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## *The Underground Pride: A Road Map to the Grammar of Freedom*<sup>1</sup>

Commentato [A1]: Titolo corsivo

### Abstract

*Questo contributo presenta la lettura critica di due romanzi, Pride and Prejudice (1813) e The Underground Railroad (2016), apparentemente diversi tra loro, e li analizza dal punto di vista teorico della intertestualità, utilizzando il lavoro magistrale di Simpson sul punto di vista (1993). Le convenzioni sociali e la dicotomia arrivo/partenza saranno le esemplificazioni intertestuali attraverso le quali gli autori, partendo dalla analisi dei punti di vista, giungeranno a promuovere la propria teoria della "grammatica della libertà" basata sulla rianalisi di elementi discorsivo-grammaticali ed epistemici.*

*Le protagoniste dei due romanzi, Elizabeth e Cora, tendono costantemente a ribellarsi contro le convenzioni e costrizioni sociali del loro tempo. Elizabeth lotta per tutto il romanzo contro le pressioni che la società impone a una ragazza intelligente e dal giudizio indipendente. La schiava Cora cerca disperatamente la libertà a qualsiasi prezzo utilizzando le sue straordinarie doti di intraprendenza e resilienza.*

*La analisi di queste due esemplificazioni intertestuali attraverso la lente del punto di vista di Simpson e la grammatica della libertà, aiuterà, ci auspichiamo, a chiarire come due personaggi femminili appartenenti a due mondi così distanti possano*

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<sup>1</sup> Although the present work was conceived as a whole by the two authors, sections 1 and 2 are to be attributed to L. Fodde, while section 3 and the conclusions are the works of A. Pesci.

*reagire quasi allo stesso modo contro le imposizioni sociali e culturali di una società che le tiene imprigionate.*

*I look on the faces that oppression has greyed  
The scars deep within that mark a lifetime in chains  
The stark legacies of a nation have changed  
As the history book begins another page*  
Gary Hughes

## 1. Introduction

The juxtaposition of two novels for the purposes of a linguistic analysis on intertextuality<sup>2</sup> – this being the general topic of this volume of essays – has been a challenging and fascinating one, at least from the point of view of its authors. Re-examining a beloved novel of one’s youth with a very recent fascinating discovery, has revealed new ways of reflecting on some theoretical issues and of advancing new ones in a very unexpected way.

Our proposal aims to illustrate how two apparently different novels – with regards to their historical time of publication, content and scope – can instead show similarities in the rendition of their female protagonists, their treatment of women’s condition, rebellion against social constraints and human bondage.

Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)<sup>3</sup> and Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* (2016)<sup>4</sup> present similarities and obvious differences. The former depicts a society in which a woman’s reputation is of the utmost importance. She is expected to behave in certain ways, whereas stepping outside the social norms makes her vulnerable to ostracism.

*The Underground Railroad* received the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 2017. In the prize motivations we can read that the book was chosen «for a smart

Commentato [A2]: Si può eliminare questa riga bianca?

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<sup>2</sup> G. Allen, *Intertextuality*, Routledge, Abingdon/New York 2011 (Second Edition).

<sup>3</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Ed. V. Jones, Penguin Books, London 2014 (ebook).

<sup>4</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, Doubleday, New York, 2016 (ebook).

melding of realism and allegory that combines the violence of slavery and the drama of escape in a myth that speaks to contemporary America»<sup>5</sup>.

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century slave girl Cora is in constant search for freedom against all odds. In her journey she nonetheless appeals to her wit to question the violence and predominance of both white men and black men – be them slaves or freemen<sup>6</sup>.

In these types of rebellion against society's conventions and constraints the present authors found the similarities they wanted to pursue from a theoretical point of view, by attempting to analyse how intertextuality can be illustrated through two types of actions which recur in both novels. Firstly, the protagonists' continued exit-return moves, and secondly, their rebellion against social conventions, as mentioned above, are fundamental to the layout of the novel and the development of each character. The theoretical analysis of the two actions will then hopefully lead the way to our analysis of what we have called the "grammar of freedom".

