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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Váha inkoustu: ženské protagonistky tváří v tvář útlaku
The Weight of Ink: Female Protagonists in the Face of Oppression

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Poděkování

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá spojením dvou hlavních hrdinek historického románu *Váha inkoustu* (2017) současné americké spisovatelky Rachel Kadishové. Cílem je popsat a interpretovat podstatu a povahu tohoto spojení. Vzhledem k tomu, že jsou od sebe protagonistky odděleny více než třemi sty lety historického vývoje, jejich osudy jsou na první pohled nepodobné. Hlubší zkoumání však ukazuje, že jejich hlavním společným rysem jsou různé formy společenského útlaku, které zasahují do veškerých aspektů jejich života. Proto praktická část porovnává a analyzuje jednotlivé případy jejich oprese, k čemuž používá koncept psycholožky Iris Marion Youngové pod názvem *Five Faces of Oppression* popisující možné formy útisku ve společnosti. Práce se zabývá i otázkou toho, do jaké míry a jakým způsobem jsou v ohledu omezení osobního rozvoje postavy ovlivněny společenským kontextem a zejména náboženstvím, v tomto případě judaismem, který je s oběma jejich životy neoddělitelně spjatý. V neposlední řadě bakalářská práce, stejně jako samotný román, vyzdvihuje způsoby, jakými se dvě hlavní postavy se svou situací vyrovnávají formou seberealizace, která, ač je společností přímo odmítaná či lze vysledovat pokusy o její výrazné omezení, slouží jako prostředek rozvoje osobního růstu, autonomie a ve výsledku i svobody.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Váha inkoustu, Rachel Kadishová, útlak, *Five Faces of Oppression*, “counterspace”

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the connection between the two protagonists of a historical novel *The Weight of Ink* (2017) by a contemporary American author, Rachel Kadish. The main aim is to describe and interpret the nature of this link. Since the two protagonists are separated by more than three hundred years of historical development, their destinies seem dissimilar at first glance. However, deeper investigation reveals the commonality of various forms of social repression, which affect all aspects of both their lives. It is for this reason that the Practical Part compares the individual cases of their confinement, employing the concept of a psychologist Iris Marion Young named *Five Faces of Oppression*, which describes the possible manifestations of restraint in society. The thesis also ponders how and to what extent the two protagonists are influenced by social context and specifically religion, in this case Judaism, which is bound to their destinies. Last but not least, the thesis, as well as the novel itself, stresses how the protagonists cope with their situation through the means of self-realization, which, despite being directly rejected or substantially curtailed by society, serves as a means of personal growth, autonomy and eventually freedom.

KEYWORDS

The Weight of Ink, Rachel Kadish, oppression, *Five Faces of Oppression*, “counterspace”

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1 Introduction

Upon studying British literature of the 20th century, I was introduced to the acclaimed essay *The Room of One's Own*, where Virginia Woolf contrives a destiny of a hypothetical Shakespeare's sister. I was frustrated by Woolf's pessimistic message that the woman, despite her talent, would have died without writing a word. Around the same time, my mother-in-law, Zora Freiová, was working on her translation of an award-winning novel *The Weight of Ink* (2017) by an American author Rachel Kadish. As I was learning more about this piece of historical fiction, I discovered that one of the key impulses which prompted Kadish to write it was the same Woolf's metaphor, which had been lingering in my own mind. In her own words, Kadish wanted to explore through her novel "what [it would] have taken for a woman of [Shakespeare's] era—a woman with a capacious intelligence and no outlet for it—not to die without writing a word" ("On Asking Dangerous Questions"). To answer this burning question, Kadish contrives a story of Ester, a fictitious Jewess living in 17th century London, whom she endows with insatiable thirst for knowledge and creation and follows her trying journey to successful realization of her ambitions. Kadish does not stop there, however. She links Ester's destiny to that of an elderly Englishwoman Helen, who discovers the enthralling legacy of the Jewish intellectual at the turn of the 21st century. It was this juxtaposition of characters that made me choose Kadish's work as a subject of my thesis, as I wished to understand why the author decided to enrich her response to Woolf's idea with such a connection and explore what it brings to the novel. Even though the two protagonists of *The Weight of Ink* are separated by almost three centuries, their destinies are strikingly similar. Firstly, they are both women with a close relationship to study - while Ester's story revolves around her development as a philosopher,

Helen is a professor who examines Ester's scholarly manuscripts. Secondly, they are both influenced by Judaism, since Ester is an observant Jewess and Helen decides to study Jewish history after being in a relationship with an Israeli Jew. Encompassing both these commonalities is the greater analogy of oppression, which hinders Ester's progress in her study of philosophy and prevents Helen from feeling fulfilled in both her profession and her love life.

The principal objective of this thesis is to uncover what exactly forms the core of this link between their hardships, answering consequently the question of what the author wanted to convey by connecting the two women through the means of confinement. To fulfil this aim satisfactorily, the thesis will open with a brief introduction of Kadish's work. I will situate *The Weight of Ink* in the context of her creative development, exploring her artistic mindset and thus creating a more informed base for my subsequent interpretations. Next, it will be necessary to specify how and why the two protagonists of the novel are discouraged from their desired pursuits. To do so, I will introduce their life stories in historical and religious contexts, in order to find out what sorts of constraint were present in the eras they would have lived in and how they are manifested in their destinies. To discover Kadish's idea behind the connection of Ester and Helen, I will have to find deeper parallels in their repression, analysing its concrete forms and its overall nature. This analysis will be based the approach of a 20th century psychologist Iris Marion Young, who developed a categorization of constraint titled *Five Faces of Oppression* (1990). In the Theoretical Part, I will introduce key points of her work, which will then be used in the Practical Part to classify, analyse and compare the concrete instances of Ester and Helen being prevented from meeting their aspirations.

Besides searching for parallels in the manifestations of restraint, I will also focus on its possible sources. Here, the aforementioned probe into historical and religious context of the novel will be instrumental as it will elucidate if the two characters could have been constrained due to their femininity, their demonstrable intelligence, or simply due to the belief system prevalent in the respective era. The secondary aim of this thesis is to pay special attention to Judaism in this sense, in order to ascertain whether it is a direct source of Ester's and Helen's hardships, or an element which motivates abusers to behave unjustly towards them, or whether it is a mere tool which the oppressors abuse for their own benefit. To conclude the analysis of Ester's and Helen's confinement, I will compare and contrast their coping strategies, which allow them to strive for fulfilment in spite of the oppressive conditions they live in. For this purpose, I will employ the concept of a counterspace, which was defined by contemporary psychologists as an environment which allows self-realization of constrained individuals. If Kadish's 17th century heroine is really to prove that a woman of her kind did not have to suffer the fate of Shakespeare's hypothetical sister, it is more than likely that she would need a source of self-enhancement which would propel her even in the most adverse circumstances. Identifying Ester's reservoir of life motivation and comparing it with that of Helen will shed even more light on the nature of their connection, bringing me closer to understanding Kadish's intention behind intertwining the two destinies.

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 About the Author

Born in 1969 into a Jewish family of Holocaust refugees, Rachel Kadish has always felt defined by history, which was too laden with suffering for her to tell. Not until she began her studies at Princeton University in the class of the Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison did she understand how writing historical fiction may allow her to express her very self while finding responses to her unanswered questions including those concerning women's social roles in various cultures and eras (Kadish, "I Was Hesitant"). In 2006 she published her debut novel *From a Sealed Room*, where she interweaves stories of an Israeli housewife, a Holocaust survivor and an American college student, melding through these three women the various aspects of her own personality. Later, she produced one more novel, *Tolstoy Lied: A Love Story* (2007), and a novella, *I Was Here* (2014), before she published her largest work so far, *The Weight of Ink* (2017), where she delves yet the deepest into history, presenting it as a source of self-knowledge and drawing attention to the suppression of the female voice ("Rachel Kadish: Author").

