



# *Athens Journal of Philology*

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## **Front Pages**

*GUNASEGARAN KARUPPANNAN, JUNAIDASANUDIN &  
FAZAL MOHAMED MOHAMED SULTAN*

**[The Impact of the Linus Literacy Programme on Reading Ability  
Skills in Malaysia](#)**

*NESSMA SALIM*

**[The Nostalgic Home in E. M. Forster's Novels](#)**

*SALLY MICHAEL HANNA*

**[The Black Aesthetic in Rita Dove's Playlist for the Apocalypse](#)**

*KRASIMIR KABAKČIEV*

**[After Verkuyl's Discovery Aspect is No Longer a Mystery, but  
Aspectology Needs a Reform Review Article:  
Henk Verkuyl, \*The Compositional Nature of Tense, Mood and  
Aspect\* \(Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 167\). Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 2022](#)**

# Athens Journal of Philology

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Volume 10, Issue 3, September 2023

Download the entire issue ([PDF](#))

## **Front Pages**

i-viii

### **The Impact of the Linus Literacy Programme on Reading Ability Skills in Malaysia**

195

*Gunasegaran Karuppannan, JunaidaSanudin & Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan*

### **The Nostalgic Home in E. M. Forster's Novels**

211

*Nessma Salim*

### **The Black Aesthetic in Rita Dove's Playlist for the Apocalypse**

225

*Sally Michael Hanna*

### **After Verkuyl's Discovery Aspect is No Longer a Mystery, but Aspectology Needs a Reform Review Article: Henk Verkuyl, The Compositional Nature of Tense, Mood and Aspect (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 167). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022**

247

*Krasimir Kabakčiev*

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The current issue is the third of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Philology (AJP)*, published by the published by the [Languages & Linguistics Unit](#) and the [Literature Unit](#) of ATINER

Gregory T. Papanikos  
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- Submission of Paper: **10 June 2024**

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- **Dr. Stamos Metzidakis**, Head, [Literature Research Unit](#), ATINER & Emeritus Professor of French and Comparative Literature, Washington University in Saint Louis, USA.

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- Submission of Paper: **2 May 2024**

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## The Impact of the Linus Literacy Programme on Reading Ability Skills in Malaysia

By Gunasegaran Karuppanan<sup>\*</sup>, JunaidaSanudin<sup>±</sup> & Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan<sup>°</sup>

*This study was conducted to identify factors contributing to reading proficiency among primary school students who attended the Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) Programme in Malaysia. A total of 108 students were selected to participate in this study, which used a mixed method. The findings show no significant difference in the proficiency of reading aspects between students in terms of gender. However, the findings proved that students whose parents work in the government sector show better achievement than students from families where their parents working in the private sector. This study also found that students obtained a better command in reading during the post-test was higher than during the pre-test. A qualitative approach is applied to obtain desired data by using observation, interview and document review techniques. The study found that the LINUS teachers used various methods such as demonstrations, instructions, drills and fun learning during teaching sessions while incorporating learning aids; for instance, scan cards and reading kits help students recognise syllables and increase reading ability. Low-income parents, type of occupation, passive LINUS students and frequent absenteeism are among the constraints identified in this study.*

**Keywords:** education, LINUS programme, literacy, primary schools

### Introduction

The problem of literacy mastery among students is an issue that has not yet been fully addressed. Various programmes have been implemented to address the problem. The Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) Programme in Malaysia is one of the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) under the Ministry of Education (MoE), Malaysia. The LINUS Programme, which stands for literacy and numeracy screening, is a continuous step from the existing programme and has been planned more systematically to address students who have not mastered basic literacy skills. The programme is designed to ensure that students master the Malay language's basic literacy and numeracy skills in the first three years of schooling at the primary level.

Primary schools throughout Malaysia have implemented the LINUS Programme to ensure that children successfully master the basic skills of LINUS and prevent students from dropping out. Student outcomes can be improved from time to time with the LINUS Programme. Teachers need to help students who are weak in

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mastering literacy skills and master those skills before the end of Level One schooling. Mastery literacy skills will make students more productive and confident to participate in society and the local community.

Not being able to master reading skills by school children is taken seriously by the government, which targets a zero-illiteracy environment by year 2020 (Ministry of Education 2010a). Based on the MoE Report in 1993, 80,000 primary school students in Malaysia facing problems in basic proficiency, namely read and write (Ministry of Education 2010b). According to Jamian (2016), the reading process is essential and should be mastered by all students from the early stage of schooling. Under the NKRA, the MoE intended to ensure that every student, after three years of primary school education, should master literacy in languages other than English, except for students with special needs (Wane Manogharan et al. 2018). Therefore, to improve students' ability in literacy learning of the Malay language, the MoE has made a significant shift by implementing LINUS Programme since 2010; a programme that identifies problems of dropouts among Year One to Year Three to master reading and writing skills. Following the implementation of this programme, the Malaysian Examinations Board has provided teachers and students modules that adhere to an integrated literacy approach. Among the elements found in the teaching and learning of the LINUS Programme is teaching students with entertaining activities such as singing, games, etc. Next, this study will examine the extent to which demographic factor is closely related to the reading aspects of the LINUS Programme among primary school students.

This study looks at the demographic point of view, namely gender, where the student lives with, the student's early education, the parents' income, and level of education. Chakravarthy (in Palaniappan 2009) proved that cultivating the habit of reading plays a crucial role in a family. Nurturing the habit and interest in reading has a very close relationship with the family lifestyle, the relationship between the child and the parents at home, and the family's socioeconomic status. Therefore, it is clear that cultivating the habit and interest in reading among children is a great responsibility for every parent. According to Koh (2006), illiterate students in Year One are more likely to experience problems throughout their schooling due to failure to read well will affect a child's mastery of skills in school. Thus, reading problems are not something to be taken lightly.

The MoE has formulated and implemented the LINUS Programme to ensure that Year Three students in National Schools (SK) can master literacy and numeracy from 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2010). Serious attention to the issue of failing literacy and numeracy is considered as it relates to the country's progress in the long run. The study of Muller and Murtagh (2002) found that a total of 877 million people in the world in 2000 did not master the basic skills of reading and writing. Meanwhile, the LINUS Report (2016) shows that a total of 4,200 Year One students participated in the LINUS Programme. Findings of the LINUS Literacy Screening Test 2 showed that 190 or 4.52% of the students involved with the LINUS Programme did not master Constructs 1-2, while 737 (17.55%) students failed to master Constructs 3-12. Meanwhile, out of a total of 4,326 Year Two students who

participated in the LINUS Programme, a total of 25 students or 0.58% did not master Constructs 1-2, and 22 or 5.18% students did not master Constructs 3-12.

Therefore, it is clear that there is a problem of reading proficiency among primary school students, namely in terms of the achievement of recognising letters, syllables, words and sentences. Accordingly, this study will identify the factors that affect the mastery of literacy, especially among students of the LINUS Programme. Therefore, the study was conducted based on the following objectives: to identify demographic factors that affect aspects of reading among primary school students that attended the LINUS Programme; to examine the teaching activities of teachers to students of the LINUS Programme, and to identify the constraints faced by the students in terms of reading ability.

The ability to read is a vital aspect of the process of applying knowledge. This view implies that reading activities coincide with human behaviour that will involve comprehension. Therefore, teachers involved in teaching, reading and learning activities need to ensure that both elements are taught in an integrated manner to students, especially students who follow the LINUS Programme. The researcher hopes that the MoE, State Education Department, District Education Office, principals, and researchers who teach the LINUS Programme will benefit from this study.

## Literature Review

### *Theories Underlying the Study*

The study was based on three theories: Vygotsky's Proximity Theory (Jacobs and Usher 2018, Knestrick 2012), Cognitive Development Theory (Blake and Pope 2008), and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (Paquette and Ryan 2007, Renn and Arnold 2003). Proximity Theory explains that the development of children's cognitive thinking results from extensive social interactions, which allows them to connect the basic knowledge with new acceptances. Children's social interactions and behaviours also develop in stages based on their development and growth process. Based on this theory, children normally will be influenced by their social world and their interaction with others is considered as significant influence that could improve their thinking ability. At the same time, children will obtain the skill of language from their parents, who will help them to master language. In the meantime, according to the Theory of Cognitive Development, the concept of Proximal Development Zone (ZPD) involves the following aspects:

- i. Children that have the opportunity to be actively involved among more mature and more adult members of society will become more skilled and always think of something in their cultural circle.
- ii. Children will be more easily involved in society's culture and respond to the environment by using the advantages of thinking, dialogue and language mastery.

Sigelman and Rider (2011), through Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Ecology, explained the aspects of human development and behaviour. The human social-ecological environment is based on how individuals interact and consists of five systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The microsystem is the system that has the most influence on the development of children. The system covers one's environment, such as around the house with parents and children or around the school, with teachers and friends. According to White and Coleman (2000), based on the philosophy of family ecology theory, schools and communities are the responsible parties in providing early childhood education.

### **Past Studies**

Literacy is an aspect related to one's culture and background. Children will acquire language knowledge and skills through their parents and others around them. Children will understand written material better in a language they know. In revealing a child's literacy based on family and community background, it depends on how the child involved is given a broader meaning about literacy (Gillen and Hall 2013). Thus, several studies examined the relationship of parents, academic level of parents, and other aspects of demographics with literacy ability among children. According to Hoff (2013), children from low economic status are those from families whose parents have low income and academic qualifications. Thus, such children will pose different level of language development than those from the middle-class family. Upon entering the school environment, the child will face problems during the language class and could obtain lower marks than middle-class children. On the other hand, Jumiya (2014) stressed that factors that influence students' achievement include the attitude of students and parents, self-identity, cultural differences, economic status, learning style, mother tongue and teachers-students relationship.

Several studies in Malaysia have examined the relationship between demographic factors and literacy proficiency among students. Among them is Ruslida's (2005) study, which involved 125 parents and 125 preschool children in five preschools, under the supervision of the MoE, in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. The study examined the involvement of parents in four aspects, namely providing guidance and material supports to their children, storytelling, interaction and spending reading time with their kids. The study found a significant relationship between parental involvement and the achievement of essential reading skills among preschool children.

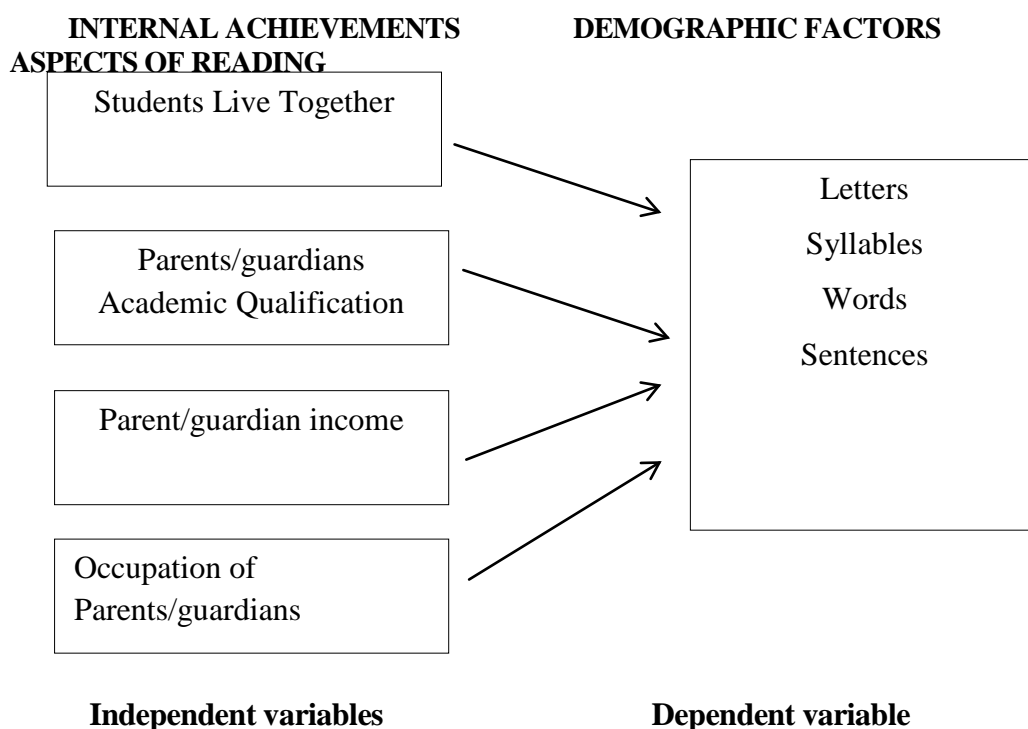
The study of Christopher et al. (2013) has explored the aetiology of individual differences in reading development from kindergarten to fourth grade by analysing data involving 487 pairs of twins in Colorado. Data from three reading measures and one spelling measure were used to study behavioural genetics regarding the aetiology of early reading development among twins. The longitude study found a genetic influence on individual differences from kindergarten to fourth grade. Lau's (2013) study has examined five characteristics of parental involvement that could

improve students' command and proficiency. The five characteristics are the roles of family, resilience, social supports, concrete supports, and attention. The study of Raban and Nolan (2006) showed that early reading practices and exposure at home would bring various advantages to children in mastering basic reading skills. A study conducted in Victoria, Australia, showed that parental involvement has started since their child was three years old. The results show that reading storybooks to children will help them improve language skills and inject a desire to learn and read. Chakravarthy (in Palaniappen 2009) proved that reading practices positively affect a child's reading habits.

A study by Hasnalee and Zulkifley (2011) found that demographic factors of students and teachers do not affect reading and comprehension skills among students. However, the skills and expertise level of teachers that responsible in conducting LINUS Programme will determine the readiness of students and the level of assistance given to the students will be able to improve students' literacy mastery. The results also show that the inability of teachers to identify children's problems at the time they first enter school will impact the learning process and would prevent children from gaining the full benefits (Achenbach 1991, Offord and Lipman 1996, Rimm-Kaufman et al. 2000).

### Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Framework of the Study*



Based on the findings of previous studies, the researcher found that several demographic characteristics have a relationship in terms of reading ability among students. Thus, the researcher concluded that the factors that influence the reading aspect of students are demographic factors such as early education of students, gender, socio-economic level of their family, place of residence and parental education level. Thus, Figure 1 is the study's conceptual framework that summarises the variables used by the researcher.