## 2. Intertextuality, *salidas*, and point of view

The first example of intertextuality present in our two novels, which we have called exit-return dichotomy, is drawn somehow from the three "salidas" (sallies)<sup>7</sup> Don Quixote takes in the eponymous masterpiece (1605, 1615) and

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/colson-whitehead#:~:text=For%20a%20smart%20melding%20of,that%20speaks%20to%20contemporary%20America> (last accessed: 30 May 2021).

<sup>6</sup> The Underground Railroad was a network of people, African American as well as white, offering shelter and aid to escaped enslaved people from the South. The exact dates of its existence are not known, but it operated from the late 18th century to the Civil War. The fugitives were driven to stations with every available means of transport, they did not know the names of their guides nor the location of each station they hit during their trip north. By the 1840s, the term *Underground Railroad* was part of the American vernacular. (Adapted from History.com: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad>, last accessed: 8 June 2021).

<sup>7</sup> As explained by Martín de Riquer, «[t]res veces don Quijote sale de su aldea en busca de aventuras y tres veces regresa a ella. Cada uno de estos viajes, que reciben el nombre de *salidas*, tiene una estructura, unas características y un itinerario propios. Las dos primeras salidas se narran en la primera parte del *Quijote* y la tercera en la segunda. La primera salida transcurre durante tres días; la segunda, durante

which in both our narratives lead the way to the pivotal moments, as inter-text insertions.

Similarly to Alonso Quixano, our protagonists face three important exits/sallies which mark the stages to their freedom. Progressively, they take successive steps towards their self-realization, though each time painfully fluctuating between advancement and reverse. And with each *salida* they add new features to what we have called the grammar of freedom. However, unlike Don Quixote, who almost until the end obstinately continues to believe in a fantasy world created by others (the authors of the *libros de caballerías*)<sup>8</sup>, Elizabeth and Cora forge their own alternative reality and manage to sow their personal seed of change. Maybe this is why they end up victorious, while Don Quixote, proved wrong and defeated, dies.

In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* there are three intertextual exit-return moves of fundamental importance in Elizabeth's character development and personal growth. Her trip to Netherfield to visit her sick sister Jane; the one to Rosings to visit her friend Charlotte, and the last one to Pemberley, Darcy's residence, with her aunt and uncle. All exits are pivotal and each one represents a step towards our protagonist's growth and self-realization. In addition, the exits also comprise new realizations on her desire to understand and overcome some of society's constraints and presuppositions. We can consider these as short stages on the protagonist's journey to freedom. It is during these exit-return moves that Elizabeth shows she does not accept some of the established social conventions of the time. For example, when her sister Jane falls ill at Netherfield she wants to go there to check on her. As the carriage is not available and she cannot ride a horse, she has to go on foot, even though it is quite a long distance and the road is muddy. Such a thing was not considered "appropriate" for a lady. Nonetheless, Jane's wellbeing comes first, and so she does not care what Mr. Bingley and his friends might think when they see her feet covered in dirt:

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unos dos meses, y la tercera durante unos cuatro meses.» (M. de Riquer, *Para leer a Cervantes*, Acanalado, Barcelona 2003, p. 116.)

<sup>8</sup> For example, *Amadís de Gaula* and *El libro del caballero de Dios*. According to Martín de Riquer «[I]os libros de caballerías, tan leídos y admirados por los españoles del siglo XVI y que ocasionaron la locura de Don Quijote [...], son unas narraciones en prosa [...] que relatan las heroicas aventuras de un hombre extraordinario, el caballero andante, quien vaga por el mundo solo, luchando contra toda suerte de personas o monstruos, contra seres normales o mágicos, por unas tierras las más de las veces exóticas y fabulosas; o que al mando de poderosos ejércitos o escuadras derrota y vence ejércitos de paganos o de naciones extrañas.» (M. de Riquer, *Para leer a Cervantes*, cit., p. 21.)