Over the course of her career, she has won numerous awards including the Pushcart Prize or the John Gardener Book Prize and her name has been mentioned in multiple anthologies. *The Weight of Ink* became the winner of the 2017 National Jewish Book Award and was praised among others by the American psychologist and feminist Carol Gilligan or the acclaimed author Leah Hager Cohen. Currently, Kadish teaches creative writing at Lesley University in Massachusetts, drawing pedagogical inspiration from her former tutor Toni Morrison, who proudly called her alumnus "a gifted writer, astonishingly adept at nuance, narration, and the politics of passion" (qtd. from "Rachel Kadish: Author").

2.2 The Young Jewess in 17th Century London

After having briefly presented the author, I will now delve more deeply into her work, commencing with an introduction of the temporally more remote protagonist of *The Weight of Ink*, whose story paints a historically accurate image of life in 17th century London. Prior to contriving the destiny of Ester Velasquez, Rachel Kadish spent several years researching the historical era in which she wanted the character to live. She did so in order to ensure that despite Ester's fictitiousness, her destiny is plausible and thus can be understood as a relevant testimony about the era under question (Kadish 563). The impending chapter will serve as a probe into Ester's life on the background of the historical context, which will allow me to describe which forms of restraint occur in Ester's life and what its possible sources might be. Besides focusing on her social role as a 17th century woman of capacious intelligence, I will also pay attention to relevant Jewish traditions as well as to the reception of Judaism in 17th century London, in order to discover if, how, and why her Jewishness could contribute to her confinement.

Ester Velasquez is a young Jewess of Portuguese origin, who spent her childhood in an Amsterdam Jewish community. After her parents died in a house fire, she moves with her brother to England, where they accompany a blind rabbi named Ha Cohen Mendes. Their relocation is closely related to the historical context; Jews are documented to have lived in communities in England since the 11th century until King Edward I issued the Edict of Expulsion in 1290, which forced them to leave the country (Holmes "Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656"). During the rule of Oliver Cromwell, the expulsion was no longer demanded, so small Jewish communities could return in 1656 (Holmes "Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656"). Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, a real historical figure, is documented

to have invited other rabbis to come rebuild a community in London. Rabbi Ha Cohen Mendes, who is a fictitious character invented by Rachel Kadish, responds to this call and moves to London, taking the two orphans, Ester and Isaac, with him. Historically speaking, Jews were tolerated in London at this time, but the readmission issued by Cromwell was only unofficial since his petition of 1655 had not been accepted by the Council of State (Holmes “Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656”). This goes to show that the anti-Semitic tendencies, which are reflected in *The Weight of Ink*, were still rather strong within the London society even after Ester’s arrival in 1657.

Although Ester was meant to learn skills associated with housewifery and marry, she becomes a scribe for rabbi Ha Cohen Mendes because her brother, who scribed for him originally, runs away from the rabbi’s household and dies, so there is no one else who could assist the rabbi. From the religious point of view, making Ester a scribe is a highly unconventional move since according to the Jewish tradition women are exempt from the commandment to study Torah for its own sake (Aiken 37), which Ester unavoidably practiced as she was introduced to the rabbi’s teachings while scribing. This notion is rooted in the Talmud, an eminent collection of classic Jewish law and study produced by rabbis over centuries (Fishbane 14). Even though some Talmudic rabbis have argued that women should study the holy texts, many others stood in direct opposition, supporting their opinion by the argument that men and women are separate peoples with distinct qualities, who are only fit to perform activities intended for their sex, intellectual pursuits being reserved for men (Baskin “Women in Rabbinic Literature”), as reflects the following citation from the Talmud: “Most women are not oriented to learn and instead transform Torah discussions into trivia due to the poverty of their intellects” (*Talmud Torah* 1:13). This accounts for the

fact that when Jewish authorities hear about Ester's scribing, they recommend the rabbi to find a male scribe in her stead. Despite the general disfavour of Ester's intellectual activities, she begins to feel fulfilled by her occupation and ventures into studying philosophical texts in her own spare time, going even as far as to openly express her preference of study over marriage.

Kadish's notion of her heroine not being able to continue with her philosophical pursuit *while* married is based not only on Jewish traditions but also on the popular lifestyle of the era. According to Dr. Amy Louise Erickson, a lecturer in British Economic and Social History between 1500 and 1750, during the 17th century an increasing number of people were performing waged work for an employer, which took place outside of home (Erickson ix). Therefore, each worker needed a family member who would manage the household while they were at work. Since "a woman's wages were wholly inadequate to support herself and her children" (Erickson ix), let alone her husband, it was mostly the men who worked and the women who were "confined to domesticity", taking care of the household and children (Erickson ix). The amount of domestic chores which were expected of a 17th century married woman was truly substantial, as suggested in Gervase Markham's manual *The English Housewife*, which first saw the light of day in 1631 and which instructs 17th century women on all the skills they need to master in order to successfully run a household. Without even taking the exacting role of a mother into account, Markham expects a housewife to hold the post of a family nurse, cook, weaver and seamstress all at the same time (Best, xi-ivi). Therefore, the vision of devoting multiple hours every day to study while being married must have been demonstrably impracticable in the 17th century.

Moreover, the reasons why marriage and women's study did not combine in the 17th century were also associated with the social understanding of gender roles. A 17th century wife was "expected to seek fulfilment through her husband, following his lead, but never asserting herself against him" (Best xxvii), which corresponds to the fact that the 17th century society generally viewed women as being of a lower rank than men (Best xxvii). This unfavourable notion prevented the vast majority of women from pursuing education, which resulted in a mere 10 percent of women being literate (Best ix). Even though during the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century the reign of Elizabeth I inspired women to learn, the puritan values vehemently repressed these progressive tendencies and bound women to domestic labour once again (Balmuth 19). In fact, according to Miriam Balmuth, 17th-century women themselves often believed that too much learning could endanger their social life and morality (19). This notion translates to Ester's story. She is told by multiple supporting characters of both sexes that her desire to pursue philosophy is unnatural and that she should abandon her endeavours and marry instead, to fulfil her prescribed gender role. When she is later offered marriage by one of the rabbi's students, Manuel Ha Levy, she rejects him, since he clearly states that he would not allow Ester to continue with her intellectual activities. Even though this might seem rather harsh, according to Jewish tradition, a husband is fully entitled to give his wife orders and demand certain behaviour from her since she is viewed as his property. This notion mirrors the 17th century

interpretations of the second creation narrative in the Genesis¹, where Eve is created *for* Adam, out of his own body (Nosek, Damohroská 87). Such conviction, of course, greatly reduces the rights of the wife, who, even in a non-Jewish 17th century marriage, “lost her legal identity as a separate person and she was recommended so to devote herself to fulfilling her husband’s wishes as to lose her own will in his” (Keeble x). Ester’s disfavour of marriage troubles the rabbi who believes to have ruined her life by introducing her to study in the first place. As a result, he forbids her from scribing, which forces her to continue her pursuits secretly. Eventually the rabbi finds out about this, but chooses not to reveal Ester, giving her undeniable talent an opportunity to develop.

