, 186). However, as Onega explains:

Since Dyer's disappearance in the crypt of Little St. Hugh in 1715 until Detective Hawksmoor enters the church, Dyer has undergone a series of split or doppelgänger reincarnations both as victim and murderer: each time he is reborn as a child or tramp, the new reincarnation is subsequently murdered by his "shadow" or dark emanation. In his last, twentieth-century reincarnation, Dyer's evil or shadow facet is embodied by the tramp called "The Architect," his good or rational side, by Nicholas Hawksmoor. So [...] all that remains to be done is to reconcile these two opposed and split potentialities, the "light" and the "shadow" [...] in order for Dyer to achieve the godlike totality of the Self. (*Metafiction and Myth* 55)

According to this interpretation, the duality between Dyer and Hawksmoor, the magus and the rational detective, is of the highest degree because they represent different facets of the same individual. The fact that Hawksmoor finds The Architect by means of intuition instead of rationality reinforces the complementarity of both characters and the compatibility of the two contrary forms of knowledge: "He tried to concentrate on what he should do next, but his mind wavered and fell away into the shadows of the unseen church of Little St Hugh. He had come to the end by chance, not knowing that it was the end" (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 215). Once there, Hawksmoor finds The Architect, his other half, and they fuse into one, thus putting an end to Dyer's endless reincarnations and achieving at last the totality of the self, the total knowledge he needs in order to complete his great plan of transcendence:

And his own Image was sitting beside him [...]. They were face to face, and yet they looked past one another at the pattern which they cast upon the stone; for when there was a shape there was a reflection, and when there was a light there was a shadow, and when there was a sound there was an echo, and who could say where one had ended and the other had begun? (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 216-17)

As Onega points out, “the text itself echoes their reunification: what they say is physically separated by a wide blank on the page, indicating a metalepsis, or change of narrative level” (*Metafiction and Myth* 55). The last line before the space in the page reads: “And when they spoke they spoke with one voice” (Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* 217). After it, the last paragraph is uttered in the first person by someone who is neither Dyer nor Hawksmoor or The Architect: “and I must have slept, for all these figures greeted me as if they were in a dream” (217). Consequently, the last paragraph serves to finally conciliate the overall duality and opposition of the two plot lines by providing them with the same temporal and spatial ending and by merging their different modes of narration —Dyer’s autodiegetic account in the odd-numbered chapters, and the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narration in the even-numbered chapters— into a single first-person narration. This, together with the fact that the merging of Hawksmoor and The Architect, finally allow Dyer to achieve complete knowledge and transcendence, evinces the novel’s defence of complementarity and the need to have recourse to the two forms of knowledge,

the scientific and the magical, which are considered irreconcilable opposites since the Enlightenment.

Furthermore, the complementariness of empiricism and occultism expressed in the final reconciliation of Dyer's split facets can also be said to put an end to C. P. Snow's lament on the separation of scientific and humanist knowledge. At the beginning of *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* Snow explains that "by training I was a scientist: by vocation I was a writer" (1) and that he lived among both groups constantly moving from one to the other and back again (2). From this, he concluded that "the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly split into two polar groups" (4), what he calls the "literary intellectuals" at one extreme and the scientists at the other, separated by "a gulf of mutual incomprehension" (4). As Cornut-Gentille points out, although he "presents scientists and literary men as equally to blame for the separation" (63), later Snow emphasises the virtues of the culture of scientists and the limitations of the literary men, in clear inclination towards the scientific pole (70). Although the conflict between the hard sciences and the humanities was not an original subject (61), Snow's lecture had a tremendous impact and contributed to the assumption that the two cultures are antagonistic and that the former is superior to the latter. As Cornut-Gentille argues, Snow's distinction "exposes beautifully the basic crisis of the world we live in: the relentless drive, efficiency and priority of science and technology, with so many valued humane things taking second place" (70). She adds that "only the restoration of a unified culture might provide a basis from which to handle the problem" (70) and concludes that, in order for human beings to become whole again, it is necessary to "find a way of reuniting the two different aspects of the

world as we know it —of recreating a married state between the scientific world of experience, inferences and emotions” (71). With these words in mind, the interpretation of *Hawksmoor* as a postmodernist attack on the Western master narratives of scientific progress and historical truth can clearly be extended to the twentieth century and be interpreted as a call to the definitive reconciliation of the two halves of Western civilization: reason and intuition, empiricism and magic, and also scientific and literary knowledge.

4. CONCLUSION

As my reading of the novel has attempted to show, Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor* defends not only the historical coexistence of the two basic forms of human knowledge: reason and intuition, logic and magic, but also their complementarity, through a series of structural and narrative devices, most importantly the overall pattern of duality and repetition expressed in the complementarity of Dyer and Hawksmoor and the juxtaposition of two different but parallel plot lines. In this sense, the symbolic structure of the novel may be said to reflect the fact that, although since the triumph of the New Science in the eighteenth century, the intellectual mainstream has been dominated by reason and logic, there were, and still are, other alternative forms of knowledge that were silenced and pushed to the margins but which are also valid and necessary. Thus, the novel challenges the assumptions that rule Western thought since the Age of Reason regarding the radical antagonism, incompatibility and binary opposition of two forms of making sense of the world which, as already stated, existed side-by-side since ancient times.

Together with this interpretation, the confrontation of reason and intuition or empiricism and the *Scientia Umbrarum* and their final rapprochement in Little St Hugh could also be extended, as I have attempted to demonstrate, to the twentieth century, the time of publication of the novel and the time when the separation between the hard sciences and the humanities were brought to the fore by C. P. Snow. From this perspective, Ackroyd's representation of the struggle for the survival of intuition and magic in the eighteenth century can easily be seen as the starting point for a movement of separation between the two cultures that reached a climax in the twentieth century. In this sense, the fact that Detective Hawksmoor solves the puzzle surrounding the twentieth-century murders and finds the fictional church where Dyer is waiting for him only when, abandoning reason, he allows his intuition to flow, provides evidence that he has managed to achieve the reunification sought for by Snow. Together with this, the overall circularity and parallelisms of the novel, mainly expressed through the striking resemblance of the eighteenth- and twentieth-century crimes, the constant reduplication of names and events, and the crisscrossing of references not only from the first to the second plot line but also conversely, shows Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* interrogating and subverting the Hegelian linear and progressive conception of time endorsed by Enlightenment rationalism in favour of the circular or mythical conception of time championed by Dyer's *Scientia Umbrarum*. This display of contradictory and even opposed traits in *Hawksmoor* perfectly matches the aesthetics of postmodern literature and agrees with one of the quintessential characteristics of historiographic metafiction: the representation of a previous historical period in order to subvert received assumptions about

historical knowledge, recover the elements and truths repressed and silenced by Western master narratives and dominant discourses, and illuminate the present.

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