“How can you be so silly,” cried her mother, “as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there.”<sup>9</sup>  
“I shall be very fit to see Jane – which is all I want.”<sup>9</sup>

In *The Underground Railroad*, Cora never returns to a physical home, unlike Elizabeth and Don Quixote, because she does not have one. Her “home” is her bondage, from which she escapes three times. The first exit-escape-sally in the novel is from Randalls’ plantation. This *salida* ends when she is captured by Ridgeway, «the infamous slave catcher»<sup>10</sup>, for the first time. In her second attempt, she escapes from her guardian again and is then recaptured. Only during her third exit-escape-sally from Ridgeway will she gain her freedom: «She trusted the slave’s choice to guide her – anywhere, anywhere but where you are escaping from. It had gotten her this far. She’d find the terminus or die on the tracks»<sup>11</sup>. Cora does not surrender to the white man. She is a rebel with an iron will and she is determined to have her way: «she’d find the terminus or die on the tracks». The boulomaic modal verb “would”, denotes her volition to win her freedom, and by doing so she openly defies the white man’s cultural roots.

All these acts of rebellion will be analysed using the linguistics concept of reanalysis, which is the process that leads to the emergence of new rules and relationships in the grammar of a language<sup>12</sup>. In this case, the new rules will be the constituents of the grammar of freedom.

The second intertextual exemplification, our protagonists’ rebellion against social constraints, will be analysed using Paul Simpson’s magistral framework of point of view (1993)<sup>13</sup> and the linguistics concept of reanalysis. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Elizabeth Bennet is constantly portrayed as questioning the pressures society imposes upon a young intelligent woman with an uncommon independence of mind. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century slave girl Cora is a rebel who does not accept the chains that bind and imprison her. She is ready to risk her life to gain her freedom. Thanks to Simpson’s theory, we can make reference to the characters’ perspectives in moments of doubts, when and how society is viewed, judged and questioned. Hence, we will refer to

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<sup>9</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., p. 304.

<sup>12</sup> N. Madariaga, *Reanalysis*, in A. Ledgeway, I. Roberts (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Historical Syntax*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017 (ebook).

<sup>13</sup> P. Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, Routledge, London and New York 1993.

Simpson's *narratorial* and *reflector* mode in the third person, depending on «whether the narrative is related from a position outside the consciousness of any character, or whether it is mediated through the consciousness of a particular character»<sup>14</sup>. Where the narrator is only apparently taking an objective stance (i.e. 'neutral shading'), and where deontic and epistemic modality take turns between what is socially right and what is personally desirable.

**Paul Simpson's framework of point of view**

**Category B (heterodiegetic)<sup>15</sup>**

	<p><b>Positive shading</b> Deontic, boulomaic systems foregrounded; generics and verba sentiendi present.</p>	<p><b>Negative shading</b> Epistemic and perception systems foregrounded; supplemented with generalized 'words of estrangement'.</p>	<p><b>Neutral shading</b> Unmodalized categorical assertions dominant; few verba sentiendi and evaluative adjectives and adverbs.</p>
<b>NARRATORIA MODE</b>	<p><b>B(N) positive</b> Disembodied narrator offering opinions and judgements (often ironic) on the story.</p>	<p><b>B(N) negative</b> Disembodied narrator trying to make sense of characters and events.</p>	<p><b>B(N) neutral</b> External narrator refusing privileged access to thoughts and feelings of characters.</p>
<b>REFLECTOR MODE</b>	<p><b>B(R) positive</b> Action located within viewing position of characters, offering their opinions and judgements.</p>	<p><b>B(R) negative</b> 'Estrangement' situated in mind of character; often used to suggest spatial distance between viewer and object</p>	<p><b>B(R) neutral</b> Action situated in viewing position of passive character, though evaluative modalities still withheld.</p>

To illustrate our intentions, a few examples of this analysis will be given from both novels.

**Commentato [A3]:** Si può eliminare questa riga bianca?

Let us start with *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr. Collins's marriage proposal to Charlotte:

<sup>14</sup> P. Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> P. Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, cit., p. 76.