Meanwhile, Ester creates a connection to an actor John Tilman, with whom she eventually falls in love. Their romance does not end fortunately, but Ester’s feelings for John never completely dissipate, which prevents her from fully committing to any other deep, romantic relationship and binds her even more closely to philosophy.

In accordance with the aforementioned historical accuracy, the novel also reflects the impacts of the plague of 1666 and the Great London Fire. Ester manages to survive both, but in the tumult, she is forcefully christened together with the former rabbi’s servant Rivka. This incident is based on the panic surrounding the plague epidemics, which made the London population “cruel as dogs to one another” (Pepys) and prompted many afflicted individuals to search for culprits who brought the disaster upon the city. Since historically

¹While in the first chapter God creates the first human “male and female” (*Holy Bible, NIV*, Gen. 1:27), in chapter two the male is said to be alone, which inspires God to create a female counterpart for him from “the rib that He had taken out of the man” (Gen. 2:22).

all natural disasters were mainly interpreted as God's punishment for human sins (Porter 25), it is plausible that the christening of the two Jewesses would have been viewed as a potential remedy for the divine wrath.

Towards the end of the novel, Ester eventually marries Alvaro Ha Levy, who is a homosexual and who allows her to hold correspondence with influential philosophers. Therefore, she does attain the creative and academic freedom she has always desired, but only thanks to a rather odd type of marriage, which allows her to evade the patriarchal system common in the era.

2.3 The Aged Professor within the 20th and 21st Century

Analogically to the previous chapter, I will now introduce the story of Helen, paying attention once again to the historical and religious contexts of the era she would have lived in. Overall, compared to Ester's storyline, that of Helen is less eventful. This is because the main purpose of Helen's character is not necessarily to enrich the plot, but to create a link between the modern day and the message brought by Ester's seemingly distant destiny. Kadish mirrors the hardships that hinder Ester's self-realization in Helen's own incapability to attain fulfilment, which allows her to make Ester's experiences relevant even in the 20th and 21st century, giving the novel a whole new degree of timelessness.

Helen Watt is an English professor in her sixties, who, in spite of not being Jewish, chooses the study of Jewish history as her profession. Her storyline revolves around documents which are found in a house situated in Richmond and which are later proven to be fragments of Ester's correspondence with 17th century philosophers. On the background this 21st century plotline, Kadish also reveals information about Helen's past:

Enraged by the 1958 racially motivated riots in Notting Hill, Helen joined a volunteer program in an Israeli kibbutz in the hope of finding her developing identity. During her stay, she fell in love with her Jewish superior, Dror. Their romance was short-lived, but it lingered in her heart, so she never married and instead devoted herself to the study of Jewish history, keeping Dror symbolically present in her life until her final days.

It might seem that in Helen's era a woman's choice of career over marriage was no longer stigmatised in any way, but a probe into the decades during which Helen came of age suggests otherwise. She would have been born in the late 1930's so during her childhood and teenage years, the world was focused on regaining stability after the Second World War. In the light of returning to the pre-war orders, the era promoted conservative understanding of gender roles, supporting women's return to domesticity (Allen 79). It was then expected of every female to become a heterosexual housewife and mother, which was presented as the natural option (Tinkler 3). Nonetheless, the post-war excitement was also conducive to the rise in women's "opportunities for employment, education and self-realization" (Allen 79), resulting in many women being torn between their career drive and the desire to conform to their prescribed conservative gender role (Allen 80). Therefore, Helen's choice of devoting her life to study was not exactly singular, but it still contested the mainstream. Especially her journey to the kibbutz in her early twenties must have been viewed as considerably curious since the majority of girls of her age were looking for a husband, while she chose to leave her homeland in order to perform often rough manual work.

What helped change the stereotypical stance towards women of Helen's era was the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, in which Friedan revealed

the discontentment of many American women who felt stuck in their role of housewives (Meyerowitz 1455). Along with the ongoing build-up of tension between the expected and desired roles of women in Europe, this book helped kindle the second wave of feminism, which took western Europe by storm around the year 1968 (Fox 1). This lease of fresh feminist energy encouraged many women to pursue a career path instead of motherhood, so Helen's lifestyle came considerably closer to being normalized. In fact, the new trend associated with the feminist movement is reflected in the number of children per woman, which dropped in most Western European countries by more than a half over the course of the 20th century (Kinsella 1196 – 1202). In the 21st century, there still persist strong tendencies of improving women's social position, such as endeavours for equal representation of the sexes in the political sphere or the continuing fight against the gender pay gap.

In conclusion, even though Helen does have to face some stereotypes and confinement over the course of her life, they seem to be much less drastic than those imposed on Ester. In order to decode how this disparity is reflected in the personal fulfilment of the two characters, it will be necessary to first understand the psychological mechanisms of oppression, which will be the subject of the remainder of the Theoretical Part. The scientific definitions will elucidate how constraint manifests itself in both overt and disguised ways, creating a solid basis for the subsequent Practical Part, where I will analyse the contrasts and similarities between the concrete obstacles which prevent the two main female characters in *The Weight of Ink* from emancipating themselves.

2.4 Oppression in Psychological Research

To categorize the different forms of restraint which occur in the novel, this thesis will employ the classification created in 1988 by Iris Marion Young, which is known as *Five Faces of Oppression*. According to this categorization, oppression of any kind may manifest itself in five possible forms, which will be introduced in more detail in the following subchapters. Young's model was chosen for its relative generality and accessibility, which makes it easier to apply outside the field of psychology. The clear arrangement of Young's work will enable me to draw lucid parallels between the two female characters, thus capturing the nature of their connection.

Lastly, to investigate the bond between Ester and Helen more thoroughly, I will focus on the ways in which they attain self-fulfilment in defiance of the experiences of oppression they live through. For these purposes, the approach of Andrew Case and Carla Hunter was chosen. In their paper called "Counterspaces: A Unit of Analysis for Understanding the Role of Settings in Marginalized Individuals' Adaptive Responses to Oppression" (2012), they introduce the term of a counterspace as an environment which promotes well-being in marginalized individuals in spite of confinement (Case, Hunter 261). The study has been used predominantly to analyse coping strategies of racially or ethnically marginalized individuals, but it may be fruitful to use it even as a tool of literary analysis, since it facilitates the identification of sources of internal drive, which are a crucial theme in the novel under question.

2.4.1 Five Faces of Oppression

Iris Marion Young defines the concept of oppression as a phenomenon whose victims "suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express

their needs, thoughts, and feelings” (Young 271), which applies to both Ester and Helen, who struggle to meet their aspirations. According to Young, oppression can manifest itself as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism or violence (Young 271). In the following five subchapters each of these faces of oppression will be defined.

Exploitation

Young defines exploitation as “domination, which occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labour of some people to benefit others.” (Young 278). In other words, exploited individuals are those who work for the benefit of others without being compensated appropriately. Most common examples of modern-day exploitation can be sweatshops or child labour (Heldke 1). Anyhow, Young argues that exploitation plays a pivotal role in gender oppression as well, since “the freedom, power, status, and self-realization of men is possible precisely because women work for them” (Young 278). Moreover, Young contends that exploitation can be found even in the fact that women are expected to provide men with emotional and sexual satisfaction with often inadequate reciprocation (Young 278). What motivates this form of abuse is the human desire to be privileged in comparison to other individuals. Exploitation allows the tyrants not only to acquire this superiority but also to maintain it or even enhance it through becoming richer or more influential thanks the abused group working for them (Young 278). This presents an acute problem since it enables exploitation to grow exponentially; the more the abusers exploit, the more power they have to oppress even more severely.