## **Methodology**

To collect the relevant data and meet the objectives outlined, the researcher used a hybrid approach, a quantitative approach followed by a qualitative method. Quantitative data was used to detect demographic factors on aspects of reading command among LINUS Programme students. The study used two types of research instruments: a questionnaire to collect information related to student demographics and achievement tests to measure student literacy. The achievement test that was used is the LINUS Screening Test. Inferential statistical analysis – t-test and ANOVA were applied to identify the effect of demographic factors on aspects of reading commands and determine the differences in the achievements, both at pre and post-test levels. In the meantime, qualitative data were obtained through the observation method by using parent-teacher interview instruments, teachers' teaching reflections and researcher field notes. Under the quantitative approach, the researcher selected 108 students, involving five primary schools in the urban zone of the Tawau district. The researcher only focused on LINUS Literacy Year Three students and selected them using the sampling method based on Krejcie and Morgan formula. In the meantime, the researcher also ensured that the study complied with legal provisions, including laws related to children, minors and students' fundamental rights. Therefore, every student and parent involved in the study have the right to know about the purpose of the study. Apart from providing adequate information and explanations, all respondents, including teachers, were protected from ethics and confidentiality, and were given assurance that information and responses shared will only be used for academic purposes.

## **Findings**

As described earlier, through this study, the researcher wished to identify the effect of demographic factors on aspects of reading proficiency among primary school students and the data were analysed using independent sample t-test and ANOVA. Meanwhile, the researcher had measured the differences between pre-test and post-test by using a matching t-test. Of 108 respondents, 65 or 60% are male students, and the balance is female students. In addition, 92.6% of students live with their parents, three or 2.8% of students stay with mothers while the remaining students with their guardians. In terms of education, a total of 51 or 47.2% respondents are students with early education in

government kindergartens, and the balance 57 or 52.8% are students with early education in private kindergartens.

Meanwhile, 103 or 95.4% of respondents are parents with SPM academic qualifications, only one or 0.9% of parents have a Diploma, and the remaining four or 3.7% obtained a Bachelor's Degree. In terms of income of parents and guardians of the students, a total of 70 or 64.8% of them earning between RM500 and RM2,000, 35 or 32.4% (RM2,001-RM4,000), and only 2.8% earning RM4,001 and above. Furthermore, the data obtained showed that 45 or 41.7% of the parents work in the government sector, 40 or 37% work in the private sector, while the remaining 23 or 9.8% are self-employed parents.

**Table 1.** *Differences in Terms of Post-Test Scores from a Gender Perspective*

Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Sig.
Male	64	4.98	0.125	0.93	0.65
Female	44	4.95	0.211		

Independent sample t-test results show that there is no significant difference in test scores in terms of gender ( $t = 0.93$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 1). This means that male and female post-test scores are the same.

**Table 2.** *Differences in Terms of Achievement from Respondents' Residence Perspective*

Residence	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.07	2	0.003	0.120	0.887
In groups	2.91	105	0.028		
Amount	2.92	107			

Meanwhile, one-way ANOVA test analysis shows that there is no difference in post-test scores according to the residence of the respondents ( $F = 0.120$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 2). This suggests that the post-test scores obtained were no different whether living with a parent, mother or guardian.

Based on Table 3, the independent sample t-test results show a significant difference in the post-test scores according to the early educational background obtained by the respondents, i.e. ( $t = 1.67$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This means that the post-test scores of public and private kindergarten students are different.

**Table 3.** *Differences in Terms of Post-Test Scores from Early Education Level of Respondents*

Post-test scores	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Sig.
Government Kindergarten	51	5.00	0.000	1.67	0.001
Private Kindergarten	57	4.95	0.225		

**Table 4.** Differences in Terms of Post-Test Scores from the Academic Level Perspective of Parents/Guardians

Academic level	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.008	2	0.004	0.14	0.87
In Groups	2.91	105	0.028		
Total	2.92	107			

Based on the description in Table 4, one-way ANOVA test analysis shows no difference in post-test scores according to the academics level of parents or guardians of students ( $F = 0.14$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). This situation illustrates that whether the parents have an SPM, Diploma or Bachelor’s Degree qualifications, the post-test scores are no different.

**Table 5.** Differences in Terms of Post-Test Scores from Income Perspective of Parents/Guardians

Income	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.29	2	0.146	5.86	0.004
In Groups	2.62	105	0.025		
Total	2.92	107			

On the other hand, one-way ANOVA test analysis shows that there is a difference in post-test scores in terms of income ( $F = 5.86$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) (Table 5). This indicates that post-test scores obtained are different in terms of the level of income of parents and guardians.

**Table 6.** Differences in Terms of Post-Test Scores from the Sector of Occupation Perspective of Parents/Guardians

Sector of occupation	Sum of squares	Df	Sum of mean	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.17	2	0.087	3.32	0.040
In Groups	2.74	105	0.026		
Total	2.91	107			

The results of one-way ANOVA test analysis shows that there are differences in post-test scores in term of the sector of occupation ( $F = 3.33$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 6). Indirectly the finding indicates that working parents, whether in the government, private sector or self-employed, the post-test scores obtained show a significant difference.

The researcher also tested the difference between the two mean dependent variables by selecting a sample to test the null hypothesis. The researcher studied the differences between achievement scores (reading command) before treatment (pre-test) and after treatment (post-test). The scores obtained for each test shown in Table 7. The finding shows that there is a significant difference between the achievement level during pre-test and post-test ( $t = 13.223$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and the post-test score was higher (mean = 4.97) than the pre-test level.



**Table 7.** Differences in the Achievement Level During Pre-Test and Post-Test of LINUS Programme

Test	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Sig.
Pre	108	4.35	0.480	-13.223	0.000
Post	108	4.97	0.165		

p<0.05.

### Teaching Activities of Reading Aspects of the LINUS Programme

Teachers have implemented various activities in teaching the reading aspect of the LINUS Programme, which contains ten constructs focused on in this study. The study's findings show that LINUS teachers have implemented several activities that help the mastery of the reading aspects of LINUS students. Among them are teaching using the syllable method, entertainment, scan cards and pictures.

- i. The syllable method is a method used by teachers in teaching the reading aspect of the LINUS Programme. Findings of the study show that this method is the choice of teachers in teaching and learning activities, especially for ten constructs in the aspect of reading.
- ii. *Didik hibur* is also an activity that is the choice of teachers to teach aspects of reading in this study. Entertainment activities involve singing, acting, elements of obsession and so on. Teachers were found to use singing techniques in teaching the reading aspect of the LINUS Programme.
- iii. Reading skills teaching activities for ten constructs were also implemented by teachers using pictures. Pupils are shown pictures and asked to read sentences and examine the information shown. The researchers' field notes further reinforce these findings. Teaching that uses pictures and scan cards will make students more involved in the learning process.
- iv. The teaching and learning of reading aspects of the LINUS Programme are also implemented using teachers' reading kits. The kit contains colourful reading cards to make it easier for students to identify syllables. In addition, this reading kit is equipped with coloured reading cards that can be used and applied repeatedly until students can master the aspect of reading.

### Constraints in Mastery of Reading Aspects of the LINUS Programme

Past studies have shown that the problem of illiterate students is still prevalent, and the occurrence is due to various factors (Chakravarthy, in Palaniappen 2009, Lau 2013, Raban and Nolan 2006). The findings of this study have identified several constraints that cause LINUS students to have problems in mastering aspects of reading, namely:

- i. Constraints related to parents' income: There is a significant relationship between parents' income and the level of mastery among the LINUS Programme students. Parents who have a high income or substantial financial resources can provide better learning facilities for their children.

- ii. Constraints related to the type of occupation of students' parents or guardians: The type of occupation will determine whether they have the conducive space and opportunity to assist their children to study or do homework at home. Parents working in the private sector or self-employed spend more time at the working or business place than those working in government sectors.
- iii. Constraints related to the level of education: Parents who have higher academic qualifications tend to monitor their children's learning progress closely. The finding shows that parents with a higher educational background, such as a degree or diploma holder, concern more on the educational development of their children.
- iv. Constraints related to students' capability: Students who have difficulty reading and writing skills, especially in Malay language, could not learn like regular students. Therefore, they need teachers' encouragement and parents' support to improve their skills and command.

## **Discussion and Implications**

The discussion and summary of the findings of this study justify that this research has been able to meet the objectives and answer the research questions and in addition, a description of the study's implications to justify the contribution of this study to education and research. Regarding one of the components related to the first research question, namely whether there is an effect of gender factors on reading by following the LINUS Programme, the results show no significant difference between male and female students. The findings of this study are slightly different from the study of Von Suchodoletz et al. (2013), who found that there were differences between male and female students in reading skills in Germany and Ireland. Regarding the effect of living together on reading, the findings also show no significant difference between students who live with their parents and students who live with their mothers or guardians. The findings of this study are slightly different from the findings of the study of Christopher et al. (2013). Christopher et al. had found differences between students living with their parent and those who are living with their mother or guardians. This is probably due to the cultural differences between Eastern and Western societies.

In terms of the academic level of parents on the aspect of reading, the results show that there is no significant difference between students and the academic qualifications of parents. The finding of this study differs from the view of Hoff (2013), who found that students in the United States whose parents had low academic qualifications had lower literacy proficiency than students whose parents had high academic qualifications. However, there is an effect of early education factors on students' skills. The researcher found a significant difference in post-test scores based on the type of early education of students. For example, post-test achievement scores of government kindergarten and private kindergarten pupils are different. The finding is in line with Muhammad et al. (2014), who stated that there are infrastructure differences between public educational institutions and private

educational institutions in Pakistan. The results of this study prove that different types of institutions influence the findings of the study. This is because each country has different policies on public institutions and private institutions.

Another component in the first research question is the effect of parents' employment factor. The finding shows a significant difference in post-test scores according to the type of parents' occupation. Post-test achievement scores of students whose parents are working in the government, private and those working on their own, is different from one to another. Parents that working as government offices has more time for their children and that enable them score better compared to other. This study found a difference in the level of literacy mastery based on the parents' occupation. Moreover, the findings of this study are in line with the writings of Raban and Nolan (2006) and Chakravarthy (in Palaniappen 2009), who had stated that parents leave a positive impact in cultivating their child's interest in reading. Parents who work in the government sector have more time at home than parents who work in the private sector. Regarding the effect of parental income factors on reading, this is also similar to Cooper's (2010) study, which stated that parental income affects the level of literacy mastery of students. According to Cooper (2010), students who come from high-income families have better literacy levels than students who come from low-income families.

The findings of the study show that the activities applied or carried out by the teachers are student-centred and using methods of learning-playing, such as puzzles and singing activities. Maddahiri et al. (2018) suggested that LINUS Programme teachers need to be more innovative in using teaching techniques appropriate to the ability level of respective students. Innovation in teaching techniques could engage students and assist them to master basic literacy skills better, and it supports opinion shared by Kyle et al. (2013), and Maszuraini and Hamedi (2015).

This study also shows that activities in the classroom trigger students' interest, but learning process only occurs in the classroom and does not continue at home. This is due to the limited time factor as parents may be too busy at work and spend lesser time with their children, especially in guiding or helping them to carry out reading activities at home. The finding is in line with the outcome shared by Sim et al. (2014), that the culture of reading together by parents or their guide since early age could help students to improve reading skills.

In terms of constraints to master the reading skills, the study found two factors that playing a significant role. For example, low-income parents not affordable enough to buy books or reading materials for their children or sending them for extra classes, and parents who are less educated, depend on the teachers and their school. On the other hand, parents with high level of education qualification are always give priority to enhance their children's academic development and achievements. This finding is similar to the study of Heath et al. (2014), who stated that parents with low economic and educational levels pay less attention to their child's literacy development. Constraints in the mastery of reading skills of the LINUS Programme are also due to student themselves as certain students are not active enough in the classroom, and do not want to engage in the learning activities actively. In the long run, this situation if not addressed effectively will affect the level of achievement of students.

## **Recommendation**

Almost all countries are aware of the importance of parents spending time with their children. Japan is a developed country that attaches great importance to the practice of parents spending time with their children. Therefore, Japan has implemented several policies, including giving working mothers long leave to take care of their children (Boling 2006, Steury 1993). The Malaysian government needs to take proactive measures as practised by Japan in ensuring that parents give adequate attention. MoEs need to be more sensitive to students who are less literate and come from low economic status. They need to be given appropriate assistance, such as giving reading materials to the student. The LINUS Programme can also be implemented based on various approaches that are appropriate according to students' needs. Teachers need to provide early exposure to the concept of printed materials, i.e., the introduction of literacy before teaching reading skills. Parents should also be encouraged to attend parenting courses, primarily developing their children's minds and literacy improvement. Studies have identified several important factors that influence the literacy mastery of LINUS students. Therefore, this research has been able to identify the demographic impact on literacy mastery, particularly reading skills. However, there is still room and opportunity to add value to literacy-related research. The added value can provide a more accurate picture of all the crucial things in the teaching and learning literacy among LINUS students in Malaysia.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study are in line with the views put forward by Shapiro and Waters (2005), Sagarra and Alba (2006), and Atay and Ozbulgan (2007), who found that the use of keywords can produce significant learning effects. Atkinson (1995) once emphasised that the keyword method is the most effective method to improve memory among the many vocabularies learning strategies. Findings show that teachers apply student-centred teaching activities by using demonstration methods, giving instructions, drills and entertaining learners such as puzzles and singing. The innovation of LINUS Programme teachers in teaching techniques can attract students and help them master literacy skills even better.

Learning aids such as scan cards and kid reading used by LINUS teachers can help LINUS students recognise syllables and read. The availability of learning aids and entertainment methods combined in teaching can attract students' interest. Students who are usually passive will eventually also participate in learning in this activity. Classroom activities such as group learning also play a role in arousing the interest of LINUS Programme students to learn. The study shows that teachers' role during teaching-learning sessions in the school and children-parents' interactions could enhance vocabulary and language mastery among students. Parents' reading practices with their children from an early age will improve their children's reading skills (Sim et al. 2014), thus being able to address literacy issues that concern many

parties, including the students themselves, parents, schools, communities, and educational authorities.