The whole family in short were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger girls formed hopes of *coming out* a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; and the boys were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid<sup>16</sup>.

This is a case of Simpson's Narratorial mode B (N) positive. We find foregrounded deontic and boulomaic modality, with evaluative adjectives and adverbs. The passage is narrated by an invisible, non-participating narrator from a position outside the consciousness of any of the characters, offering opinions and judgements, often ironic, as in this case<sup>17</sup>.

Mr. Collins's marriage proposal to Charlotte gives us many other examples of Simpson's narratorial mode. In the following one we have an interesting passage from one reflector's mode to another.

Charlotte herself was tolerably composed. She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it<sup>18</sup>.

Here Austen seems to prepare the reader to get into Charlotte's mind. The first epistemic modal "must" is used to show how she is trying to make sense of her reality (Reflector mode Negative). Alternatively, the boulomaic "would be", and the second deontic "must" are inserted in Charlotte's free indirect thought and change the mood of the extract, underlying the passage to the Positive Reflector Mode.

In Whitehead's novel, we have a poignant description of Mabel's (Cora's mother) escape attempt, which is in dramatic contrast with her daughter's. She regrets having abandoned her daughter at the plantation and decides to go back:

She had to go back. The girl was waiting on her. This would have to do for now. Her hopelessness had gotten the best of her, speaking under her thoughts like a demon. She would keep this moment close, her own treasure. When she found the words to share it with Cora, the girl would understand there was something beyond the plantation, past all that she knew. That one day if she stayed strong, the girl could have it for herself.

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<sup>16</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, cit., p. 120. All the underlined portions of the excerpts from the two novels are instances of either positive or negative shading.

<sup>17</sup> P. Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, cit., p. 120.

The world may be mean, but people don't have to be, not if they refuse<sup>19</sup>.

We are again in the presence of the Reflector Mode in the Positive shading, with deontic modal operators emphasizing what is necessary from the main character's point of view, offering Mabel's opinion and judgement.

The second example depicts Cora on the roof of the Griffin Building after her first escape. Here we are in the presence of a Reflector mode in the negative shading:

Miss Handler had taught the class about the Great Pyramids in Egypt and the marvels the slaves made with their hands and sweat. Were the pyramids as tall as this building, did the pharaohs sit on top and take the measure of their kingdoms, to see how diminished the world became when you gained the proper distance? [...]

To the east side of the Griffin were the white people's houses and their new projects – the expanded town square, the hospital, and the museum. Cora crossed to the west, where the colored dormitories lay. From this height, the red boxes crept up on the uncleared woods in impressive rows. Is that where she would live one day? A small cottage on a street they hadn't laid yet? Putting the boy and the girl to sleep upstairs, Cora tried to see the face of the man, conjure the names of the children. Her imagination failed her. She squinted south toward Randall. What did she expect to see? The night took the south into darkness. And north? Perhaps she would visit one day<sup>20</sup>.

This complex passage presents epistemic and perception modal expressions, including possibility and prediction. The modality here is the product of Cora's consciousness and not of an external narrator often used to suggest spatial distance between viewer and object<sup>21</sup>.

What is the connection between reanalysis and modality systems as seen through's Simpson's critical analysis? How do these female protagonists make sense of their own personal and external world and negotiate their journey towards rebellion from their society's constraints? The next section will attempt to give an answer to this theoretical issue.

### 3. The Grammar of Freedom

As illustrated in the previous sections, both our protagonists, Elizabeth and Cora, challenge the social conventions which they consider unjust and they try to replace them with a new paradigm. Our hypothesis is that in order to

<sup>19</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., pp. 293-294.

<sup>20</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., pp. 118-119.

<sup>21</sup> P. Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, cit., p. 71.

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achieve this goal they adopt a strategy which may be better explained using the linguistics concept of reanalysis.