Marginalization

The process of marginalization is that of consistent depreciation of a group whose members are refused by the labour market. As a result, the marginalized group is confined

to a lower standing or edge of the society (Young 280). Prevalent cases of marginalization are those based on race, but even elderly or disabled people can often become victimized (Heldke 2). The most visible problem associated with marginalization is material deprivation of the afflicted group, but even affluent individuals can be marginalized by being prevented from freely developing their capacities regardless of their actual skills. Their exclusion from society makes them dependent on others and thus deprives them of freedom (Young 281). This particular issue is reflected in the traditional patriarchal family model where a woman is perceived as inherently dependent on her husband as he is the one responsible for breadwinning (Young 282).

Powerlessness

The third face of oppression causes the oppressed to be literally powerless, having no opportunity to change their own situation and being subjugated by another group of people who possess this power (Heldke 2). Thus, the powerless are subjected to the decisions made by the professionals, as Young calls them, and they have no voice of their own since nobody listens to their opinions (Young 284). Arguably, the greatest danger of powerlessness and oppression as a whole lies in the possibility of internalizing it. According to Paulo Freire this internalization creates what he calls the “Culture of Silence” (qtd. in Heldke 3). Those who adopt this culture accept their inferiority to such an extent that they cease to believe they are worthy of speaking up for themselves and thus they remain silent, completely subjected to the power of the dominant group, often not even realizing they are being severely oppressed (Heldke 3). An example of individuals with internalized oppression would be 17th century women, whose fate was to a great extent in the hands of men and who oftentimes subordinated themselves

voluntarily. Lucy Hutchinson, an English poetess, biographer and the first translator of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, who lived in between 1620 and 1681 (Mayer 305), argued that "the most knowing women [are] inferior to the masculine understanding of men [due to their] ignorance and weakness of judgment [as well as their] own imbecility" (Hutchinson 5-6). In this quote a clear internalization of powerlessness can be observed as Hutchinson believes herself and all other females to be inherently inferior to their male counterparts.

Cultural Imperialism

One of the most prominent faces of oppression in the modern western society is cultural imperialism, which establishes the culture of one group as a norm while marking any different cultures as "the Other" (Young 285). The Other groups are then judged according to the norms of the dominant group, which can induce the occurrence of all the remaining faces of oppression. In these days, the dominant group of the western society is that of white men with Judeo-Christian values (Heldke 3). Anyhow, cultural imperialism may be based also on the difference in language or even accent (Heldke 4). Thus, the dominant group is oftentimes almost impenetrable from the outside, making it practically impossible for those marked as Others to become an accepted member of dominant culture group.

Violence

In extreme cases, coercion can of course manifest itself even as verbal or physical violence. This face of oppression being most easily detectable out of the five is the one that is most commonly denounced. Anyhow, it is important to note that what can be understood as violence are not only the physical attacks themselves but also the constant threat of random unprovoked abuse that the abused individuals have to endure (Young 287).

2.4.2 Finding a Counterspace

Besides understanding what oppression might look like and what the oppressors' motivation might be, it is also beneficial to research the ways in which the oppressed individuals maintain well-being. This will facilitate the comparison of Ester's and Helen's story, since it will enable me to assess their personal strategies of self-enhancement. The following chapter will briefly introduce the concept of a counterspace, which was defined by psychologists Case and Hunter and which helps marginalized individuals escape the shackles of personal restraint.

The methods of coping with oppression are diverse. The basic distinction that we can make between the various responses is that they may either be on an individual or a contextual level (Case, Hunter 257). The individual level includes all reactions that are independent of the afflicted individual's surroundings. Simply put, the individual-level processes can be viewed as a one-on-one battle between the individual and the experiences of oppression. The contextual level of responses, on the other hand, includes reactions facilitated by the contexts or by the surroundings the abused individual is in (Case, Hunter 258). An example of such a context might be social group, namely family or friends, but also a specific environment in which the individual performs a certain activity. The goal of both, individual- and contextual-level responses is to make the victims feel better and promote a sense of well-being despite the presence of constraint. According to Case and Hunter any process that promotes well-being in confined persons can be referred to as adaptive responding (Case, Hunter 259). An environment which facilitates adaptive responding and thus well-being is then to be called a *counterspace* (Case, Hunter 251). Adaptive responding can be further divided into self-protection and self-enhancement

(Case, Hunter 260). While self-protection mechanisms serve to protect the self-concept of the oppressed individual, self-enhancement goes further as it results in enhancing the sense of self-worth in the hostile environment (Case, Hunter 260). Hunter and Case argue that self-protection usually takes place on the individual level, in contrast with self-enhancement, which primarily occurs in the presence of others (Case, Hunter 260); thus, counterspaces can be claimed to be especially beneficial as they foster self-enhancement which might not otherwise occur.

3 Practical Part

3.1 Ester and Helen from the Perspective of Five Faces of Oppression

As the historical context of *The Weight of Ink* revealed, Ester's journey towards her aspirations must have been considerably more hampered by repression than that of Helen, whose story is set in much more favourable circumstances. Nevertheless, the whole of the Theoretical Part indicated that despite the dissimilar severity of repression, there are reasons why both of them can be claimed to be confined in their own way. In Ester's case the sole fact that she is a foreigner in a country whose language she barely knows and whose religion she does not share is enough to make her prone to multiple hardships, let alone the fact that she is a woman, which causes her to be less privileged than her male counterparts in its own sense². Similarly, Helen often needs to prove herself capable of her job, being targeted on multiple occasions for having an interest in Jewish history while not being Jewish herself. Therefore, despite the progress that society has undergone between the 17th and 20th centuries, there are clear parallels to be found between the repression of the two characters. It is these parallels that I will endeavour to uncover in the impending subchapters by juxtaposing the manifestations of the individual faces of oppression in the two storylines.

3.1.1 Exploitation

In Ester's life, this first face of oppression is manifested rather overtly. Although in the household where Ester lives, there is a maid, Rivka, who performs the majority of household

² See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

chores, Ester still often has to get up before dawn to help in the kitchen or with the laundry, which brings her to the state of exhaustion. The reason why these experiences may be labelled as exploitation is that there is no adequate compensation for the work that Ester performs; on the contrary, it deprives her of the joy of studying. The fact that the workload inflicted on Ester is excessive is evident from the following metaphor, which compares the chores to a sea tide, against which Ester has no power: “All week a tide of housework rose about her, sliding her this way and that as she fought breath and limb to stay afloat” (251). The image of water currents reappears in Ester’s storyline as a symbol of oppression and develops together with Ester’s resistance, ranging from life-threatening deluges to a slow river current which she is able to withstand, as it will be later analysed in more detail. In this particular case, the force of the water is so great that Ester expends all her efforts on surviving. As a direct result she has no capacity left to pursue her study: “Verses that had once played in her mind now vanished” (251).