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## The Nostalgic Home in E. M. Forster's Novels

By Nessma Salim\*

*Edward Morgan Forster wrote 6 novels, all of which revolve around the concept of home in relation to the representation of time and its impact on human soul and spirit. Homes of Forster are created by people and their emotions; hence they are very effective in their lives. In his *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster confirms that the art of fiction depends on facets like characters, plots, patterns, time, and places. This paper handles the representation of homes and the impact of time on these homes in E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *A Room With A View* and *Howard's End*. In these novels Forster uses a recurrent theme; that is the impact of time on places and people. As *Angels Fear to Tread* echoes Alexander Pope's line in his *An Essay on Criticism*: "for fools rush in where angels fear to tread", the novel deals with concepts like national character, connection across social differences, the passage of time and its impact on places and houses. In *A Room with A View*, Forster contrasts Florence, Italy and Windy Corner, England, showing their influence on the development of Lucy, the heroine. Lucy is torn between two different lives. She misses the feeling of home, warmth and domesticity. She struggles throughout the whole novel to embrace love, security, and belonging. Home as a concept is an evasive axis in Forster's *Howard's End*. The novel is set in the Victorian era where all houses were rebuilt, reconstructed and replaced. There was a demanding rebuilding initiative across Britain, especially in London. That's why houses and places were obviously an entity for people's emotional values. In *Howard's End*, the Schlegels are evicted from Wickham place, and this leads to their dichotomy. The concepts of places, dwelling, passing of time, and nostalgia, give an opportunity for readers to observe the importance of home in modern life. In Forster's novels, homes are experienced on many levels: homes as places people have already visited and lived in; homes as places people imagined through pictures or dreams; and homes that are never visited or even imagined by dwellers. As John Edward Hardy states: "buildings, and the design of them, the architectural character of civilization, would seem to be in Forster's mind fundamentally related to its character of manners and morals", it would be significant to have a deeper look into the concept of home, time and nostalgia in relation to modern man.*

**Keywords:** *houses, homes, Forster's novels, passage of time, nostalgia and modernity*

Edward Morgan Forster, born in 1879, wrote six novels, all of which revolve around the concept of home in relation to the passage of time, and human psychological development. Homes in Forster's novels are created and shaped by the people who live in them and their emotions. In *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster confirms that the art of fiction depends on characters, plot, pattern, time, and places. In his novels *Where Angels Fear to Tread* 1905, *A Room with a View*

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1908, and *Howards End* 1910, Forster uses the recurrent theme of the passage of time and its effect on homes, and nostalgia. This paper examines the recurring concepts of home portrayed and presented in E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* 1905, *A Room with a View* 1908, and *Howards End* 1910. It raises the question whether a home is a fixed place, building, or a changeable state of being peaceful in any place in the world. Home in Forster's novels is a flexible concept associated with no definite place or country. Characters in the novels feel peaceful in other countries or places different from their homelands since home is presented as the environment in which a person feels comfortable, safe and peaceful, and is not necessarily a birthplace of a motherland.

*Where Angels Fear to Tread* echoes Alexander Pope's line in *An Essay on Criticism*: "for fools rush in where angels fear to tread". Split between England and Italy, the novel deals with concepts like national character, connection across social differences, and the passage of time with its influence on homes. In *A Room with a View*, Forster contrasts Florence, Italy, and Windy Corner, England, showing their influence on the development of Lucy, the main character. Lucy is torn between two different lives. She misses the feeling of home and warmth. She struggles throughout the whole novel to grasp love, security and belonging. Home as a concept is an evasive aspect in the novel. In *Howards End*, Forster puts the novel in the Victorian era where all houses were rebuilt and replaced. A demanding rebuilding initiative across Britain started, especially in London. This fact explains the reason that houses and places are obviously an entity for intimate, emotional values of people and souls living inside. In *Howards End*, the Schlegels are evicted from Wickham place, and this leads to their dichotomy. The concepts of home, nostalgia and the passage of time give the reader an opportunity to observe the importance of home in modern life.

In Forster's novels, houses are experienced and perceived on many levels: houses as places people have already visited and lived in; and houses as places people have imagined through pictures and dreams; and houses that are never visited or even imagined by dwellers. As Avtar Singh states, "buildings, and the design of them, the architectural character of civilization, would seem to be in Forster's mind fundamentally related to its character of manners and morals" (147). It would be significant to have a deeper insight into the concepts of homes and their relation to the passing of time in E.M. Forster's novels.

*Where Angels Fear to Tread* 1905 is Forster's first novel. It unfolds the mystery of Edwardian England through a fake love affair of Lilia, representing England, and Gino, representing Italy. The novel creates a unique multi-cultural society through juxtaposing both characters; Lilia and Gino. Lilia escapes the Edwardian English life through marrying the inferior Italian Gino. Split between England and Italy, the novel deals with the theme of social contradictions; as Lilia lives in two worlds: the English world of Sawston, and the Italian world of Monteriano. Out of this theme of social contradictions, emerges the theme of the search for home. Home in the novel is the symbol of belonging and identity. Sawston is the home of the traditional middle class English Herriton family. It is represented in the novel as the world of repression, conventions and duties.

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the word "house" is mentioned fifty six times and the word "home" is mentioned twenty one times. House as a concept is an essential symbol in E.M. Forster's works as he tells the story of the human desire to live, connect and melt with the universe and other human beings. In the novel, places and homes are significant in creating and symbolizing various opportunities of connection. Places, houses and homes represent the inner struggle of each character to develop reconciliation with society and the outer world; it is the concrete bond that connects characters' inner emotions to the external world. Places and houses are the central symbols of people's inner conflict. Forster always uses locations and places to develop the hidden sides of characters. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, readers perceive the duality of place. In actual life, Italy is a geographical entity, an actual part of Europe; it is a cultural touristic place, while in the novel Italy is more than a tourist destination. For Herriton and Caroline Abbot, Italy is a place where their journey of self-awareness starts and develops. Italy in the novel is presented as a transformative place of identity.

Italy for Lilia is the escape from the traditional life of rules, codes, and conditions. Forster portrays Italy as a dream place for Lilia, a home of happiness and love; a homeland to which Lilia feels nostalgic. It is the place where she finds a more natural and romantic life: "Lilia gave up her house, sold half her furniture left the other half and Irma with Mrs. Herriton, and had now departed, amid universal approval, for a change of scene" (6). The house that Lilia sold is the symbol of her wish to let go and forsake her life in England, aspiring for a better lively life in Italy. For the first time in her life, she finds a place; a home, where she can do crazy and untraditional things. Italy in fact is the place Lilia feels nostalgic for. Lilia falls madly in love with a young Italian man, Gino Carella. The fact that Lilia meets her lover in Italy enhances Forster's portrayal of the Italian hero as a lively and romantic character.

Gino is a natural man, full of life. When Lilia falls in love with Gino, Mrs. Herriton, the symbol of the traditional English woman sends her son Philip to stop this marriage of Lilia and Gino. However, Philip cannot stop this marriage as the wedding has already taken place before his arrival. Lilia dies in childbirth and now Forster turns to continue his portrayal of Italy as a world of happiness and life versus England, the place of conventions and traditions. After the death of Lilia, Philip and Caroline return to Sawston, but with different spirits and mentalities. Philip is in love with Caroline, who is in love with the Italian Gino. Forster moves between Italy and England in a cycle of departures and reunions echoing the cycle of human life. Gino's home in Italy is the symbol of intimacy, love and reunion. Caroline moves to Gino's home to save Lilia's baby from that savage Italian father; Gino. Forster portrays Caroline's change of mind and heart as a symbol of the whole setting of the novel. Gino's home is ironically the place where she encounters true love:

She turned away her head when Gino lifted the son to his lips. This was something too remote from the prettiness of the nursery. The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature; in no ordinary love scene could he ever be so great. For a wonderful physical tie binds the parents to the children; and—by some sad, strange irony—it does not bind us children to our parents (81).

Forster sheds light on this scene, stressing this moment of reunion, intimacy as the major motif of life in general. Kissing his child passionately, Gino changes the perspective of Caroline to the whole world. The English woman who comes to Italy to rescue the little baby is now entrapped in the love of the claimed savage father. In his book *A Companion to E.M. Forster, Volume 2*, Sarker (2007) says "in the novel, Lilia, actually, and Philip and Miss Caroline Abbot, imaginatively, enter into the world of Gino, an instance of cultural conflict between England and Italy" (402). The conflict between England and Italy is a conflict between a world of conventions and another of freedom.

Forster portrays Italy as a home of purgation and reconciliation. The scene of the baby bath may be viewed as a baptism. The bathing of the baby stands for the cleansing and renewal of adults who are purified, and restored once more to the world of love: "Miss Abbott reverently averting her eyes—both of them had parents whom they did not love so very much" (81). In "may I help you to wash him?" Sarker (2007) says "on the one hand, Philip, Harriet and Miss Abbot, are given to the conventional morality that demands conformity to the English tradition of rationality predominating over emotion, of uniformity and discipline; and on the other hand, Gino, the Italian, akin to Nature, is emotional and unconventional" (403). Gino's natural love for his child is the engine that convinces Caroline of the cycle of regeneration. This regeneration is found in Gino's home, the place where the baby, as the symbol of innocence rests, in a place that is womb-like.

The tragic scene of the death of the unnamed baby, after being kidnapped by Harriet, symbolizes the evil and destruction that may result when "fools rush in where angels fear to tread", Stape (1956) confirms that:

*Where Angels Fear to Tread* also introduces Forster's characteristic theme of a conflict between two cultures. Forster believes that place shapes characters. Here it is Italy versus England. England, as epitomized by Mrs. Herriton and even more by the next generation in the person of her daughter Mrs. Herriton and depicted as sexually repressed, emotionally sterile, and impotent in personal relations. Philip, the self-conscious, disengaged man who has difficulty feeling and suffers from a kind of anomie, introduces a new character into English fiction. By contrast, Italy retains passion, poetry, sexuality and thus offers the possibility of intimacy and perfect relationship. Gino represents an older tradition of instinctive life that survives in spite of civilization's conventions and restraints. Certainly Caroline and Philip are changed by their days at Monteriano. The passions of Lilia, Gino and finally Caroline overwhelm the traditions that would restrain them. The novel shows that feelings and passions are the essences of being alive (379).

According to Stape (1956), the importance of E.M. Forster's places and homes lie in their relation to the psychology of his characters. Places and homes in themselves have no significance if they are stripped of characters and impressions. Forster's Characters are categories that represent human passions and feelings. Nostalgia and homesickness are not the literal concepts of craving or longing for a location; it is however a longing for feelings. These feelings may be feelings of security, love, and passions. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, each character represents one of the human feelings: Mrs. Herriton represents the conventional, aristocratic and heartless lady. She condemns people and things from her angle of

morality. Sending Philip to Italy for the purpose of breaking the relationship between Mrs. Herriton attributes boredom and melancholy to residence in England as:

Lilia's sister in law, Harriet Herriton, perhaps Forster's cruelest and most hilarious caricature of suburban Englishness, kidnaps Lilia's and Gino's son; later in a carriage crash, the baby is killed. Forster's rendering of Harriet as an English harridan presents his critique of English normality at its most harsh: although she bears primary culpability for the death, she denies any guilt, returning quickly to her old self (Bradshaw 2007, p. 50).

Forster depicts nostalgia for love, emotions and passion through the Sawston group in Italy. Singh states that Forster

examines, ironically of course, maternal affection of Lilia and Mrs. Herriton, the spiritual love of Caroline Abbott, sexual love of Lilia and Gino, paternal love of Gino for his child, the near absence of love in Philip, and the perversion of love in Harriet. Indeed the whole quest of the Sawston group in Italy, though they are unaware of it until it is over, is for the love which the ugliness of middle-class suburban life in England had denied them. Harriet fails utterly being too long confirmed in Sawston's sterile hardness of heart. Philip and Caroline, perhaps unhappily for them, are tied to both worlds (58).

Lilia, the English woman, follows her heart in loving and marrying Gino, as a quest for passion; ironically, her feeling of nostalgia is for another country, another homeland, she searches for love in Italy. She loves Gino as a quest for passion, love and life. However, unfortunately, her love story ends up unhappily. In the novel, Monteriano overcomes Sawston, but for a short period of time. England, as a place is depicted as a boring country since "no fruitful marriages are found there. Philip is a bachelor and his sister will remain a spinster...Even Lilia has to go to Italy to have her child" (Singh, 58). In describing the child's spiritual position in both places, Sawston is portrayed as a repulsive country for the little Irma as "Sawston, her own home, was within easy reach of London, and they were not late for tea. Tea was in the dining-room, with an egg for Irma, to keep up the child's spirit (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 3).

Deciding to give birth to her son of Gino in Italy, is an attempt of escaping from England, the place of hypocrisy; Lilia plans to deliver her baby in Italy in search for love, and passion. She was creating her homeland. She tries to seed her baby in a land of love. Caroline, the Edwardian English heroine, unexpectedly changes her views of England and Italy after the death of Lilia. Miss Abbott is now responsible for the child of Lilia and Gino. She has to make the decision either of taking the child to England or keeping it with his father in Italy. She decides not to separate a father and a child. This decision shows an emotional and spiritual development in her character. Doing this, Forster wants to confirm that "Sawston is harsh, ungracious and ugly; it falls like a lump from the tongue. Monteriano is greatly, musical and light" (Singh 1996, p. 58).

After their marriage Lilia asked Gino to buy her a brick house in Italy:

This house is bigger than it looks, for it slides for two storeys down the hill behind, and the wooden door, which is always locked, really leads into the attic. The knowing person prefers to follow the precipitous mule-track round the turn of the mud wall till he can take the edifice in the rear. Then—being now on a level with the cellars—he lifts up his head and shouts. If his voice sounds like something light—a letter, for example, or some vegetables, or a bunch of flowers—a basket is let out of the first-floor windows by a string, into which he puts his burdens and departs. But if he sounds like something heavy, such as a log of wood, or a piece of meat, or a visitor, he is interrogated, and then bidden or forbidden to ascend. (Forster 1975, p. 23)

Forster portrays Italy as a homeland of romance, pleasure and peace of mind. Gino's house is a symbol of Italy in the novel. Lilia's residence in Gino's house is an attempt of escaping her traditional life in Sawston, England. However, Forster does not portray Italy as the perfect place on earth; it is still a place with its flaws. All characters that visit Italy change their personalities; "an instance of cultural conflict between England and Italy, Forster has shown us in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* through a minor bickering between Lilia and Gino where the narrator tells us about the couple... On the one hand, Philip, Harriet and Miss Abbott are given to the conventional morality that demands conformity to the English tradition of nationality predominating over emotion, of uniformity and discipline; and on the other hand, Gino, the Italian, is 'a kin to nature' is emotional and unconventional" (Sarker 2007, pp. 403-404).

Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* uncovers the nature of the Edwardian period through characters, symbols and decisions. Characters yearn for a world of their own creation; the English characters of the novel ironically escape their native land in search for happiness in the Italian world. Forster creates his characters from different socio-cultural segments of society in an attempt to give his audience a deeper insight into the human psyche.