If we assume that «a given output can be triggered by two different underlying grammars»<sup>22</sup>, reanalysis can be defined as «a shift between two of those ‘alternative’ grammars, i.e. the creation of a new structure on the basis of ambiguous surface data»<sup>23</sup>. This process is of the utmost importance as it can lead to linguistic change.

As an example, let us consider the case of the modal verb “will”. Originally, “will” was a lexical verb which meant “to wish for”, “to desire”, “to want”. Then, through grammaticalization, it became a modal auxiliary used to mark the future tense: «between early Modern English and Present-day English [...] *Will* loses the sense ‘desire’ [...] and volitional instances decline in frequency»<sup>24</sup>. This happened when some speakers became uncertain about which signified had to be associated to the signifier of the verb, and, for some reason, started to consider the sense of volition as related to the future. For instance, we can plausibly suppose that when this change was in the making the speakers involved found it difficult to determine if a sentence such as “I will buy a new house” meant “I want to buy a new house” (old signified: volition) or “I have just decided to buy a new house” (new signified: future tense).

<b>SIGNIFIER:</b>	“Will”
<b>SIGNIFIED 1 (OLD):</b>	Volition
<b>SIGNIFIED 2 (NEW):</b>	Future tense marker.

When speakers are not sure, they normally formulate a hypothesis: “it might be X”, “it may be Y” or “it must be Z”. In other words, they rely on the epistemic and perception modality systems illustrated in the second section. If by chance they choose the “correct” or conventional signified, nothing changes. However, if they opt for the “wrong” or unconventional one (in this case “will” as future tense marker), and if this new signified is accepted by other speakers, the result will be a linguistic change in the diachronic axis. Our hypothesis is that both Cora and Elizabeth try to change social conventions by means of what might be called “reanalysis of social conventions”. However, social conventions are normally amended or eradicated on purpose, and not simply by mistake. Such adjustments occur

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<sup>22</sup> N. Madariaga, *Reanalysis*, cit., p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> A. R. Warner, *English Auxiliaries – Structure and history*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993, p. 181.

because somebody **wishes** to modify or abolish a given social norm, or because they think it **must** change. This is why agents involved in such processes are inevitably bound to rely on the deontic and boulomaic modality systems. The absence of these systems could mean lack of volition, doubt, etc., thus, acceptance of the status quo, as can be seen in the following passage from *The Underground Railroad*, which depicts the way Ajarry (Cora's grandmother) came to terms with slavery:

Ajarry made a science of her own black body and accumulated observations. Each thing had a value and as the value changed, everything else changed also. A broken calabash was worth less than one that held its water, a hook that kept its catfish more prized than one that relinquished its bait. In America the quirk was that people were things. Best to cut your losses on an old man who won't survive a trip across the ocean. A young buck from strong tribal stock got customers into a froth. A slave girl squeezing out pups was like a mint, money that bred money. If you were a thing – a cart or a horse or a slave – your value determined your possibilities. She minded her place<sup>25</sup>.

The point of view in this extract is B Reflector neutral (modality systems are not foregrounded). Ajarry (the reflector) resorts only to unmodalized categorical assertions when she explains the ways of the world she lives in. Why? Epistemic and perception modality instances are absent because the reality she lives in is not a mystery to her: she knows very well its rules and principles. In her mind, signifieds and signifiers are neatly ordered in the conventional way established by the white master. Deontic and boulomaic systems are not foregrounded because she accepts her reality as it is. She never shows any wish to change it. She was captured in Africa when she was a child, she was raped, and then she was bought, sold and branded countless times. There are no words which can express the real extent of the damage she suffered. However, the telltale absence of items taken from the modality lexicon is eloquent enough. Her soul is broken beyond repair: she has been totally deprived of authority (deontic), volition (boulomaic), and doubt (epistemic). She only does what the white master obliges (deontic) or wishes (boulomaic) her to do, and she perfectly understands the “white” episteme (epistemic).

Cora and Elizabeth Bennet are quite the opposite. Even though Elizabeth's situation is clearly less dire than Cora's, they have much in common. Just like Cora refuses to live in chains, Elizabeth does not accept the social conventions which establish that women cannot enjoy the same rights as men.