The character who may be seen as the cause of this form of exploitation is the rabbi. He presents Ester’s intellectual activities as straightforwardly harmful, referring to them as “errors” and to her as being “misshapen” (393), eventually inflicting demanding labour on her, to prevent her, even physically, from continuing with her study. He claims that he does so in order to help her reintegrate into the Jewish community, who demand that she only perform activities meant for the female sex³. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that he must have been afraid even for his own reputation, which was endangered by association with Ester’s non-conformity. Therefore, driven not only by his concern for Ester

³ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

but also by fear for himself, he becomes an exploiter, misusing the traditional Jewish conception of gender roles as a vindictive element, which exonerates his behaviour and even makes it appear fully altruistic. The fact that he later allows Ester to continue her studies in secret⁴ further illustrates the role of fear in the issue. Once the rabbi is virtually shielded by the argument that she studies and philosophizes without him knowing, his position is no longer in danger, so he feels no need to hinder her progress anymore. This confirms that it was chiefly the association with her non-conformity, which scared him, forcing him to manipulate her, even though he recognized her intellectual potential as extraordinary.

Another character who subjects Ester to exploitation is her suitor, Manuel Ha Levy. When he proposes to Ester, he specifies that he is offering “neither fidelity nor obedience, nor any part of [his] heart but that which [she] earned through a change in [her] own demeanor” (289). Manuel’s tone, together with the word “earned”, signal that he perceives Ester as indebted to him and that in marriage she would have to repay his favour of marrying her. He later reiterates this stance as he greets Ester during the plague epidemic with the words “I came to check on my investment” (400)⁵. In both cases he is threatening Ester with what might be called *spiritual exploitation* as he is not forcing her to perform any physical labour, but he is threatening to deprive her of philosophy and study, which bring her joy, without offering any adequate compensation⁶. His motivation to subject Ester to such

⁴ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

⁵ Ester’s hypothetical contemporary, John Milton, viewed Eve as indebted to Adam similarly to how Manuel views Ester. Christine Froula, an expert on *Paradise Lost*, states that “[Eve’s] debt to [Adam], as [Milton] represents it, is such that she can repay it only by ceding to him her very self” (Froula 328).

⁶ See chapter 2.4.1 of the Theoretical Part

coercion may be his desire to benefit from his superior position in the potential marriage in combination with his fear of deviating too far from the common patriarchal model⁷ if his wife were a scholar.

From this perspective, it is interesting to compare Ester's situation with that of Helen, who *is* a scholar. Since she appears to perform this prestigious profession voluntarily, there seem to be no traces of exploitation to be found in her life. However, Helen's history reveals that when she falls in love with Dror in the kibbutz, there comes a point when he begins to force her into learning about Jewish history against her will in an attempt to make her see the dedication which is necessary in order to understand and identify with the religion. Dror does not want to renounce his faith since he feels that he belongs to the Jewish nation, but at the same time he is apprehensive of becoming burdened by the degree to which Judaism influences a believer's spiritual and practical life. For this reason, he feels the urge to warn Helen in advance against the potential confinement which his Jewish lifestyle might inflict on her if they were to stay together.

It is essential to clarify however, that Helen misunderstands Dror's thought process. She deduces from his behaviour that he considers her to be inferior for not being Jewish and that he wants her to learn about his history in order to make her worthy of him. She fears that his sense of belonging to the Jewish nation is so strong that in a crisis he would choose his faith over her, using her non-Jewishness as a vindictive argument: "She raised her voice, louder than she needed to. 'What you're saying, Dror, is that I'll always come second. And I'll never understand you because I'm not Jewish. I'll never be as—'" (173) In order to avoid

⁷ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

such suffering, she ends her relationship with Dror, but neither her love for him, nor the wound created by his insistence on her studies ever disappear. As a result, she immerses herself in Jewish history in order to compensate for her non-Jewishness and prove to Dror as well as to herself and the entire world, that she is in fact capable of understanding Judaism even without being a believer and a member of the nation. This life-long work, which is never rewarded by Dror's recognition, can be in a sense interpreted as a form of exploitation, to which Helen subjects herself in a desperate attempt to establish her own worth.

Only shortly before her death does Helen come to understand that Dror's intention was not to harm her, but actually to protect her: "[...] looking back at the young man, she saw that all his warnings about the harshness of his history had been nothing but his fear that she'd step blithely into his world, then later feel its confines and flee" (452). In other words, Helen realizes that her fear of being oppressed by Dror was irrational and considerably overblown, as she was only being warned against *potential* abuse, which Dror never wished to effectuate and which she paradoxically inflicted on herself in an attempt to avoid it. This creates a noteworthy contrast between the two protagonists. While Ester is exploited by individuals who wish to divert her from scholarly activities, in Helen's case it is the study itself which exploits her, as it never brings her any true spiritual fulfilment.

3.1.2 Marginalization

One of the faces of oppression which affects both the protagonists of *The Weight of Ink* very manifestly is marginalization, since Ester and Helen are, in distinct ways, prevented or at least discouraged from performing an activity, regardless of their skills, only because they are members of a certain social group.

First, I will again focus on the more evident case of a marginalized individual, Ester, whose life and happiness is arguably most heavily influenced by the fact that she cannot overtly pursue her passion for study solely because she is a woman. The recommendation that the rabbi should find a male scribe instead of Ester arrives in a form of a letter to the rabbi's household. The religious authority, Yacob de Souza, who is the author of the letter, uses a direct citation from the Talmud as a mainstay of his oppressive argument: "I myself trust in the words of Rabbi Eliezer of the Talmud, *For the word of the Torah should be burnt rather than taught to women*" (66). This sort of argumentation is exceptionally powerful when aimed at a religious person such as rabbi Ha Cohen Mendes or Ester, as it forces them to consider their behaviour as sinful. The motivation of the authorities is most likely the fear of disruption to their worldviews, which, in their mind, keep them in God's favour. Ester threatens these worldviews by being a talented scribe, which contradicts the beliefs of the religious authorities about women⁸ and thus results in the need to subjugate her. Therefore, Jewish traditions are misused by the oppressors as a tool aiding them in preserving their existing value system, which is in conflict with Ester's non-conformist behaviour.

Due to this particular case of marginalization Ester cannot write under her own name and has to invent a male nom de plume to bypass the oppressive system. Here, the reader can perceive a direct effect of internalizing oppression⁹. Since Ester is taught by the Jewish community including the rabbi that men and women have separate qualities, which cannot

⁸ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

⁹ See chapter 2.4.1 of the Theoretical Part

or should not transfer from one sex to the other¹⁰, she has a tendency to consider herself twisted for possessing intellect, which the Jewish authorities consider to be inherently male. The words “unnatural” and “darkly” in the following passage illustrate Ester’s feeling of being in breach of some unwritten natural law:

But her nature, it seemed, was unnatural. What she wished – she could not help it, the wish persisted darkly inside her – was to be a part of the swelling wave she felt in the words of the books and pamphlets lining the tables outside St. Paul’s, the piles of fresh-bound quires at the bindery (293).

Nevertheless, Ester does not succumb completely, as she still recognizes that there is something illogical about the fact that simply because of her sex, she should not enjoy scholarly activities. In the following quote, she clearly expresses her doubts concerning this Jewish conviction: “Nature gave a woman not only body but also intelligence, and a wish to employ it. Was it then predetermined that one side of Ester’s nature must suffocate the other?” (293) Her powerful quote “let there be one space where I exist unsundered¹¹” (307) exemplifies her resistance to the division of male and female qualities, illustrating her belief that it is in fact possible for a woman to enjoy activities meant for the male sex. By writing her real female name under her male nom de plume, she overtly links her intellect to her

¹⁰ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

¹¹ Since Ester’s first language is Portuguese, her English is imperfect, especially in the beginning of the novel, where she often makes errors in morphology and syntax.

femininity, defying thus the Jewish conception of gender roles, making an essential step towards asserting her creative persona in spite of the strong cultural pressure.