Lilia, the heroine of the novel, has different identities. She is a wife of an English man; Charles, a mother to two babies, and a lover of an Italian man at the same time. Her identity is a mixture of a typical English wife, and a romantic lively beloved. Lilia feels nostalgic for a world of freedom. For her, Italy is the homeland where she loves Gino, marries him and delivers his baby. Italy is the place where she achieves her dreams. Lilia tries to be an independent female in an Edwardian society, and when she fails, she resorts to Italy. Lilia's residence in Italy is a regenerative attempt for her recovery. In his book *The Novels of E.M. Forster*, Avtar Singh states that "in the early novels of the pattern is to associate values with certain places. Sawston in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Longest Journey* represents the repressive and philistine middle class, quintessentially expressed in the English public school, whose key characteristics are dogged industry, respectability and narrow snobbery" (121). Singh believes that Foster establishes a connection between characters' psychological development and places through emotions stirred in characters. Creating this connection, Forster confirms the importance of places, represented in homes in his novels.

In Forster's novel *A Room with a View* 1908, places and homes are significant. Forster, like other novelists, shows significant places in his own private lives and cultures through symbols, characterization and motifs. In his book *The Role of*

*Place in Literature*, Lutwack (1984) argues that "places lend themselves readily to symbolical extension because there is so little that is inherently affective in their physical properties. Spatial dimensions and climactic conditions, for example, do not in themselves stimulate a constant emotional response; rather the qualities of places are determined by the subjective responses of people according to their cultural heritage, sex, occupation, and personal predicament" (35). E.M. Forster is one of the novelists that utilize the effects of places and houses in his novels to convey his themes. As for his novel *A Room with a View*, Forster indicates that places themselves are not hated or loved except when viewed and associated with people's feelings and emotional development. Forster claims that people are strongly with or against a place only through the emotions they develop towards this place. According to Dowling (1985),

the first book of *A Room with a View*, the first seven chapters set in Italy, were written after he had published two other novels, where Angels Fear to Tread and The Longest Journey...Forster tried to make the form of this novel as innocuous and unobtrusive as possible...even the title of the novel suggests that how one sees one's neighbor is intimately bound up with how one sees the world. Again the arts come in a beating, but landscapes and landscape-painting are exempt from the general censure, because they have much to do with one's moods and responses to others. Views are extremely important to rooms (49-50).

Forster depicts Italy and its impact on the English heroine Lucy Honeychurch. Lucy's trip to Italy is necessary for her spiritual and psychological development. Lucy and her cousin travel to Florence to see real Italy. However, this place is extremely English; which disappoints Lucy: "And a cockney, besides!" said Lucy, who had been further saddened by the Signora's unexpected accident. It might be London" (*A Room with a View*, 2). Lucy and her spinster cousin Charlotte Bartlett stay in a pension decorated in English style in Italy; a room with an unpleasant view. In his book *E.M. Forster's A Room with a View: The Attitude of English People Abroad*, Schuller (2001) comments on Lucy's visit to Italy:

by describing the behaviour of the English tourists and residents at Florence Edward Morgan Forster reveals a lot about English mentality, and he sometimes overtly criticizes it. As Forster himself travelled Italy and Greece, it can be assumed that he made experiences and acquaintances that served as a model for some of the situations and characters described in *A Room with a View*, Forster clearly distanced himself from this kind of people, or more precisely, tourists. Edward Morgan Forster offers an interesting point of view to the readers because he was English himself, but nevertheless critically observed the attitude of his fellow countrymen (2).

The English travellers face a problem when they arrive to Florence as their rooms do not have a view. However, when another male guest offers to switch rooms, the acceptance of Lucy and Charlotte is an indication of English women's interest in things that men are not interested in. Lucy's time in Florence and her experience with the Emersons, who offer her the room with a view, helps her to grow and develop and to think about the world around her differently. Lucy's departure from Italy and her return to England, her homeland, doesn't keep her

away from George Emerson and his father. The Emersons symbolize another different choice for Lucy. Forster is interested in how deeply Lucy will live and how greatly she will change. In the novel there are two settings: Florence, Italy and Summer street, England. Florence is totally different from the traditional quiet English countryside Lucy is used to; as "a magic city where people thought and did the most extraordinary things (Forster 1978, p. 43).

Florence is Lucy Honeychurch's home of love and passion. It is the place she longs for. In Florence, Lucy finds her love George Emerson. The view, which is the title of the novel, is the symbol of escape, experience, and inner mental development. Lucy's acceptance to change rooms in Florence is her decision to escape from the imprisonment and conventions of the deathlike life imposed on her in England. The Emersons who gave their room with a view to Lucy and Charlotte, are portrayed as the only English people who understand the Italian style of life. They are underestimated and looked down upon for not conforming to English social rules and standards. Love in the novel is so much related to nostalgia. Lucy yearns for love; she is nostalgic to a life of love, which she finds with George Emerson in Florence. Lucy has to choose between George Emerson and Cecil Vyse.

Cecil, representing the conventional English life, despises Lucy and her family. Forster portrays Cecil as an arrogant, unpleasant and callous character. He, like most English people, judges others all the time. He feels superior. On the other hand, George Emerson, the symbol of Lucy's home of love, passion and development, represents liberal ideas that are encountered in Italian culture. Belonging to a lower social class than Cecil and Lucy, he is still more passionate and emotional; "only in *A Room with a View*, Forster takes up the fragments contrasting Italy and England which are found in the early Lucy novels and brings them to a successful conclusion. The critic on the constrictive and rigid rules of social life in English society has often been an issue discussed by Edward Morgan Forster, and it is a central issue in *A Room with a View*" (Schuller 2001, pp. 2-3).

George Emerson is a landmark in Lucy's life as he strongly encourages her to express and show her true feelings. Actually, most of George's behavior is acquired and learned from his father Mr. Emerson. Lucy's choice of George to be her lover and later her husband reflects the main theme of the novel; that is passionate life is a priority for Lucy. She is nostalgic to Italy; Italy is the homeland of love, passions, freedom and development. The couple elopes to Italy to live a passionate life. The judgmental English social norms do not accept George's liberalism or the fact that a couple from different social classes would like to get married. Actually, Forster makes fun of the English social norms and portrays Italy as the homeland of love, passion and psychological development.

The room with a view in Florence is a compensation for the English Lucy and Charlotte who were given a room with a poor view at first. The room is metaphorical as it symbolizes human life; a life that all characters feel nostalgic for. According to Forster, Lucy's room with a poor view of a country yard, is the symbol of the repressive English society. It is significant that the Emersons have given her a room with a better view as they improve her actual vision of the whole



world. George Emerson has changed Lucy's perception of life, teaching her how to be more expressive and open.

In "he saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her" (Forster 1978, p. 53), George follows his instinct and kisses Lucy; he acts on his emotions, not paying attention to social norms. George changes Lucy's attitude to life. *A Room with a View* is a social comedy with hints of deeper significance of the concept of nostalgia. Italy is the true home for which Lucy longs.

Nostalgia in Forster's *Howards End* takes a different perspective as he associates housing conditions and locations with his characters; their features, behavior and development. In *Howards End*, there are three different types of houses. First, the country houses, second the urban lower middle-class houses and third the London town houses. These types of houses do have an impact on their dwellers. Forster's main concern is focused on living in the countryside versus living in the city; living in houses versus living in flats.

London is always mentioned in the novel as cheerless, foggy and grey. The air is always pitiless as "Margaret glanced at the pitiless air and then at the tired face of her companion" (Forster 1984, p. 60). London as a city is presented to be dirty and unpleasant; "the city seemed satanic, the narrower streets oppressing like the galleries of a mine" (Forster 1984, p. 84). Throughout the whole novel Margaret feels that life in London is like "the sense of an imprisonment" (Forster 1984, p. 84). For Margaret, nothing pleasant can develop in London. She never feels nostalgic to such a dreary place.

The London city life is associated with hard and joyless labour connected with a dim climate where nothing lively can develop or flourish. Houses and places of London reflect this atmosphere of melancholy. In London "month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and where more difficult to cross and human beings heard each other speak with greater difficulties, breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew: the leaves were falling by midsummer; the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity" (Forster 1984, p. 107). Forster portrays faceless houses which are built as faceless to suit the masses of faceless people. This picture of the faceless masses does echo Ezra Pound's *In a Station of the Metro*, 1913, in which he describes faces in the metro station in Paris as dead: "the apparition of these faces in a crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough". The image of Pound's poem corresponds to Forster's description about the faceless masses: "and month by month the roads smelt strongly of petrol and were more difficult to cross and heard each other speak with greater difficulty, breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew: the leaves were falling by midsummer, the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity" (Forster 1984, p. 107). According to Pound's poem, death in people and plants corresponds to death of the metropolis itself. People in London miss contact with nature; they are dehumanized. Leonard symbolizes people of London where he is described as "colourless, toneless, who had already the mournful eyes above a drooping moustache that are so common in London" (Forster 1984, p. 115). Again, the Schlegels have the "lives of gibbering monkeys" (Forster 1984, p. 78).

They are the intellectual symbol of the English upper class. Margaret and Helen feel nostalgic to the beauty of the English country. Margaret hates the "eternal formlessness" (Forster 1984, p. 186) of London. Both Helen and Margaret seek life in a place far from London. They are nostalgic for a place of love, warmth and harmony.

On the other hand, Forster represents the countryside through Leonard Bast and his wife Jacky. Being a modest clerk in an insurance company, the Leonards represent the lower social class in Forster's novel. Singh (1996) states that

if Lawrence is the poet of place, Forster is its philosopher. The spirit of place is rooted not only in his work but also in the ideas about form and infinity that give shape to his thinking. The true possession of the spirit that the "house" will survive so long as the pattern of integrity among the inhabitants is maintained. Gransden has noted the significance of Ruth Wilcox's answer to Margaret's comment that a house 'cannot stand by bricks and mortar alone'. There is a persistent note of misgiving about it. It is more than nostalgia (147).

The design of houses in *Howards End* is a complex metaphor. The designs of buildings, houses and homes are extremely symbolic in the novel since they symbolize the two types of people in *Howards End*. Forster's choice of the characters depends on sociological and psychological basics. They are formed and portrayed to present the English middle-class people in their natural life cycle. Forster situates his characters in two settings—the Schlegel's house in Wickham place, London, and the Wilcoxes' house in the country, Howards End. Characters find liveliness, warmth and happiness in the countryside as London is a chaotic harsh place; all characters seek to escape London life and long for the country. London is the place that ruins Leonard Bast, and it is also the place that makes Margaret Schlegel search for a passionate life in another place. The Schlegels and Wilcoxes resort to the country to build and reform their families, and to restore a connection between England's past and future:

"In these English farms...one might see life steadily and see it whole... connect—connect without bitterness until all men are brothers" (Forster 1984, p. 279). Margaret contemplates the countryside around Howards End. She encounters new emotions and feelings in her heart. She reflects on the children playing happily. She enjoys this new experience of having a great harmony between her inner feelings and the outer world. The countryside is the place for which she longs. Howards End establishes a deep connection in all living beings that she misses in her life, longs for and finds so absent everywhere else.

Actually, Margaret has "a new feeling came over her; she was fighting for women against men" (Forster 1984, p. 302). For her Howards End is a place of power, strength and victory as she protects the pregnant Helen from these men who want to examine her pregnancy. She protects her sister by preventing these men from getting into their house. In his book *A Reading of E.M. Forster*, Cavaliero (1979) describes Forster's creation of houses in the novel, saying that

another recurring theme is that of houses, the character of places where people make their houses...Howards End itself is understandably vivid, but Oniton, the country

house in Shropshire, and Leonard's wretched little sitting room are portrayed with equal skill. The importance of living in the right house is something that Margaret and Henry together, and it is one of the first things that he discusses with her after their engagement (121).

In fact, Margaret achieves her balance and psychological inner peace only when she is united with *Howards End*, when she takes possession of this place. Margaret functions as a uniting agent in the novel. She connects people. Her nostalgia is not only for a place; *Howards End*, but also for a feeling of passion, unity and domesticity. Helen describes Margaret's role in uniting everyone at *Howards End* saying:

"You!" cried Helen. "You did it all, sweetest, though you're too stupid to see. Living here was your plan—I wanted you; he wanted you; and everyone said it was impossible, but you knew. Just think of our lives without you, Meg—I and baby with Monica, revolting by theory, he handed about from Dolly to Evie. But you picked up the pieces, and made us a home. Can't it strike you—even for a moment—that your life has been heroic? Can't you remember the two months after Charles's arrest, when you began to act, and did all?" (Forster 1984, p. 358)

*Howards End* is the home for which all characters yearn. They are portrayed as voyagers whose destination of stability and balance is in *Howards End*. The house of *Howards End* is portrayed as a living soul; with its own life. Getting into the house for the first time, Margaret feels that she is out of time; she experiences a kind of timeless mood: "but it was the heart of the house beating, faintly at first, ten loudly, martially. It dominated the rain" (Forster 1984, p. 207). The house is a timeless agent in the novel that connects the past with the present; "you are living here, and have been for the last ten minutes, if you ask me.

It was a senseless remark, but with a queer feeling of disloyalty Margaret rose from her chair. She felt that Henry had been obscurely censured. They went into the dining room where the sunlight poured in upon her mother's chiffonier, and upstairs, where and upstairs, where many an old god peeped from a new niche. The furniture fitted extraordinarily well. In the central room—over the hall, the room that Helen had slept in four years ago—Miss Avery had placed Tibby's old bassinette (Forster 1984, p. 283).

*Howards End* represents a time free flowing agent, connecting people, and objects through the house itself and its being. It is through *Howards End* that Forster embodies a powerful design of controlling time, through bringing past time with present and connecting it to the future. Times, places, and objects are all elements of eternity with which all characters identify themselves, in an attempt to immortalize their beings. Nostalgia here in *Howards End* is not only for the past; it is also for an unknown future. Characters start to retrospect the past through tactile objects, like furniture, so as to freeze the future and re-envision their upcoming lives.

E.M. Forster is one of the distinguished modern novelists who portrays the new type of man that comes into being; the helpless individual who was deprived

of his own personality and identity, melting into an artificial industrial community. This community was the result of the change that came to Western civilization towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century all over Europe. This social, economic and psychological change was brought about by industrialization; and the rise of machinery. Forster's novels *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *A Room with a View*, and *Howards End*, represent an attempt to regain the true self of the English man/woman which was lost in an age of fragmentation. It is through his novels that Forster tries to delve deep into human existence.