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<sup>25</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., p. 108.

Both girls are deeply aware of the conventions which bind them, and whenever they do not like them, they try to change them. Their master tool to achieve this goal is what we have called “social reanalysis”, which is the main feature of their “social grammar of rebellion”, and is adopted to reanalyse the “social grammar of oppression” in an attempt to trigger a change and turn it into the “social grammar of freedom”.

The deontic and boulomaic modality systems are used to show what they want to achieve, while the epistemic and perception modality systems appear when they are uncertain about what is to be done. Let us consider the following example from *Pride and Prejudice*:

Elizabeth was distressed. She felt that she had no business at Pemberley, and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it. She must own that she was tired of great houses; after going over so many, she really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains.

[...] The possibility of meeting Mr. Darcy, while viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! She blushed at the very idea; and thought it would be better to speak openly to her aunt, than to run such a risk. But against this, there were objections; and she finally resolved that it could be the last resource, if her private enquiries as to the absence of the family, were unfavourably answered<sup>26</sup>.

This passage describes Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley (Mr. Darcy’s mansion). Earlier in the novel, Darcy had asked for Elizabeth’s hand in marriage, but she had rejected the proposal in a very harsh manner, and kept it a secret. Later on, she went on a trip (the third *salida*) with her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, who was not aware of Darcy’s marriage proposal. When they passed near Pemberley, Mrs. Gardiner expressed the wish to visit the premises. Elizabeth, who «felt [...] she had no business» there, would have liked to avoid the place at all costs because, in accordance with the social conventions of the time, she was afraid that if Darcy had seen her there, he would have thought that her purpose was to take a look at what she had missed by turning down his proposal.

The point of view is mainly B Reflector positive (the Reflector being Elizabeth). The deontic system is foregrounded because she is determined to avoid the visit:

She [...] was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it.

She must own that she was tired of great houses...

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<sup>26</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, cit., p. 232.

However, in order to achieve this goal she might have to disclose her secret to Mrs. Gardiner, and so «it would be better to speak openly to her aunt...», because if she met Darcy at Pemberley «[i]t would be dreadful!» (this is the only instance of epistemic modality in the passage).

Later on, after she finds out that Darcy is not at home, she agrees to visit the place. However, when the tour is almost over, the master suddenly appears:

Her coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange must it appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man! It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself in his way again! Oh! why did she come? or, why did he thus come a day before he was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of his discrimination, for it was plain that he was that moment arrived, that moment alighted from his horse or his carriage. She blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting. And his behaviour, so strikingly altered, – what could it mean? That he should even speak to her was amazing! – but to speak with such civility, to enquire after her family! Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting. What a contrast did it offer to his last address in Rosings's Park, when he put his letter into her hand! She knew not what to think, nor how to account for it!<sup>27</sup>

In this passage, the point of view is B Reflector negative. Elizabeth (the reflector), extremely embarrassed, is trying to make sense of the situation. This is why the epistemic and perception modality systems are foregrounded:

How strange must it appear to him!

In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man!

It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself in his way again!

The reader is well aware that Elizabeth did not go to Pemberley to see what she had given up by rejecting Darcy. She is there because she did not want to disclose the real nature of her relationship with him. However, the social conventions of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were such as to induce people to believe the first option to be the right one. Elizabeth then resorts to reanalysis to try to subvert the convention:

<b>SIGNIFIER:</b>	A girl visits the mansion of a gentleman who is much richer than her and whose marriage proposal she rejected.
<b>SIGNIFIED 1 (OLD):</b> (established social convention)	The girl wants to see what she has missed by turning down the suitor's proposal.

<sup>27</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, cit., pp. 241-242.