In Helen's case the manifestation of marginalization seems to be much less drastic as is illustrated by the almost innocent remark of Ian Easton, who attempts to divert her from studying the manuscripts newly found in his house: "Perhaps we ought to leave it to *them* to handle the papers?" Ian said carefully. 'The Jews,' he added. 'No!' The single word shot out before Helen could stop it – and in the silence that followed, the rest rang unspoken: *the papers are mine*" (15). Ian's tone is considerably less brutal than that of Ester's oppressors. In fact, he is hesitant and even presents his case in polite language. Furthermore, the reason why he resorts to the cited argumentation in the first place is rather prosaic, as he only wishes to avoid the inconvenience of having Helen stay long hours in his house working on the preservation of the documents. In this light, Helen's almost aggressive reaction seems unnecessarily strong. From her perspective, however, Ian's remark presents a much graver form of abuse, which endangers her very identity and ambitions and which she is desperately trying to avoid by being extremely defensive. What she sees behind Ian's comment is a substantially marginalizing presumption that as a non-Jewish person, she is not suited for studying Jewish culture and religion. Such insinuation is a true backstab to Helen, since it jeopardizes her life-long effort of disproving this unrighteous stereotype, and thus puts her entire self-concept in question.

The comparison of Ester's and Helen's marginalization therefore leads to the conclusion that fear functions as a prompter of the characters' behaviour in both cases, but it seems to appear on the opposite sides in the two storylines. While in Ester's case it is the Jewish authorities whose acts are spurred by fear of transgressing the mainstream, in Helen's

case the dismay is mainly on her side, producing a fierce defensive reaction to any hints of repression connected to her occupation, which defines her personality. As far as the role of Judaism is concerned, the abusers of Ester and Helen both use it as a tool which allows them to strive for their goals. Interestingly enough, the religion is misused against the protagonists regardless of their faith, since one is marginalized for being Jewish and the other is manipulated on the grounds of *not* being of Jewish origin.

3.1.3 Powerlessness and Cultural Imperialism

Both powerlessness and cultural imperialism seem to have a strong connection to romantic relationships and marriage in Ester's story, since in the 17th century, and especially in Jewish families, women were viewed by the mainstream culture as inferior to men in marriage¹², having very little chance to change their position unless their husband was uncommonly permissive. In Helen's era, on the other hand, the general public viewed marriage in a considerably more egalitarian light, and it was even becoming common for a woman to decide not to marry at all¹³, which is the case of Helen herself who lives a rather independent life where there seems to be no place for powerlessness. Nevertheless, it is more than likely that had there been the opportunity, she would have married Dror, the only reason why this did not happen being her non-Jewishness. Here a curious irony appears: while Ester cannot marry if she wants to stay a scholar, Helen is prevented from getting married because she is not Jewish, which is why she becomes a scholar instead. Despite the inverse circumstances, both the women are affected by Cultural Imperialistic ethos, which prevents them from

¹² See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

¹³ See chapter 2.3 of the Theoretical Part

entering a fully-fledged marriage and leaves them powerless since Helen, even though she studies Jewish history her entire life, is still being confronted with the reality of not being Jewish¹⁴ and Ester has no other option than to renounce marriage based on love in order to retain her passion of philosophy. Cultural imperialism and powerlessness therefore seem to be intertwined in both Ester's and Helen's storylines, which is why these two faces of oppression will be analysed together in this subchapter.

Beginning with Ester, an experience which almost dissolves her apprehension of confinement in marriage is her relationship with John, who makes her see how free she could be in her life. He does so by taking her outside of London, which makes her feel powerless, and introducing her to the openness of the English countryside, stating: "Not London [...]. *This* is England, Ester" (359). Although enchanted, Ester does not allow her infatuation to deprive her of freedom and academic creativity, as the following passage suggests:

She slid her left hand toward his until they touched. With her right, she lifted the candle in its holder and raised it high. [...] she traced the wax over his hand and her own [...] a searing drizzle that left no burn, but cooled to a fine tracery that would seal them together until they broke it apart (369).

Ester's metaphoric gesture evinces her feelings for John while communicating her need of equality and independence in the relationship. The brittleness of the wax allows not only him but also her to break their bond at any time, giving both the parties the same degree

¹⁴ See chapter 3.1.2 of the Practical Part

of control over their union. When John later ends the relationship, she is wounded but respects his freedom of choice, in accordance with what she once expressed. Upon explaining his sudden departure, John confesses to her: “I haven’t your strength of heart” (402). This quote illustrates that in spite of his initial enthusiasm about Ester’s creativity, her non-conformity scares him more than it excites him, since he is incapable of stepping outside of the mainstream. His susceptibility to Cultural Imperialistic behaviour would thus prevent him from providing Ester with the independence she demanded and make him adhere to the traditional patriarchy, if their relationship were to continue, referring back to Dror, who has failed to provide a safe environment for Helen.

Even though hints of Ester’s love for John reappear throughout the novel, she does eventually find herself a different husband. Her choice of a life partner is rather strategic – since he is a homosexual¹⁵ they create together a functioning self-enhanced out-group, which ultimately allows them to defeat cultural imperialism and oppression as a whole. This victory is symbolically represented by ashes of burning London, the epicentre of her abuse, falling from the sky during their wedding ceremony. The same motif is further developed at the very end of the novel, where Ester, encouraged by Alvaro, overcomes her fear of water by entering the water current, which is the recurring symbol of oppression in her life. Even though the pressure of the water never fully ceases, together with her husband she finally learns to keep it under her own control, thus metaphorically asserting her power over the oppressive forces in her life.

¹⁵ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

Water forcing her palm open, the current kissing her fingers. [...] The current tipped her forward and her husband led her, [...], and her legs and feet were absurd and she had no notion what to do with them – until the water lifted her limbs and made them glad and foolish (560).

The progress in Ester's coping strategies is reflected in the bond that Helen forms with her. At the beginning of her study of Ester's texts, Helen practices the approach of scientific scepticism and refuses to draw rash conclusions without solid evidence. As the novel progresses, she becomes more attached to Ester's personality and begins to wish her success in the battle against oppression. This results in Helen rejecting strict methodology and getting audacious in her surmises, which is a truly striking shift in her behaviour:

‘And don't you think’, she interrupted – and there was now something explosive in her manner, ‘that being barred from learning might give a young woman with hunger for education – enough love of the work of *thought* itself – sufficient incentive to *invent* a Sabbatean crisis? (418-9)

To explain to her assistant Aaron the sudden change in approach, Helen turns to the story of Masada¹⁶. She points out that it is known only thanks to two women who hid in a

¹⁶ According to a legend, during the First Jewish War in the 1st century A.D., a group of Jews who were resisting Roman legions hid on the top of the Masada mountain in a fortress. They eventually ran out of supplies and were forced to surrender but in order to protect the dignity of their nation, their leader ordered them to commit a mass suicide (155).

cave, did not listen to their leader, who ordered a mass suicide, and as the only survivors they later told a historian about their experience (419). These two women are generally viewed as a disgrace to the Jewish community because they did not sacrifice their lives for the honour of Judaism despite being Jewish themselves. Their faith is thus being presented as a reason why they should be discriminated and marked as an outgroup, which makes this case of oppression fit the definition of cultural imperialism. The fact that the two women were so heavily outnumbered by their oppressors even during their lifetime made it impossible for them to change their situation, which signals that they were also subject to powerlessness.