Most of Forster's English characters go to Italy for the cultural enrichment, and also the psychological, personal and sociological development. In his novels, Italians are portrayed as passionate and emotional, a feature that some English people lack. English characters resort to Italy and long for Italy as the land of passions, emotions and freedom at the same time. Nostalgia takes different perspectives in Forster's novels. Each character feels nostalgic for a specific feeling inside his/her heart. Italy is a country that touches and affects all heroes and heroines of Forster. Italy changes the characters in different ways.

Characters of Forster's novels search for a homeland throughout the whole novels. Each character yearns for a home in which he/she can live the life he/she aspires for. This home or place is not that perfect or ideal one. In Forster's three novels, Italy is portrayed as the home for which all characters yearn, in an attempt to achieve self-identity. However, Italy is portrayed as an imperfect country so as to confirm Forster's message that modern man, with his fragmented vision of the universe, tries to feel in harmony with the surrounding world, even if this world is imperfect. This attempt of creating a harmonious perfection of man and nature, allows Forster to create an aesthetic world in a distorted universe. Forster's novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*, revolve around the themes of connection, and harmony: connection of soul and place, man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness, melancholy and cheerfulness and finally connection of different cultures. The genius of Forster's fiction lies in its timelessness. His novels are timeless; they are suitable for all periods, and all cultures as they tackle universal themes. Forster's novels create a universal order for a chaotic disorganized world. Forster tries through his ideas to convince his readers that the only hope to maintain inner peace in a chaotic world is to identify oneself with homes, places and houses. Homes and houses are the means of establishing an orchestrated harmonious identity with the outer chaotic world.

In conclusion, after visiting Italy, Forster's characters started to act more on their impulses. They find their happiness and peace in communion with the Italian community. Forster claims that the feeling of home is not necessarily associated with one's birthplace, it is, however, detected in an environment where someone feels free, loved and appreciated. Characters of Forster's three novels feel nostalgic for a homeland where they do what they feel right, which sometimes is not deemed right in their own original homeland. Lilia Herriton, Gino Carella, Lucy Honechurch, Margaret Schlegel and Helen Schlegel find passion to empower love instead of ruining it. This paper explores the image of Italy and how it is considered a homeland for many characters of three novels by E.M. Forster *A Room with a View*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *Howard's End*. For Forster, the concept of

home is changeable; it depends on one's feeling of passion, peace, and comfort. He is deeply influenced by his own life and personal thoughts. Forster describes the women of the middle class perfectly. He also hints about the mixture of cultures as he shows how Italian and English cultures can derive inspiration from one another. However, he never claims that one nationality is superior to the other. He stresses throughout his works that both nationalities have their positive and negative aspects. Actually, England is a place where people are of fully developed cultures, minds, and civilization. The fact that the English characters seek love and passions in Italy, doesn't mean that England is not a great country. On the contrary, England is depicted as a country of perfection to the extent that the English character looks down upon anything that is not elevated to his/her level. Forster tries to change the readers' views as he believes that "what is so wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who wrote, and brings to birth in us also the creative impulse" (Forster 1925, p. 152).

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## The Black Aesthetic in Rita Dove's Playlist for the Apocalypse

By Sally Michael Hanna\*

*To Rita Dove, a renowned poet of great transformations and eclectic artistry, blackness is an aesthetic that must be embraced and celebrated. It is the project of this paper to reflect on the black aesthetic depicted in Rita Dove's *Playlist for the Apocalypse* (2021); a breakthrough volume presenting blackness as an "Ars Poetica" an "X marks the spot" leading to Dove's signature crossing. In this volume, Dove presents a playlist of the everyday and of the nation's history over the past fifty years. The title of the volume, while acknowledging the sequential playfulness of a music playlist, it maintains a cadence of finality brought about by the word "apocalypse." *Playlist for the Apocalypse* presents "a lifetime of song" dramatizing Dove's view of the idea of the apocalypse as both end and resurrection recorded in personal triumphs and pains as her stories meet with the grand arc of history.*

**Keywords:** *Black aesthetic, grand arc of history, music, vocalization, orchestration, memory, race, anger, resignation, disease, death, resurrection*

To Rita Dove, a renowned poet of great transformations and eclectic artistry, blackness is an aesthetic that must be embraced and celebrated. It is the project of this paper to reflect on the black aesthetic depicted in Rita Dove's *Playlist for the Apocalypse* (2021); a breakthrough volume presenting blackness as an "Ars Poetica," an "X marks the spot"<sup>1</sup> leading to Dove's signature crossing. To morph a new black aesthetic, Dove, together with renowned African American thinkers, acknowledged the necessity of walking the tight line between the imperatives of political and cultural agency on the one hand, and the reconstitution of a novel sense of black subjectivity that taps into race pride. The result of such deliberations was the rise of a paradigm that bridged the chasm between an entrenched arsenal of racial authority and the hegemony of western tradition. Dove prides herself on producing a new African American literature that allows entrance into a language acknowledging race without the venom or haunting pathos. Dove has always known that to achieve such an end, she must delve deep into history as the shaping power of African American consciousness. Hers is a literary canon that influences black culture rather than being influenced by it. The importance of history as an

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<sup>1</sup>In "Ars Poetica," a poem from her volume *Grace Notes*, Dove describes herself as a hawk swooping down a ghost town finding its vantage point which is both a point of intersection and a point of crossing.

What I want is this poem to be small,  
a ghost town  
on the larger map of wills.  
Then you can pencil me in as a hawk:  
a travelling x-marks- the-spot. (48)

entry into this new aesthetic of blackness could not have been better expressed than by Henry Louis Gates in *Loose Canons: Notes on Cultural Wars*:

In our attempt at canon formation, we are demanding a return to history in a manner scarcely conceived of by the new historicists. Nor can we opt of our own private histories, which Houston Baker calls the African American autobiographical moment, and which I call the autocritography (Gates 1992, p. 166).

The literature that Gates postulates formulates a vision of blackness capable of self-criticism rather than being helplessly proscribed by what blackness means from a sociopolitical perspective. In the wake of the Black Power Movement that presented blackness as an essence bracketing the African American literary product, Houston Baker celebrated “the emergent theoretical prospect” that attempts to discover how the qualities of a literary domain shape Afro-American life. Baker suggested the importance of “a move from the whole of culture to the part signaled by the most recent generational shift in Afro-American literary criticism” (Gates 2000, p. 198).

Moreover, Baker argued for an African American canon that is “an expressive embodiment of spirit work” (Baker 1992, p. 136). He believed that a black national script of empowerment can come about by investing in the power of “imagistic fields” (Baker 1992, p. 150) that is a poetics that accesses “the general, overarching, or framing images and values of a culture as well as foregrounding the quite specific values or instances that modify or expand a general field” (Baker 1992, p. 150). Baker’s poetics may be described as a “phenomenology of conjure” (Baker 1992, p. 154); constellations of images that reveal the workings of the spirit. The product of such reasoning is a literature that is authentic in terms of its representation of blackness; in that it acknowledges the spirit of blackness and celebrates its humanity rather than being sidelined in a psychopathology of racial pathos. The vision of this novel literature is not constricted by any paradigm but is enlarged in the sense of establishing and defining the contours of social edicts.

Versatile in exploring the reaches of her identity, Dove has sailed the turbulent waters of racial identification of self, but never at any point in time has she drawn on it as the sole definition of self. Arnold Rampersad reflected on the universality of Dove’s work that “instead of an obsession with the theme of race, one finds an eagerness, perhaps even an anxiety, to transcend- if not actually to repudiate- black cultural nationalism in the name of a more inclusive sensibility (Rampersad 1986, p. 53). He advances his argument when he refers to Dove’s literary product as one that maintains a “disciplined” distance that “prizes objectivity” (Rampersad 1986, p. 53). He adds that she writes of black experience “mainly in the course of ordinary things” (Rampersad 1986, p. 55).

Dove staged numerous attempts for an entry into blackness all through her literary career manipulating different registers to find the “best way in” (Vendler 1995a, p. 160). Helen Vendler argues that “Dove’s skin color gave her blackness” (Vendler 1995b, p. xii) “as a *donne*” (Vendler 1995b, p. 61) but has never prescribed a limit on what she could be. Vendler most succinctly sums up Dove’s virtuosity in terms of a discovery that “blackness need not be one’s central subject, but equally need not be omitted” (Vendler 1995b, p. 82). Vendler elaborates on the



“daunting task” that Dove has undertaken in being “faithful to, and yet unconstrained by, the presence- always already given in Black America-of Blackness” (Vendler 1995b, p. 87). Despite Dove’s loyalty to her racial orientation, she rises to the occasion of expanding beyond the threshold of her skin color and soar to the limitless expanse of humanity at large. Hers is a poetry that flows from a place of literary and spiritual abundance that eludes the grip of social or racial circumstance.

There are moments in her work in which she rightfully chooses to move out of the black predicament only to come back to it by creating associations with other universal groups of the disadvantaged worldwide. A perfect example of such instance can be found in ‘Parsley,’ a poem in her volume *Museum* in which she inhabited the mind of a Dominican dictator who ordered the massacre of a field full of Haitians for their failure to pronounce the letter “r” in parsley. Dove confesses to Therese Steffen that the notion of black art is not set in stone:

The concept is not pure: the insistence on black art is just a device, a way of establishing territory or generating publicity. It was necessary at one time to underscore that otherness in order to get any kind of respect whatsoever, but the insistence on difference also requires one to erect certain walls or obey certain rules - all of which is anathema to the artist. When I was growing up, I did not think in terms of black art or white art, or any kind of art. I just wanted to be a writer (169).

Knowledgeable of her role as a writer, Dove shares her gratitude to earlier generations who muddied their hands fighting for a definitive black aesthetic:

Sometimes I feel like getting down on my knees and saying thank you because these battles have been already fought. And these are not easy battles between confessionalism and beat poetry and formalism, or whether poetry adheres to gender or not, or whether it adheres to whatever black aesthetics. These discussions have been on the table. We haven’t had to clear the path first before writing (Kirkpatrick 1995, p. 37).

She insists in her interview with Johnson and Peabody (1985) that the ‘pendulum had to swing back’ (6) from the reference to only blackness to a wider range of consciousness. She later insists that a “black artist is defined by differences more than rules--- so we can move a bit more freely in the field. We have surmounted what Langston Hughes called the “Racial Mountain” (Steffen 2001, p. 170). Blackness figures in Dove’s work in the form of helpless poverty, social diminishment, and human trauma. Dove has always created a community of characters who through their plurality of vision have presented definition of what blackness is. Dove’s work shares with the world a revised universalism that makes her a citizen of the world.

In more than one context, blackness to Dove has always conditioned a return to history that grounds it in facticity as it journeys toward the reaches of the fictitious. In her seminal book *Understanding Rita Dove*, Pat Righelato notes that Dove “has negotiated her artistic space with grace and determination” (Righelato 2006, p. 1) that helped bring African American history into the mainstream of American poetry (Righelato 2006, p. 4). The allure of history also attests to giving

Dove as Vendler suggests “a prefabricated plot, and the lyric that has to dance to its tune” (Vendler 1995b, p. 66). Her engagement with history has helped universalize her work through beautiful imagery that helps keep a distance from the limitations of racial representation. About her take on history, Dove shares her views with Hanna and Basosi:

As soon as I was old enough to be aware of the world, I understood the “official” story as well as the view from the sidelines. I always thought of this as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The black historian W.E.B. Dubois writes about the kind of binocular vision one acquires when one is not a part of the mainstream – it’s the ability to see things three dimensionally because you can take in the prevailing point of view while maintaining the revisionist view from the margins. I have always been aware that for every story deemed important and true by historians, there were a thousand others that would never make it into the history books. Obviously, we can’t put every event in the textbooks, yet just as obvious is that realization that every minute we live matters to us. All which disappears – that’s what interests me as a poet. So please, (to historians) continue to take care of the big stuff in history, and I’ll take care of the little stuff (Hanna and Basosi 2014, p. 259).

What Dove presents in her literary oeuvre, is the minute detail that makes up a life that is often left out. In an interview with Charles Rowell, Dove proclaims that her literary product appears as a *mélange* of fact and fiction often imparted in star-burst fashion:

We think of history as a narrative, but all we have are little flashes, like Morse code; we connect the dots into the narrative line we call History. So, there I was, trying to keep this whole book up in the air as I wrote it. I found it counterproductive to even think about it in the kind of terms one would use to answer the question: “What’s it about?” (Rowell 2008, p. 696).

Dove’s volumes attempt in their variant ways to answer the question “what’s it about?” Her journey started with *The Yellow House on the Corner*, her first poetry volume, which included stories from slavery representing the grand arc of history, while her personal history was faintly playing in the background. *Museum*, her second volume, represented history as an artifact on display in a museum with hardly any sense of personal narrative. The Pulitzer Prize winning *Thomas and Beulah* was Dove’s first volume discussing her grandparents’ biography as the grand arc of history meets with the smaller spectrum of their personal narrative. Dealing with the challenges that her grandparents encountered helped her connect her life as an African American professor and author to theirs and to the ordeals they faced. Volumes to follow focused intently on Dove’s experience in the world, a Black woman, talented and educated who is tasked with carrying the torch to her entire family as she identifies with her racial roots which she clearly expressed in *Mother Love* and *Grace Notes*. *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* reached the apex of her political representation of blackness as Dove reenacted the Civil Rights Movement and gave voice to the voiceless. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. were the makers of this miracle of justice and liberty. In this volume, Dove reclaimed her right as a black woman speaking for the rights of liberty and

equality for the race. From then on, her volumes dealt with racial representation with elaborate tact and freedom. *Sonata Mulattica* is a magnanimous volume that managed to write into music history the story of George Polgreen Bridgetower, a mulatto violinist and a composer, who lived his fifteen minutes of fame and died in the shadows as his fate intersected with Beethoven's. In her attempt to make a "shadow shine," Dove made a footnote in musical history a hero in her world and fleshed his existence in verse.

*Playlist for the Apocalypse* captures ordinary moments in the most extraordinary ways. It presents time as a continuum of past, present, and future of both the nation and the self of the poet featuring six sections which explore the representation of blackness across the spectrum of history both public and private. The volume maintains a sharp political edge that navigates "the vacillating moral compass guiding America's, and the world's, experiments in democracy" (Goodreads). In this volume, Dove presents a playlist of the everyday along with the nation's history over the past fifty years to preserve it for generations to come. Like a music playlist, the volume creates a dynamism of moving sound, subject matter and form as the poems move in certain constellations, brushing against each other and talking back, creating, and expanding meaning on topics that are meditated upon like the myriad meanings of the word ghetto (Dove 2022). In an interview with the New York Public Radio, Dove comments on the nature of the playlist:

as something that shapes a certain span of time you dip into it because you wanted to feel to be lifted and then down so you plan the emotional swing of the playlist musically and I thought this is really what I would like readers to feel when they are reading this book that is taking them on its journey and it will accompany them.