<p><b>SIGNIFIED 2 (NEW):</b> (Elizabeth's personal interpretation)</p>	<p>Other personal reasons (the girl visits the mansion because she does not want other people to know that she rejected this particular suitor).</p>
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As can be seen, the new and the old signifieds are quite different. If the new one were accepted by a large number of people, the old one might possibly disappear or at least become one among the "other reasons" in signified 2. If this came to pass, the male chauvinism of signified 1 would be (at least partially) eradicated. If Elizabeth succeeded, the result would be the «[n]on-convergence of grammars»<sup>28</sup> (in this case, of social conventions) or, in other words, the «discontinuity or failure of transmission between generations»<sup>29</sup>. In the end, Darcy reveals that he had not interpreted Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley in the sense of signified 1, thus showing that he did not stick to the social conventions of the time. However, this happens because he had already been profoundly changed by Elizabeth, who, therefore, was able to convince at least one other human being (one, however, in a high position in society) to accept the new signified.

"I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me; when we met at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?"

"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise."

"Your surprise could not be greater than *mine* in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive *more* than my due."

"My object *then*," replied Darcy, "was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you."<sup>30</sup>

Cora acts in a very similar way, as can be seen in the following excerpt from *The Underground Railroad*:

She discovered a rhythm, pumping her arms, throwing all of herself into movement. Into northness. Was she traveling through the tunnel or digging it? [...] The ones who excavated a million tons of rock and dirt, toiled in the belly of the earth for the deliverance of slaves like her. Who stood with all those other souls who took runaways into their homes, fed them, carried them north on their backs, died for them. [...] Who are you after you finish something this magnificent – in constructing it you have also journeyed through it, to the other side. On one end there was who you were before you went underground, and on the other end a new

<sup>28</sup> N. Madariaga, *Reanalysis*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, cit., pp. 349-350.

person steps out into the light. The up-top world must be so ordinary compared to the miracle beneath, the miracle you made with your sweat and blood. The secret triumph you keep in your heart.

[...]

She trusted the slave's choice to guide her – anywhere, anywhere but where you are escaping from. It had gotten her this far. She'd find the terminus or die on the tracks<sup>31</sup>.

In this extract the young runaway slave is travelling through one of the dark passages of the underground railroad in the final stage of her flight towards freedom. The tunnel may be interpreted as a gloomy metaphor of what 19<sup>th</sup> century America really was: the land of slavery, a dark and endless underworld where the absence of light blinds one's eyes and also one's conscience, and where nothing is what it seems<sup>32</sup>. Naturally, if those who rule are "blind", it should not come as a surprise if they make laws such as the Fugitive Slave Law (1850)<sup>33</sup>. However, there still remains some hope for a better future, because there is always light at the end of a tunnel. And if this end should turn out to be a dead end, it will still be possible to carry on digging until one finally reaches the light (just like thousands of former slaves did, in the fictional world of the novel, when they built the underground railroad «[w]ith their hands»<sup>34</sup>.

**Commentato [mgd4]:** È per enfasi? O è citazione?

**Commentato [AP5R4]:** Si tratta di enfasi.

**Commentato [A6]:** Si può eliminare questa riga bianca?

The point of view is B Reflector negative and the Reflector is Cora. She does not know what she will find at the end of the tunnel. This uncertainty is illustrated by the foregrounding of the epistemic and perception modality systems combined with the character's free indirect thought:

Was she travelling through the tunnel or digging it?

Who are you after you finish something this magnificent [?]

<sup>31</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., pp. 303-304.

<sup>32</sup> When Cora and Caesar are about to start their first journey on the underground railroad, as they step on the train, Lumbly (a white agent) tells them that if they «[l]ook outside» they will «find the true face of America». However, when Cora looks «through the slats» she cannot see anything: «[t]here was only darkness, mile after mile». (C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., p. 69.)

<sup>33</sup> R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom – Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2018.

<sup>34</sup> C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., p. 67.

Cora is trying to make sense of what she calls the «miracle beneath». She knows who she was at the beginning of her journey, but she still has not figured out who she will be when she reaches the exit.

By the end of the passage, as her confidence increases, she switches to the modal “must”, which in this case is epistemic (and not deontic) because it expresses certainty: «The up-top world must be so ordinary compared to the miracle beneath».