Helen notices this injustice and identifies with it, as it reminds her of Ester's struggle, as well as her own, mirroring her failing attempts of integrating into the Jewish community which keeps rejecting her as a non-Jew. To defend the two women, Helen points out that the way the dominant culture portrays them might not be accurate: "No one ever mentions that they might have been something other than weak-hearted – that they might in fact have disbelieved the worldview that required their murder" (419). In defiance of the Cultural Imperialistic perspective, Helen presents the two women as heroes who stood up against powerlessness since they refused to allow the oppressive power to take away their lives. She therefore brings attention to their voices, which, according to her, were silenced wrongfully.

Mirroring of the Masada narrative can be found in the 17th century storyline; Ester and Rivka both come close to death during the plague epidemic and later during the forced christening. In the end, they come out of the tumult alive and leave London, the city of powerlessness, taking a journey up the river Thames. Their survival can therefore be linked to the two women on Masada, who also "stayed alive and [...] told the story" (419). This

puts Helen into the role of the historian to whom the story was told, and it is up to her to protect Ester's words from disappearing in history. In other words, Helen virtually projects her own desire to emancipate herself into Ester, who becomes a mediator of her self-realization.

3.1.4 Violence

Over the centuries which lie between Ester and Helen, the fight against discrimination has intensified considerably¹⁷. It is only logical that the first form of abusive behaviour which was tackled was violence as the most visible face of oppression. This progress is reflected in the fundamental differences that exist between Ester's and Helen's storylines. While in Ester's life there are unmistakable occurrences of violence even in its physical form, Helen is never attacked in such a way, with all the assaults on her taking more of a symbolic form.

One of the cruellest manifestations of violence that is inflicted on Ester is the forced christening. The person to blame for this deplorable incident is one of the supporting characters, Esteban Bescós, who turns the post-plague wrath of a few Londoners¹⁸ against Ester and Rivka and thus initiates the act of violence. His motivation for such an act may be tracked back to an experience when his marriage proposal was rejected due to his lack of education. It is likely that in his eyes Ester's academic talent greatly accentuates his own shortcomings and reminds him of his failure. He is therefore urged to degrade Ester in order to alleviate his feeling of inferiority and restore his self-confidence, which Ester

¹⁷ See chapter 2.3 of the Theoretical Part

¹⁸ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

unconsciously jeopardizes. To do this as effectively as possible, Bescós aims at Ester's Jewishness, which is an easy target in the context of the 17th century anti-semitic atmosphere¹⁹. The fact that he himself does not assault Ester physically and even runs away as Ester and Rivka are being dragged to the church may be explained by his fear that Ester would discover his self-consciousness and thus mar his aim of attaining superiority over her.

In Helen's story, there appears a character who is a clear counterpart of Bescós. During her time in the kibbutz, Helen meets Muriel, a Jewish girl who becomes her bunkmate and who expresses her contempt for Helen from the first moment they meet:

Most of the female soldiers had responded with indifference to the information that Helen wasn't Jewish; some even nodded appreciation. Only Muriel had looked as though the fact were a violation, and upon learning Helen was her bunkmate, swore audibly. Seated on her mattress, Muriel spilled water from her canteen, swinging her legs in silence as drops rained down on Helen's bed bellow. (149).

Muriel attempts to establish dominance over Helen not only by claiming the top bunk granting her a higher position even in the physical sense, but also by allowing the water to drip down on Helen's bed, which seems accidental and thus showcases not Muriel's active aggression but rather her disinterest in Helen's wellbeing. This form of abuse is much more

¹⁹ See chapter 2.2 of the Theoretical Part

effective and safer than if she were to assault Helen directly, which would most likely result in her being viewed as a deplorable oppressor.

The motif of water as a symbol of oppression is analogical to Ester's story. In fact, the amount and form in which water appears in the two cases is indicative of the change which oppression has gone through between the 17th and the 20th centuries. In Ester's case violence is oftentimes physical and thus much more visible and noticeably cruel. Correspondingly, the water which appears in her story as a symbol of oppression comes in large quantities, namely water currents, which are on many occasions so strong that they endanger Ester's very life as it was analysed in previous chapters. In contrast, the water in Helen's storyline has the form of mere drops which wet her bed. This reflects the concealed nature of violence which is proper to the modern era and which makes the identification of oppression more arduous.

As far as Muriel is concerned, the question remains of why she feels the urge to demean Helen in the first place. Quite early on, Helen discovers, that "[Muriel] resented Dror and was in love with him" (151). Since Helen is not Jewish, her volunteer work in the Jewish kibbutz is arguably more admirable than that of Muriel, whose abusive tendencies may thus be explained as a result of jealousy associated with romantic rivalry.

When Dror chooses Helen, Muriel copes with her humiliation by attempting to turn others against Helen, drawing attention to her non-Jewishness as an element, which excludes her from the group in the kibbutz, reflecting thus Bescós' incitement to the forced christening. This correspondence in the two storylines signals that fear of humiliation which comes with rejection by a loved one can cause individuals to oppress under any circumstances and at any given time, the 17th or the 20th century. The key difference however

is in the victims' reaction to the abuse. While Ester does not allow Bescós' violence to sway her away from her desired pursuits, Helen, on the other hand is strongly influenced by her bully. She internalizes Muriel's snide remarks about her non-Jewishness and begins to believe that Dror would give priority to his religion and nation over her, even though this is not the case²⁰. This contrast might be explained by the nature of Muriel's acts of violence. Since it is disguised and difficult to identify, it gives rise to Helen's dread of confinement, as she does not know when and where it might strike her. Therefore, Helen's acts no longer reflect her true desires but rather the constant threat of mistreatment, which lingers in her mind ever since she encountered Muriel and forces her to imprison herself in study which does not bring her the joy it brings to Ester.

3.2 Ester and Helen from the Perspective of a Counterspace

The last chapter of the Practical Part will be devoted to the sources of personal growth of both Ester and Helen. In the Theoretical Part it was explained that the concept of a counterspace refers to environments and activities which facilitate self-enhancement in oppressed individuals.²¹ As it has already been suggested before, Ester is clearly empowered by study and philosophy. When she begins to scribe for the rabbi, there is a precise moment described when she feels as though "something kindled in her" (81). The verb "kindle", which is inherently associated with fire, evokes a sudden wave of energy, which can be interpreted as the formation of the counterspace: "The writing table seemed abruptly to be a vast expanse – a plateau where some small remaining freedom might be possible. [...] She

²⁰ See chapter 3.1.1 of the Practical Part

²¹ See chapter 2.4.2 of the Theoretical Part

felt her body rush with quick heat, as though every bit of her, every plain and hidden part, were waking” (81).

Thanks to this source of life energy, Ester comes to understand that she is not determined by her suffering but by her desire to create which can flourish under any circumstances, just like a comet, which “didn’t signify divine displeasure, nor did it have anything to say of London’s sin; the comet’s light existed for the mere purpose of shining” (471).

At first glance, Helen’s counterspace also seems to be her study, but the previous chapters revealed that her occupation is not a source of personal motivation but rather a specific form of exploitation which she inflicts on herself²². However, there still seems to be an aspect of study that brings her profound joy. The discovery that the author of the manuscripts is a woman is essential as it makes Helen feel associated with Ester’s destiny. Helen’s feelings at the moment of this discovery are described with the following words:

She set aback in her chair. And was startled by an unfamiliar sensation in her chest: the flurry of her own heart, like something long silent abruptly waking to argue its innocence (66).