The volume displays an incessant sense of movement that dictates change as the new *modus operandi*. The movement suggested is both linear and horizontal recognizing the spectrum of time and the travail of humanity across it. In an interview with Margaret Quamme, Dove states that the objective behind the constant state of flux is to be able to locate the logic behind events today: "I wanted to start with the fact that you can look back, but you can also look forward, and things that happen in the past are, in a way, indications of what's happening today." She later refers to the poems in the volume as "an accompaniment" (Brown 2021) during the period of the pandemic, a time in which humanity was trying to fashion ways to get through it. The idea of being accompanied brings with it the warmth of sharing and companionship on a path that is unpredictably dreary and changeable.

The title of the volume, while acknowledging the sequential playfulness of a music playlist represented in song cycles, it maintains a cadence of vulnerability, desperation and finality brought about by the word "apocalypse" in the title. Goh (2021) comments on the nature of the "apocalypse" in her *Los Angeles Review* of the volume:

The use of the word "apocalypse" to mean the imminent destruction of the world, however, is a modern one, first recorded in the late 19th century. It is rooted in the Greek *apokalyptein*, to "uncover, disclose, reveal." The last book of the *New Testament*

describes prophetic visions of the end of the world — and it is known as the *Book of Revelation*, as much a document of John's struggles with the dark nights of his soul as it is a vision of apocalypse. Another way of saying this is: Perhaps apocalypse is not so much about the destruction itself, but rather the shifts, disclosures, and revelations of the soul when our usual defenses are stripped away by catastrophe.

The volume presents “a lifetime of song” dramatizing Dove's view of the idea of the apocalypse as both end and resurrection recorded in personal triumphs and pains as her stories meet with the grand arc of history in terms of both its grandeur and its incumbent weight (Garner 2021). Being a product of the violent events in Charlottesville in 2017 and later of the lockdown, the volume certainly testifies to catastrophe and the human response to it, not necessarily by way of finality and death but by the attempt to reconcile ourselves to whatever is changing around us in an endless cycle of tragedy and catastrophic failures of the human heart as well as of the redemption of the human soul (The Open Scholar). The sense of looming catastrophe created the silence that made a poet's voice heard. It was from this point of forced silence that Dove found her voice anew into poems both joyfully playful and deeply disturbing.

The volume makes the best use of recording personal experience through the deft depiction of personae poems; poems that speak about the private history of characters whose fate has intersected with the grand arc of history. About personae poems, Dove tells Chet'la Sebree “every persona poem is an autobiographical poem, too. Though I don't like to write about myself per se, I should amend that and say I don't like to write an unfiltered self.” Her personae aim at building a bridge that brings history alive to the present moment (Oliver 2021). Such personae often find moments of grace and wonder in the retelling of a tale that was once silenced. There are instances of playfulness “laughing to keep from crying” that are clearly recorded in this section (Dove and Su 2021). Despite the darkness of the volume, there are truly funny instances that Dove captures in the *Spring Cricket* section and in *Ode to the Right Knee* that are influenced by the playfulness of language. Dove mentions that she was inspired by Shakespeare, Mad magazine, Bessie Smith, or a Corelli flute Sonata in the writing of the volume (Clarke 2021); a fact that supports its eclectic range of subjects and moods.

The volume starts with a dedication to the memory of Dove's parents which reinstates the importance of history and remembering. Part one *Time's Arrow* chronicles aspects of self and identity in the light of loss across a spectrum of time leading to change. *Bellringer* celebrates Henry Martin's birth on July 4, 1826, as it coincides with the death of Thomas Jefferson; a historical instance that is synchronized with her personal quest for freedom. Henry Martin, a mulatto born into slavery in Monticello, rang the rotunda bell at Jefferson's University (Virginia University) for fifty years. Dove conjures up this man's life in the poem to locate “powerful moments of grace and resistance in the lives of those who have been oppressed and silenced” (Publisher's Weekly 2021). The significance of Henry Martin, a man who was otherwise insignificant, endows the volume with a proper historical edge commemorating the end of the shameful period of slavery maintained by Thomas Jefferson and the beginning of an era in which the servants of Monticello, the seat of power in Jefferson's time, emerge as masters of the

house showing that blacks have agency over history.

This is my place:  
stone rookery perched above  
the citadels of knowledge,  
alone with the bats and my bell,

keeping time. Up here, molten glory  
brims until my head's rinsed clear.  
I am no longer a dreadful coincidence  
nor debt crossed off in a dead man's ledger;  
I am not summoned, dismissed-

I am the clock's keeper. I ring in their ears.  
And every hour, down in that  
shining, blistered republic,  
someone will pause to whisper  
Henry! —and for a moment

my name flies free (6).

About her choice of Thomas Jefferson and Monticello, Dove proclaims that “he embodied so many of the contradictions and the ways we have of overlooking those contradictions, the man both wrote some of the most famous things about liberty and the pursuit of happiness at the same time owned slaves ---I worked for the University of Virginia for many years and the embodiment of that ambivalence is something that I walk through every day” (The New York Public Radio 2021). The mention of his death announces the end of an era along with its ambivalences that the present attempts to resettle and to “emphasize(s) how history impacts us over time and how that impact shapes our livelihoods” (Hughes 2021).

Not only does Dove conjure up Henry Matin, but she also enters his aura and testifies to her authenticity of self as a timekeeper and a bell ringer who holds the power of reminder and commands order as she reigns in her unique aloneness over pinnacles of knowledge and glory. Bats in the poem call into being an inky night sky in the background which acts as a reminder of loneliness, trials and tribulations that eventually modulate into the light of victory harnessed by the power of will and intellect to claim a place for oneness among the ranks of the free as though Dove is attempting to re-own her history in a different light (Hughes 2021).

*Family Reunion* sounds the call for family togetherness and the importance of taste in life represented by an array of foods that represent the nourishment of body and soul. Dove introduces southern cuisine and the variety of accents that have migrated from the south to the Midwest as her extended family meets around the barbeque- all differences reconciled in the act of sharing a meal: “Pity the poor soul who lives a life without butter— those pinched knees and tennis shoulders and hatchety smiles!” (9). Dove contrasts a life limited to healthy foods to one in which “resurrecting the food/ we’ve abandoned along the way/ for the sake of sleeker thighs” and concludes that the latter is a happier and a much more fulfilling style of life to the human soul. *Girls on the Town, 1946* is one of the lighthearted

poems that Dove writes in memory of her mother, a woman whose elegance was unrivaled. The poem is about an outing that Dove's mother had with girlfriends before she got married. The dressing was an important ritual that Dove records in the poem:

You love a red lip. The dimples are  
 Extra currency, though you take care to keep  
 Powder from caking those charmed valleys.  
 Mascara: Check. Blush? Oh, yes.  
 And a hat is never wrong  
 Except evenings in the clubs.

The meticulous process of dressing up reflects a different standard of living when humanity was better connected, when it was important to make a good impression and to invest more time in the ritual of beauty. Dove underscores the tension that the volume builds by deflecting attention to a mood changing poem which takes the reader back to slower and happier times.

*Mirror* dabbles with ideas of self- reflection across the color line. Ideas of memory and shame come into play as the protagonist features self and reflection as a complimentary presence, then as subversion in the last question: "is Woe is -is Woe/ is me? - me?" (14). The poet clearly associates pain and suffering with the identification of the self-reflected in the eyes of otherness. The confusion about self and identity is echoed in the rhetorical question that reverberates across the spectrum of humanity at large requesting no answer but simply embodying one.

Matters of injustice are fully explicated in the volume which explores the meaning of "ghetto," as first introduced in Venice in 1516 when the Jews were requested to live apart in a section in the principality known as the ghetto. *Foundry* is a political poem that samples "bites of glory" as it savors the real meaning of castaways of minority status like "Jew" and "nigger" as an existence that needs to be wiped out for the safety of the republic. In her notes, Dove clarifies the origin of the word foundry as the equivalent of ghetto and "refers to the island in which foundry slag was dumped before the Jews were forced to move there" (109).

You think surely  
 there's no harm in  
 rounding up trash  
 and hauling it  
 to the dump where it  
 won't offend your delicate  
 snub nose. You think  
 as long as we stay where  
 you've tossed us, on  
 the slag heap of your regard,  
 the republic is safe.  
 OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

*Now you see me  
 Now you don't. (26,27)*

The poem commemorates a project that Dove undertook in Venice since it housed the first ghetto in the world for the Jews. The project was to experience the ghetto and write something that would reimagine and revise the ghetto with all the permutations of the word (Dove and Mayson 2021). In an interview with Margaret Quamme, Dove reflects on the historical nature of the project:

After that, I felt it was comfortable to go through a very specific way in which time and history work with a section that deals with a ghetto, how a ghetto began with the concept of the word in Venice, all the way up through the concentration camps and our contemporary American ghetto and the ghetto that still exists inside people's heads in Black Lives Matter and all that.

The poem addresses racial matters in strong language that reenacts the wrong that was done unto minorities in the name of righteousness and safety bringing about a sense of forced invisibility and displacement. Segregation is the only answer “out of sight, out of mind” as Dove proclaims. White pride in this poem is tantamount to the erasure of otherness.

In *Aubade: The Constitutional*, Dove is grateful for “the miracles of living-breath, / a heart that beats, that aches and sings; even the ecstasy of thirst/ or sweat peppering my brow, /fanned by the mercurial breezes” (30). Dove questions her sense of unhappiness despite the continuity of the race as she rues “my lost/my sweet and damaged tribe” (30). Dove decides to walk the path with her “foot soles polishing the scarred stones” (30). The answer to depression is to keep going, to keep celebrating breath and heartbeat as a person manages to make the best of life. In *Sketch for Terezin*, Dove shares her dream of being “a comet/ a streak of spitfire consuming itself/ before a child’s upturned wonder” (34). In these lines, Dove presents the wish for self-sabotage encapsulated in the heart of a fire that self-consumes.

*Orders of the Day* investigates humdrum matters of life as they culminate into death. The finality depicted in “when at last our bodies crumbled/ in their final resting place” (35) imparts a sense of futility that accompanies strife through life. This poem places a tombstone on human pride that leads to divisiveness equating death with apocalypse as one of its definitions. *Transit* presents shards of Alice Herz Summers’ story of survival after she was captured in Theresien Stadt concentration camp which was a model concentration camp for composers, artists and musicians presenting the image of happy prisoners. The poem reinstates music as soul food, as it presents an entrance into a new consciousness of self as love and reinforcement. Music is presented in the poem as the power of life itself which ensured that Summers, the most senior pianist in the world to date, and a survivor of Theresien Stadt, made her pledge to life. In the poem, music is the color that painted taste on tastelessness, beauty on horror and nurture in the absence of it. Art according to Dove can perform the magic of healing the wounds of racism making life livable.

This is the house that music built:  
each note a fingertip’s purchase,  
rung upon rung laddering

across the unspeakable world.

the black water passing for coffee,  
white water for soup.  
We supped instead each night  
on Chopin, hummed our grief-  
soaked lullabies to the rapture  
rippling through. Let it be said

while in the midst of horror  
we fed on beauty—and that,  
my love, is what sustained us (36).

*Declaration of Independence* is a political parody on the Declaration of Independence as an attempt to start a new country of dreams and ideals. Dove recalls the pain of othering as a thorn in the side, “a pain that does not subside I laugh to forget, and the thorn deepens/Excuse me, but what do vermin actually look like?” (37). The poem presents the denigration of blackness as vermin representing the uselessness of a debased state. Dove counters the state accorded her through race by sharing her view about herself as someone who escapes description in words that pigeonhole and confine. She is a woman out of the world “neither exotic nor particularly earthly,” “I was a child once; I belonged to someone” (38). Uprooted from life through the act of othering, Dove is alone with no one to claim her, with no one to belong to.

*Elevator Man 1949* reiterates the story of Dove's father, a graduate of Chemistry Department who had to work as an elevator man serving his white classmates who became his bosses in the company.

He sleeps on his feet  
until the bosses enter from the paths  
of Research and Administration—  
the same white classmates  
he had helped through Organic Chemistry.  
A year ago they got him a transfer  
from assembly line to Corporate Headquarters,  
a “kindness” he repaid  
by letting out all the stops,  
jostling them up and down  
the scale of his bitterness  
until they emerge queasy, rubbing  
the backs of their necks,  
feeling absolved and somehow  
in need of a drink (39).

The story is a prototype narrative that represents the sacrifices made by black people to survive. Black people are expected to stand on the hand and foot of whiteness and be grateful for the slightest kindness by making more sacrifices.

*Youth Sunday* is a poem that commemorates the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham Alabama, by members of the local Ku Klux



clan on September 15, 1963, killing four African American girls and injuring fourteen other persons (Playlist 110). The poem focuses on the girls whose lives were squandered by an undeserved act of hatred. At no time does Dove refer to the violence itself, instead the poem captures in deft minimalism the instances taking place before the bombing of the church. In her interview with Mayson, Dove proclaims that in the face of acts of violence that leave one speechless, she wanted to “remember humanity and combat helplessness. The girls haunted me.” Dove writes the poem from the perspective of those girls whose lives have been cut off. She pictures a day at the end of summer with its cool weather with Addie and Carol chattering about “leading the congregation,” dressed up “all in white like Angels” (40). The poem closes with a reference to the heavenly nature of the girls as though in preparation for their untimely passing: “My, don’t we look – /what’s that word the Revered used in/last Sunday’s sermon? Oh, I got it: ethereal” (40).

*Trayvon, Redux* is a political poem about the infringement on the rights of blacks. It echoes Dove’s previous volume *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*.

This is what you’re thinking. Thinking  
drives you nuts these days, all that  
talk about rights and law abidance when  
you can’t even walk your own neighborhood  
in peace and quiet, get your black ass gone (42).

The poem races back to the sixties as it harnesses the power of the Civil Rights Movement and the underlying anger that fueled Rosa Parks and her fellow protesters to claim a denied right through peaceful resistance. Dove reverts to strong language to mark the threshold of change brought about by the Civil Rights Movement.