She realizes that the new episteme («the miracle beneath»), which is being secretly fashioned in an underground tunnel, is more powerful than the one which governs the outside world. When her journey is drawing to an end, she braces herself for the unknown and switches from the epistemic to the boulomaic system (and so B Reflector negative becomes positive). Unlike Ajarry, Cora does not surrender to the white man’s episteme in the Bakhtinian dialogic battle with the «up-top world». She is determined to have her way: «she’d find the terminus or die on the tracks». This is yet another instance of free indirect thought. The direct thought original version would have been: “I’ll find the terminus or die on the tracks,” where “will”, besides being a future time marker, is also boulomaic, as it denotes volition, what she desires so strongly that she is even prepared to «die on the tracks». Cora does not accept to live in chains and so she runs away. However, if she wants to live as a free human being, she needs to create and impose a new episteme which regards slavery and racism as a crime. She has to subvert the established social conventions which govern the «up-top world», possibly by finding what she calls «the weak link»<sup>35</sup> in the epistemic chain that binds her. In order to achieve this goal she resorts to reanalysis. In the text above, it is possible to identify two signifiers which form a dichotomy:

1. The underground railroad
2. The «up-top world»

Cora reanalyses both of them:

<b>SIGNIFIER A:</b>	The underground railroad
<b>SIGNIFIED 1 (OLD):</b> (white master’s social convention)	An illegal system of underground tunnels used by slaves as a means to illegally running away.

<sup>35</sup> «The weak link – she liked the ring of it. To seek the imperfection in the chain that keeps you in bondage. Taken individually, the link was not much. But in concert with its fellows, a mighty iron that subjugated millions despite its weakness». (C. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, cit., p. 125.)

ha eliminato: **vi**.

<b>SIGNIFIED 2 (NEW):</b> (Cora's personal interpretation)	A "miracle" designed to help slaves to get back their long lost dignity and become free human beings once again.
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<b>SIGNIFIER B:</b>	The «up-top world»
<b>SIGNIFIED 1 (OLD):</b> (white master's social convention)	A place where, by divine right, white masters rule and black slaves obey.
<b>SIGNIFIED 2 (NEW):</b> (Cora's personal interpretation)	A dark and unjust place where the law allows a human being to deprive another human being of their humanity and freedom («so ordinary compared to the miracle beneath»).

The subversion is complete. Although illuminated by the sun, the «up-top world» is in truth a dark place. The real light lies entrapped in the metaphoric darkness of the tunnel, where it patiently awaits the right moment to come out and finally dispel the shadows which haunt the outside reality.

Cora wins her freedom. At the end of her journey, the underground episteme (the «miracle beneath» or the light inside the darkness) finally comes out to drive away the shadows from the "civilized" «up-top world», even though it is still very weak. However, as a 21<sup>st</sup> century reader well knows, it is bound to become stronger. 200 years later that same light is still shining on, radiating from the hearts and minds of those who take to the streets to shout that "Black Lives Matter".

#### 4. Conclusions

Both Cora and Elizabeth are thus active agents of change and builders of a new world. They understand that in order to redesign reality, they need to reorganize the way signifiers and signifieds are arranged. They modify the sign by replacing old meanings with new ones, and then the amended sign reshapes the episteme which governs their existence. The grammar of oppression thus becomes the grammar of freedom. In this sense, the same framework illustrated in this article could be used to analyse any fictional or non-fiction character who acts in a similar way.

In 1820, P. S. Shelley wrote that «[p]oets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in



another, the creations, of their age»<sup>36</sup> Cora (a slave) and Elizabeth (a woman forced to live in a world dominated by men) are both creations of their age. However, unlike the majority of their peers, just like poets do, they negotiate new meanings and thus become the creators of a new world.

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<sup>36</sup> P. S. Shelley, J. Donovan, C. Duffy (ed.), *Selected Poems and Prose*, Penguin Books, London 2016 (ebook), pp. 186-187.