Here, Helen feels a sudden flush of intense positive emotions, just like Ester did. Therefore, Helen’s counterspace is arguably her connection to Ester enabled by the study. In fact, Helen seems to be pinning her hopes on Ester, as if the 17th century woman could be

²² See chapter 3.1.1 of the Practical Part

the one to escape confinement when she herself failed to do so, as is illustrated by the following passage, which depicts Helen's thoughts soon before her death:

She'd spent the last of her energies trying to redeem Ester Velasquez's fate – believing fervently in some hidden truth that would upend the story of another woman's life. But all the while, it seemed, she'd failed to look for the same in her own (452).

The introspection clearly suggests that Helen feels to have missed her opportunity of finding spiritual fulfilment, which she seeks only in hindsight, towards the end of her life, through Ester. This notion is also reflected in the final letter which she writes to Dror, in order to find peace with herself before death. Even though she knows that Dror is long dead and that the letter will not be received by anyone, she writes: "There is a hole where my heart once was. In its place, your history" (559). By this powerful quote Helen admits to herself that she has devoted her entire life to coming as close to becoming Jewish as possible, only to make herself feel equal to Dror, without considering her own genuine desires. It is her connection to Ester that makes her realize that although she has been feeling independent, she has never really emancipated herself in the proper sense of the word, since she let her aspirations be defined by others and their threats of victimization. Ester's legacy then serves to her as an example of what a true defeat of oppression looks like, highlighting the saddening truth of Helen's failure in this sense. To compensate for this personal defeat, Helen lends her own voice to Ester by bringing attention to her remarkable accomplishments and prevents the 17th century philosopher from being forgotten. Therefore, towards the end

of her life, she discovers her own value in the discovery of Ester's destiny, which thus virtually becomes her own.

4 Conclusion

When the translator Zora Freiová was contemplating the title of the novel during the translation process, she encountered the issue of polysemy of the English word *weight*. Two possible translations suggested themselves – *váha* and *tíha*, the former with neutral to positive and the latter with rather negative connotations. Having been consulted, the author herself opted for the first alternative, emphasizing not the suffering of her characters but the momentousness of their work. With the unfortunate destiny of Shakespeare's imaginary sister in mind, I was surprised by the choice, since during my first reading of *The Weight of Ink*, I focused mainly on the burden of Ester's hardships which stood between her and her philosophy. The long progression of writing this thesis that made me realize that it is through the connection of the two protagonists that I can understand the positive impact of ink, which the author wished to stress.

This is why I endeavoured to analyse the parallels between Ester's and Helen's personal restraint. I began my analysis by briefly presenting the author, before I introduced the life stories of her two characters under question which I connected to relevant historical and religious context. This demonstrated that both the protagonists face hardships which are typical for the era in which their storyline is set. Then, I proceeded to introduce psychological approaches which were chosen for the analysis of the text.

For the Practical Part, I selected the following method: for each of the characters I identified how they are hindered from emancipation according to the pre-defined psychological categorization, relating their individual experiences of confinement to the respective faces of oppression. Through this procedure I confirmed that regardless of the significant differences in Ester's and Helen's destinies, there are clear analogies between

their inability to attain fulfilment. Thanks to the comparison of the two characters I reached the conclusion that in Ester's case, her restraint is more apparent and easier to identify since it oftentimes manifests itself as direct undisguised verbal affronts or even as physical violence. In Helen's case, on the other hand, the coercive tendencies of the characters around her were proved to be much more surreptitious in the context of public denunciation of oppression, which is proper to the 20th century.

While ruminating over the role that Judaism plays in the confinement of the protagonists, I arrived to the following inference: In both storylines, tyrannizers of Ester and Helen tend to abuse the religion either as a direct tool of oppression, or as justification of their abusive behaviour. This happens *irrespective* of the actual faith of the victims, since one of them is oppressed for being Jewish and the other one is targeted for not being of Jewish origin. Therefore, logically, the blame cannot lie with the religion itself but with the individuals who misinterpret and abuse it. In both the eras, the 17th and the 20st centuries, Judaism seems to be misused alarmingly often by different supporting characters who mistreat Ester and Helen for various, often strikingly dissimilar reasons. While the Jewish authorities, including the rabbi, use religious traditions to contain Ester as a potential jeopardizer of the existing conception of gender roles, Ian Easton abuses Judaism against Helen simply to retain his existing comfort. Bescós and Muriel both become tyrants in order to hide their fear of humiliation, but the forms of their attacks differ in apparentness and intensity, which allows Kadish to reflect in these two characters the forms of restraint proper to the two eras – Bescós' acts are overtly oppressive, as was much of the general ethos of the 17th century, while Muriel abuses Helen surreptitiously, thus intruding into Helen's mind and altering her perception of self and others.

The connecting element between the various cases of oppression seems to be fear which creates an essential contrast, influencing Ester's oppressors on the one side, and Helen on the other. In the storyline of the 17th century Jewess, it is her non-conformity that scares the supporting characters. As a result, they either attempt to hinder her emancipative pursuits or, in case of John, run away from her. Because their acts are overt and the abuse which they inflict on Ester is identifiable, she manages to assert herself against it and continue her struggle for equality.

On the contrary, in the modern-day storyline, it is Helen who is most afflicted by fear. Even though there are cases of some characters, such as Muriel or Ian Easton, who behave oppressively towards her, the degree to which they constrict her is never as drastic as in Ester's case. The major hindrance that prevents her from attaining self-fulfilment is therefore not necessarily produced by others, but rather by herself and her own apprehension of being constricted. Driven by her fear, Helen spends her life trying to avoid potential confinement instead of striving for actual fulfilment. As the first chapter of the Practical Part showed, her meticulous study of Jewish history is not a realization of her dream, but an attempt to assert her value by proving that she knows enough about the religion and nation to escape potential abuse of her non-Jewishness which she expected from Dror. Therefore, by juxtaposing the two destinies in such a way, Kadish conveys a cautionary message that the progress in eradicating oppression, though it is of course beneficial, may lead to a new form of internalization, where the afflicted individuals confine themselves by fearing the modern surreptitious manifestations of abuse, which might hit the victims unexpectedly.

By further comparing and contrasting the protagonists' strategies of self-realization, I discovered the essential role which study and creative work play in the novel. They were

proven to be giving rise to two distinct forms of counterspaces, where the one promotes self-enhancement directly, allowing Ester to become fulfilled, and the other vicariously, through Ester, alerting Helen to the internalized fear, which has been restraining her. It might seem from this conclusion that Ester's achievement is of greater importance, but it should not be overlooked that without Helen, Ester would remain unknown, suffering effectively the same fate as Shakespeare's hypothetical sister. It may therefore be said that it is not only Ester's ink that carries the metaphorical weight, but also Helen's, melding the two women into an almost single body where one part cannot exist successfully without the other – Helen attaining fulfilment through Ester, and Ester obtaining a voice thanks to Helen.

As Kadish herself puts it, *The Weight of Ink* is to serve as a material testimony of the human capacity to “grow through pavement” (Kadish) and meet their aspirations in spite of difficulties. From the perspective of this thesis, the pavement is an illustration of both the adverse circumstances that Ester lives in, and Helen's self-incarceration in her fear of possible abuse. With the weight of their ink, the two characters then metaphorically break this pavement, one for the other, bringing attention to historical and modern-day manifestations of oppression in a contrastive fashion. Woolf's pessimistic metaphor is then challenged but still not forgotten, reminding the readers of all those whose ink has not made an imprint across centuries.

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