*Naji 14, Philadelphia* parodies Rosa Parks’ need for a bench on the bus, a right denied which eventually sparked the Civil Rights Movement in the Sixties. The need for a rest denied calls for a litany of the poet’s personal misery shared with her mother in “what a fine cup of misery/ I brought you mama- cracked /and hissing with bees” (45). Misery, according to the poet, visits home and mothers have their fair share of pain when things go wrong for their daughters.

They say we bring it on ourselves  
and trauma is what they feel  
when they rage up flashing  
in their spit-shined cars (45).

Others in the poem shirk the responsibility of the pain incurred on black people and mask their atrocities by claiming it is their trauma to deal with. Dove resolves the issue by making the speakers in the poem hoarse, with no power to speak their truths. Until history takes a turn, silence is the answer opted for in the poem. *Ghettoland: Exeunt* is another poem in which Dove speaks about the anger that builds up as she finds nature as a pacifier. Wherever she looks, she is reminded by the sharp pain and anger that accompany the sense of self- pity:

You stop to gaze at the softening sky  
 because there is nowhere else to look  
 without remembering pity and contempt,  
 without harboring rage (46).

The rest of the volume furnishes the resolution to the escalation of anger that it builds.

*The Spring Cricket* section is rife with explorations on the matter of “negritude” after the tradition of the Harlem Renaissance with musical jollity that conceals a soul drenched deep in the sadness that blues brings. Dove gives Aviva, her daughter the credit, for the presentation of the Spring cricket as a comic idea from childhood when she insisted “nobody loves me but the Spring cricket” (Dove 2022). As a result, Dove started to write from the point of view of the spring cricket. The spring cricket, comic as presented in some poems in the sequence, dabbles in matters political especially as a representative of the marginalized, he plays the pivotal role of the singer in the volume.

we just climbed. Reached the lip  
 and fell back, slipped

and started up again—  
 climbed to be climbing, sang

to be singing. It's just what we do.  
 No one bothered to analyze our blues

until everybody involved  
 was strung out or dead; to solve

everything that was happening,  
 while it was happening (50, 51).

Dove reenacts a cabaret scene from the early Twentieth century in which singing the blues was second skin. The blues singer, the spokesperson for the entire black community, sings to keep from crying as the tale of wrongdoing ensues. Her attempt to remedy the situation may be rendered waste, but it holds relentless willpower. *The Spring Cricket's Grievance: Little Outburst* echoes the sense of resignation that often infects the soul as a result of achieving nothing. The cricket goes about his business complaining about being “Tired for singing for someone else/ tired of rubbing my thighs/ to catch your ear” (52) but, is nonetheless determined to make his show worthwhile “when the sky falls tonight/ I will stand on my one green leaf/ and it will be my time/ my noise/ my ecstasy” (52). The poem clearly echoes the determination in Langston Hughes’ *I too, Sing America* in which the reinstatement of the black prince is inevitably foretold in legend and relived as a future reality.

I am the darker brother  
 They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,  
 But I laugh,  
 And eat well  
 And grow strong

Tomorrow,  
 I'll be at the table  
 When company comes.  
 Nobody 'll dare  
 Say to me  
 "Eat in the kitchen,"  
 Then.

Besides,  
 They'll see how beautiful I am  
 And be ashamed -

I, too, am America (46).

*Postlude* is Dove's confrontational poem in the volume dealing with matters of invisibility of otherness: "you prefer me invisible" (56), "you wish me shushed and back in my hole" (56). Racial aggression and othering run all through the lines. However, the protagonist decides to pass judgement on herself through the eyes of otherness: "out of sight I am merely an annoyance/ one slim obstinate wrinkle in night deepening trance" (56). The poet, however, transforms the fate of the speaker by emerging as the hero who knows her business: "I've got ten weeks to croon through/ what you hear is a lifetime of song." (56). It is the commitment of this volume to sing a lifetime of song dedicated to the strong who never lose sight of their calling. The romanticizing of the song surely reflects on the emotion that runs through the volume- the need to share love with the world rather than denigrate those who do not fit the mold.

*A Standing Witness* is a song cycle of twelve poems that retells the history of America over the past fifty years in scathing tones including notable events like the assassinations of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. and 9/11. It presents testimonials to different political events across the spectrum of American history in the voice of a female witness, probably Dove herself (Martin 2021). This section chronicles moments in time dealing with the trappings of history and how by simply telling, one becomes captivated by the narrative. Dove refers to it as "a series of droplets in the stream of history" (Quamme 2021). In an interview with Chet'la Sebree, Dove shares her viewpoint about the song cycle and about the selection of Charlottesville as the setting for the section.

"A Standing Witness" is part of a song cycle. I was looking for touchstones in the history, but from a standpoint that was a little bit removed, so I didn't want to concentrate only on Charlottesville in that section. The phenomenon of these white supremacists, and the whole mess of black lives being taken, and how this whole thing erupted, and how the United States, this country, was so unprepared for the violence that has been simmering under the surface — I wanted to get at the entire

phenomenon. I wanted Charlottesville to be part of that matrix but not be thought of as the “only.” As someone who considers Charlottesville her home and who has lived here for all of these years, when that happened in 2017 I said, “Ah — this was a strategic move.” This is a sleepy college town. It could have been many other college towns. They picked a really good one because everyone here is not only complacent, they’re also very polite. In fact, probably as far as college towns go, it is more liberal than most, and therefore totally unprepared. The concentration on “what was it like” or “oh, Charlottesville, Charlottesville” ...I’m thinking, the more you say Charlottesville, the less you have to think about your own town.

The section was originally planned between Composer Richard Danielpour and Dove in 2017 as a libretto song cycle “bearing witness to the last fifty odd years of American History” (110) as Dove remarks in her endnotes to the volume. Music is presented as sustenance. Dove insisted that the poems stand for themselves rather than harness the power of the music written by the composer. They planned a world premiere for 2020 at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts which never happened because of the pandemic. The history relayed in this section, according to Dove, is alien to the truth, since the truth in the volume “has gone walking/ left her porch for doves and ravens.” (59). Dove takes liberty to condemn the times “these are/ arrogant times/ Believers slaughter their doubters/ while the greedy oil their lips with excuses/ and the righteous turn merciless/ and merciful mad” (59). There are moments in the section in which it reads like a lament, a plea and a whisper that brings people around to listen closely (Brown 2021).

*You Tired, You Poor: First Testimony 1968* is a poem presented from the vantage point of the Statue of Liberty with her tall slate of proud promises as she observes “not-so-silently as the country destroys itself” (Boe 2021). Moreover, it deals with the burden of history as it questions the promises made by the Statue of Liberty. The poem presents a stirring testimony on the history of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Kennedy as Dove marks their cataclysmic deaths with an elegy in the form of a broken villanelle endlessly going back and forth in a relentless ritualism echoed in the rhetorical question: “who comforts you now that the wheel has broken.” The sequence starts with breakage and helplessness in the face of the realization that the wheel of life has broken with no sense of purpose. The poem elegizes loss and grief as “the constant now” with “hope that last word spoken” (60) in a stanza reduced to a single line thus reflecting the silence that shock brings. Chet’la Sebree comments on how the form of the poem echoes the subverted expectations and promises made earlier by the Statue of Liberty:

*Your Tired, Your Poor* --- begins like a villanelle, but then, instead of following through with the 19-line form, the speaker interrupts it, ending with the 16th line, further calcifying how the wheel — the engine of the poem we know and understand — is interrupted and broken.

The repetition of the rhetorical question “who comforts you” is a painful reminder of a sense of enveloping loneliness, loneliness that is as sharp as a knife

carving a way into the speaker's heart. For not only is there breakage, but there is also no one to see clearly through these tough times. The poem commemorates a point when grief breaks down and brings about the end of a belabored stretch of time.

*Bridged Air: Second testimony 1969* attempts to heal through music the rift created by history as it prays for "peace to the Universe" (61). The poem commemorates the landing on the moon. *Giant: Third Testimony: Ali* reverts to the racial discourse of the sixties as it paints America's black man Muhammad Ali as a denigrated other who deserves nothing but to be slayed for his ambition and his turn of phrase.

He's our homegrown warrior, America's  
toffee-toned Titan; how dare he swagger  
in the name of peace? No black man  
strutting his minstrel ambitions

deserves those eloquent lips:  
Swat him down, pin him to the mat!  
On and on they mutter, hellbent on keeping  
their own destiny unscathed

& brazenly manifest (62).

*Imprisoned Lightening: Tenth Testimony 9/11* commemorates the collapse of the two towers as an "episode" in which all viewers did not have the luxury of a response. The poem wails the loss of the many who worked at the World Trade Center which was later called "ground zero"- "a delicate puff"- a space of memory representing a rift in the history of a nation that nothing can remedy.

Something big was about to happen, was happening.  
No one had seen this episode before  
so we did nothing but stare  
as the second arrow struck (70).

*In Send these to Me: Eleventh Testimony: Obama*, Dove celebrates Obama as "America's miracle, fruit of bold dreams and labor" (71). *Eight Angry Odes* thunder with Dove's underlying anger at the world and her inability to change it. The section is written in sonnet form and starts with a quotation from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as Dove's anger gathers like a hurricane that cannot be contained. Dove spoke to Chet'la Sebree about the necessity of giving oneself the license to anger that helped see her through the volume:

But that meant that I had to be polite. I think I couldn't finish that whole section because I hadn't given myself permission to be angry. It felt great to be angry. In fact, a lot of the book is angry. I don't think of anger as something necessarily destructive. It's just the emotion that comes out of a moment. In the "A Standing Witness" [section] poems, there's that resolve and that feeling [that] this is what

happened in this country for the last fifty-plus years, and this is the unvarnished truth. Don't turn your face away from it. Now, what are you going to do about it?

*Pedestrian Crossing: Charlottesville* presents a powerful reason that rekindles her anger. The poem replays the violence enacted in Charlottesville before the statues were removed. It is interesting that the poem does not directly refer to the violence but breathes it silently as if it is about to burst open (Dove and Su 2021). Dove chooses to refer to Charlottesville because to her it is a symbol of the American dream (Dove 2021b). She chooses to introduce a group of impudent young girls walking around leading off Court square. The poem takes the reader to the place and space of violence, only to bite it off in an anti-climax:

I know my aggression- to lump them  
into a gaggle, silly geese, when all  
they are guilty of is being so young, so far" (78).

*Ode to My Right Knee* is one such poem that expresses the lightheartedness of the volume. Dove's playfulness starts with an impossible exercise that she assigned herself at her students' request to author a poem in which each line is dedicated to a different letter of the alphabet. This wild card practice has been a constant exercise in class, the result of which is a funny poem: "Membranes matter of factly/ corroding, crazed cartilage calmly chipping/ away as another arduous ambulation/ begins, bone bruising bone" (82).

*Shakespeare does not Care* envisions Shakespeare in the process of creating a sonnet which according to Dove is a side business coupled with "a playlist for the apocalypse" (84) as he manages to "live in his words" (84), an act best suited for a poet. Dove races poetry back to Shakespeare as she harnesses his power of prosody to aid her in the process of building a playlist that represents poets across the literary spectrum. Dove emerges as the heir who owns not only the word but also the history that she bore witness to since the dawn of time. The volume clearly bears witness to the poetic virtuosity of generations of writers before Dove for whom she holds the torch. Such a composite experience sings the joys and pains of generations who managed to make it through life.

*Little Book of Woe* is an introspective and meditative section that is ruled by darkness within as Dove attempts to reinterrogate the idea of time in personal terms. She deals with "the fear of personal extinction and incapacitation" (Quamme 2021) and with the changes of life caused by disease. Because illness makes a person alone and overwhelmed, Dove shows the reader in the volume that we are not alone. This section has biblical overtones as it ruminates over matters like reaching the end of life and what that means in terms of letting go. In this section, Dove opens up to the readers about the truth of her diagnosis with Multiple Sclerosis, a condition she likens to "a sword on the top of my head." For the first time, Dove confronts her readers unmasked, sharing her vulnerabilities in the hope of finding companions in her struggle. About the reasons she did not wish to share her diagnosis with the world she tells Chet'la Sebree:

Another reason why I had not published a book was because I had to learn how to write again, in a sense. I've had multiple sclerosis for many years. I didn't tell anybody. One of the reasons I hadn't told anyone was because of my parents, who were aging and were very ill, and I did not want to burden them with this. I was handling it. The way my generation was raised, you tough it out and you make these things work. And I thought, *I'm handling it. It's fine.* I didn't want to worry them. They're both passed now. I was trying to figure out, in the midst of all this public life, how to write. One of the things that got affected with the MS was that I couldn't write by hand anymore, and that's how I always wrote. And so, I just thought, *Until I can figure out how to do whatever is necessary to write poems, I need some quiet.* Both of those reasons—the length of time it took me to do another book, but also the fact that I'm coming out with something that's very private, and I'm a private person.

Apocalypse, in this section of the volume, takes up new meanings. It is no longer that of a nation at large. It is an apocalypse as personal as it can get. *Soup* commemorates Dove's visit to the doctor in which she received her diagnosis. Instead of focusing on "falling into pity and helplessness" (90), she reverts to making soup "fit for the gods" (90). The kitchen has always been Dove's metaphor of survival with the "slow courage of the lentil as it softened, its heart splitting into wings" (90). Dove musters her courage as she compares herself to a lentil with its heart broken. Breakage in the poem is necessary for the magical metamorphosis into wings of a butterfly to take place. Wining and dining rather than whining about the news is Dove's winning way of transforming pain into the power of survival.

In *Blues Straight*, Dove chronicles the damage caused by the disease. A classical musician at heart who performs the Viola de Gamba, Dove finds her hands incapacitated to perform and her body breaking down:

One minute I'm up and running,  
and then I'm not.  
I smile. I nod. I practically beam.  
The cup of plenty runneth over,  
ruins my hands—  
I've scrubbed them,  
but they won't come clean.  
Strange, I know, to wish for  
nothing. A day  
to live through. A scream (94).

The nature of relapsing -remitting multiple sclerosis is unknown in the way it changes on a patient, which is part of its incapacitating psychology. Dove, like other autoimmune patients, thinks of the disease as a verdict that can hardly be averted, a monstrosity of fate that is as though conceived in the genes. The poems reflect on MS as the writing on the body that cannot be erased or even modified. Loss of sensation is what Dove refers to as "the cup of plenty that runneth over." The ritual cleansing of her hands commemorates the impossibility of steering her fate clear from it. Her days are encumbered with a persistent scream of fear, pain, and diminishment of self. It is the first poem of its type that Dove writes as she

opens herself up to scrutiny as she studies the nature of the disease concluding “we live in mystery” (95).

In *Voiceover*, Dove shares the wisdom she has accumulated during her lifetime of creativity and pain:

Someone once said: There are no  
answers,  
just interesting questions.  
(Which way down? asked the dove,  
dropping the olive branch.)

If you think about it,  
everything's inside something else;  
everything's an envelope  
inside a package in a case—

and pain knows a way into every  
crevice (97).

Life according to Dove is a series of questions that may not have direct answers. It takes Dove a lifetime of song to deal with them despite their apparent simplicity. The sense of connectedness that Dove insists upon weaves a web in which fate is inescapable; pain knows its way into the human body no matter how hard one resists it. *Rosary* evokes a medical ritual tantamount to a supplication for good health and deliverance. The sense of ritual repetition is at once dizzying and incapacitating like the intent behind the swallowing of pills and the subjection to steroid injections. Seeking health is an arduous task like joining an impossible quest that focuses more on keeping count, studying method, and only then realizing that it is to no avail.

*Last Words* is one of the most touching poems in which Dove shares with the reader her vulnerability and ruminations on death:

I don't want to die in a poem  
the words burning in eulogy  
the sun howling why  
the moon sighing why not (101).

Dove fashions her death the best way she sees fit for a life of achievement. She does not accept pity in death even if it must be crafted as the most elegant eulogy that nature has ever known. Death beds are also not what she thinks would serve her best since that will be “a poem gone wrong” (101).

Let the end come as the best parts of living have come  
Unsought and undeserved  
Inconvenient  
Now that is a good death (101)

In *Reve d'Ural*, Dove attempts self- definition in verse as she proclaims:” I



am not a poem, not a song, unsuspecting” (103). She continues defining herself by negatives “I am not a river, exactly.” The incidence of negatives calls attention to the impossibility of the task she is undertaking, or at least so she thinks until she finally finds the proper words for the description: “A brown ordinariness/a cup of coffee” (103). Dove’s sense of resignation and concomitant pride at being “a brown ordinariness” represents Dove’s expert crossing of the color line and attaining the X marks the spot, a point in which she is comfortable with who she is and with her pain.

*Playlist for the Apocalypse*, unlike its predecessors, represents a rainbow of public and personal expression of blackness that is quite unparalleled. The volume introduces an array of political and social poems that deal with violence against the color line as well as violence perpetrated against otherness including minority groups like the Jews in Italy. Violence is condemned in the name of purity or power while resistance against racism with all its crippling machinations is praised. Dove insists that such ruminations on race and on humanity at large are the ones that bring about either a doomed end or a resurrection that calls for a fresh start in life. Survival against all the odds seems to be a persistent motif in the volume. Going through the volume, the reader is reminded with the blues singer who is the historian of his people, a man who upholds the Harlem Renaissance motif of “laughing to keep from crying.” Unlike Dove’s other volumes, some poems in *Playlist* are presented as venting ground which Dove introduces as a springboard to help transcend the atrocities perpetrated against blacks through the creative power of writing and self-expression. Dove dexterously gives a cursory review of important historical detail that informs the historicization of blackness. Such historical moments appear as faint flashes that function as a reminder that these moments have been surmounted as a racial mountain. She also includes other stories that have never made it into history books and that would otherwise disappear. Because every moment matters, *Playlist for the Apocalypse* commemorates such simple and private moments as they emerge into a wider consciousness of the world.

Dove’s urge to outshine her greatness as a writer is nowhere to be found in the volume. Instead, the simple and happy resignation to be an ordinary person strikes a true chord that living one’s humanity, regardless of race or status in life, is the lesson learnt in this lifetime. Disease and death do not discriminate against black people, they come to white and black as a verdict that endows life with meaning. Dove concludes that life is precious and ought to be lived, cherished, and celebrated no matter how difficult it seems to be. It is true that the blocked stream produces the best song as does this volume. The volume celebrates the resilience of the human spirit, travelling between past and present in the hope of reaching out to a better future. The volume touches upon racial matters in ways that recount past atrocities while looking forward to a future whose sun shines bright over the darkness prevalent in centuries past. The volume attests to the creation of a new black national script of empowerment that shuns hatred and embraces passive resistance, creativity, and beauty as its modes of expression creating a space of oneness for humanity at large.

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**After Verkuyl’s Discovery Aspect is No Longer a Mystery,  
but Aspectology Needs a Reform Review Article:  
Henk Verkuyl, *The Compositional Nature of Tense, Mood  
and Aspect* (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 167).  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022**

*By Krasimir Kabakčiev\**

*This is a review article on a new monograph by Henk Verkuyl, the finder of compositional aspect (CA), which crowns his research for six decades already. The paper summarizes Verkuyl’s contribution in describing the mechanism of aspect in CA languages by establishing two semantico-syntactic schemata, a perfective and an imperfective one. Defects, flaws and omissions in his model are also identified. Verkuyl’s discovery is widely recognized but his theory is misconceptualized in its very core by a large part of the aspectological community. The reasons for the massive misconceptualization are analyzed against the author’s own model, claimed to be capable of providing the most adequate explanation of CA vis-à-vis verbal aspect (VA) and of doing ultimate justice to Verkuyl’s “oeuvre”.*

**Keywords:** *compositional aspect, verbal aspect, article-aspect interplay, boundedness/non-boundedness, perfectivity/imperfectivity, temporality of situation participants*

### **Discovery of CA**

In a 1971 Utrecht dissertation, the finding of a significant language phenomenon was reported (Verkuyl 1972), later called CA by other researchers. Half a century on, a new book with a similar title by the author (Verkuyl 2022) has hit the shelves of academic libraries and bookshops to mark the five decades since the discovery. Its main idea is that aspect, tense and modality can be characterized together in a binary approach, not separately from one another (Verkuyl 2022, p. 256). But this review deals with Verkuyl’s work on aspect only, not on tense or modality – because aspect is the heart of his undertaking while the explorations on tense and modality are extensions of his main efforts rather than independent endeavors.

Certain major issues in Verkuyl’s model that frequently remain misunderstood or buried under details in aspectological studies are outlined; weaknesses, flaws and omissions are also identified. The review is based on the conceptualization of aspect as a language phenomenon, not through the prism of philosophy or formal semantics, although the author’s approach, alongside linguistics, lies predominantly within the latter, partly within the former. Formal semantics and philosophy have a place in aspectological analyses, but they occasionally confront standard linguistic

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approaches and lead into dead-ends. The review also focuses on the author's efforts to draw a convincing parallel between CA and VA, the latter represented in Slavic and some other languages. Finally, as this text is for a specialized readership, presupposed in it is common knowledge on VA/CA, Vendler's (1957) classification,<sup>2</sup> determiners' impact in CA construal, etc.

In his speech at the workshop in October 2021 in Amsterdam to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defense of his dissertation, Verkuyl emphasized that in the 1960s he had been troubled by the fact that aspect, exemplified exclusively by Slavic VA then, was regarded as a mystery, practically by all linguists. He was convinced that perfectivity-imperfectivity ought to be possible to be realized in "aspectless languages" like English, including his mother tongue Dutch.<sup>3</sup> In those times a Slavacist exclaimed: "Russian aspects are awe-inspiring and mystical categories" to be treated by the initiated, the native speaker (Issatschenko 1974, p. 141). Others not only rejected the existence in Germanic languages of Slavic-like aspect but even dispensed warnings that seeking manifestations of aspect outside VA languages is a waste of time (Zandvoort 1962, Dušková 1983). The second of these publications appeared a decade after the discovery of CA – showing that its recognition in the linguistic community was by far not easy or fast at all. Actually, for many researchers it has remained a hard nut to crack even today, despite the otherwise vast recognition of the discovery. Note that three decades after his dissertation, Verkuyl (1999, p. vii) himself saw the recognition of aspect as a compositional phenomenon as only "gaining ground", a statement he made six years after introducing a more sophisticated CA model (Verkuyl 1993) – revealing uncertainty about his own achievement. Earlier, as a young man in the 1970s, he was patted on the shoulders by authorities of that time, specialists in aspect, for his correct observations on Dutch and English, but was also admonished that on Slavic data "things are more complex". The well-wishers had not the slightest idea they were *not* on the right track, *he* was. And even today, with his model widely recognized as valid for the Germanic languages, hosts of researchers dramatically fail to discern its value for understanding aspect universally (see below).

In Verkuyl (1999, p. vii) another revelation was made, indicative both of the author's past qualms and of the state of the art in aspectology today, when many continue to be unaware of the domain CA operates in. Verkuyl admitted he *needed ten years* prior to his dissertation to realize that "it is imperative to distinguish sharply" between aspectuality at the VP- and the S(entence)-level (ibid.). The opposite was a mistake he had to overcome to grasp the essence of CA and where it operates: the sentence, not some parts thereof. Sadly, aspectology today continues to be misled by publications "discovering" CA in the VP (see Kabakčiev 2018, 2019, 2021a, Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021). An alarm concerning the massive misconceptualization was recently raised: "the strong focus on internal arguments has overshadowed the role of external arguments in the calculation of aspect" (Bulatović 2020, p. 391). To sum up, Verkuyl realized that CA is an S-level

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<sup>2</sup>And his colleagues' Garey, Kenny, Ryle.

<sup>3</sup>There are no aspectless languages. There are theories whose proponents are not aware that *all* languages have systematic devices for perfectivity/imperfectivity.

phenomenon in the 1960s and it is really strange today to observe quests for a cause he relinquished five decades ago.

### Verkuyl's Conception of Aspect in Terms of Two Schemata

While most publications in aspectology focus on minor issues about the contribution of VP-level information to CA, Verkuyl's understanding of aspect in Dutch and English is S-based in terms of two semantico-syntactic schemata, perfective-imperfective, initially called terminative-durative (labels he still uses – Verkuyl 2022, pp. 39, 135–138)<sup>4</sup>. The perfective schema contains only plus-values, +SQA in NPs and +ADD TO in verbs, where +SQA is “specified quantity of A”, and +ADD TO is loosely defined as movement to bring about some change (Verkuyl 1993, pp. 17–18) or an expression of dynamic progress of some sort (Verkuyl 2022, p. 123). The imperfective schema contains at least one minus-value (-SQA/-ADD TO), see below.

In the notation assumed here (and elsewhere – Kabakčiev 2000, 2019), the term +SQA is replaced by “bounded”; -SQA by “non-bounded” (“bounded”/“unbounded” also used by Verkuyl 2022, pp. 65–72). The term +ADD TO is replaced here by “telic”, -ADD TO by “atelic”. By telic, the value “directed to a telos” is meant, not that a telos is achieved, atelic means “not directed to a telos”. Thus, verbs like *bring*, *enter*, *fall*, as lexical entities, whatever the sentence they are used in, and whatever the situation participants, are telic. There is action, activity, movement aimed at a telos – achieved or not depending on the sentence. Conversely, *carry*, *contain*, *exist*, *run* are atelic verbs. There is no state, action, activity, nor movement directed to a telos (*John carried the bag*, *John ran in the morning*), unless situation-participant NPs or adverbials are added explicating a telos: *John carried the bag to the station*; *John ran a mile*, in both the telos is an achieved one. Similarly, *love* and *hate* are state verbs, inherently atelic, not aimed at a telos, and normally trigger imperfectivity: *John loved/hated Mary*. But they can sometimes be coerced into perfectivity, e.g., by adverbials: *John suddenly loved/hated Mary*.

Verkuyl's conviction has always been that CA is aspect *per se* and universal “as it is”, i.e., as he envisions it, even in VA languages. Phrased otherwise, CA is the *real thing* and Slavic VA is something that keeps on getting in the way – until eventually it is correctly understood. Actually, CA exists in VA languages – peripherally (Kabakčiev 1984, 2021b, Dimitrova 2021, p. 202), but Verkuyl's schemata *cannot be mechanistically transferred to VA* (Kabakčiev 2019, p. 212ff) – because VA is a phenomenon different from CA, yet the two are closely related.

In any case, the *quintessence* of Verkuyl's theory, maintained *in all of his publications*, including his three major monographs (Verkuyl 1972, 1993, 2022), is that sequences/sentences like (1a) below with bounded (+SQA) situation-participant NPs and a preterit verb form (unmarked for aspect), explicate perfectivity, whereas sequences/ sentences like (1b–d) explicate imperfectivity. To be able to make the perfective-imperfective transition, the latter obligatorily contain at least one so-called leak, also labeled a minus-value: a non-bounded NP

<sup>4</sup>“Non-durative” means terminative (Verkuyl 1972, p. 41).

(-SQA) or an atelic (-ADD TO) verb,<sup>5</sup> Verkuyl (2022, pp. 123–127).<sup>6</sup> Counterpoised to the imperfective one, the perfective schema demonstrates Verkuyl's so-called plus-principle, all components in a perfective sentence feature plus-values: +SQA situation-participant NPs and +ADD TO verbs (Verkuyl 2022, pp. 122–128), cf. (1):<sup>7</sup>

- (1) a. A/The tourist visited a/the castle.  
b. A/The tourist visited castles<sub>LEAK</sub>.  
c. Tourists<sub>LEAK</sub> visited a/the castle.  
d. A/The tourist hated<sub>LEAK</sub> a/the castle.

The rules of the schemata work perfectly outside contexts, unless some pragmatic (not semantic) circumstance interferes with the prototypical interpretation. Thus (2a), with a bounded subject (through an article) and a non-bounded object (through a zero article) matches the imperfective schema and explicates imperfectivity. But (2b), again with a bounded subject and a non-bounded object, fails to conform to the imperfective schema. It signals perfectivity, due to “knowledge of the world”, a pragmatic factor (Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 309–326):

- (2) a. The neighbor sold beer.  
b. The neighbor bought beer.

This is because we simply know that *selling beer* is a job – a Vendlerian activity/state, an imperfective situation, whereas *buying beer* is typically a one-off act, a Vendlerian accomplishment, a perfective situation. Phrased otherwise, the pragmatic factor “knowledge of the world” is capable of overriding the rules of Verkuyl's schemata. Although Verkuyl (2022) frequently considers pragmatic interferences, he never formulated a regularity such that the rules of the schemata can be systematically overridden. This boils down to the need to distinguish between default and non-default aspectual readings of sentences.

### Verkuyl's Schemata in a Cross-Language Perspective

When the major tenets of Verkuyl's theory about V- and NP-features in perfective and imperfective sentences are analyzed in cross-language terms, it becomes clear that

*the key difference between CA and VA is in the effectuation of perfectivity; perfective verbs are the hallmark of VA.*

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<sup>5</sup>I call the leaks Verkuylian in honor of their finder (Kabakčiev 2019, p. 204), but also because the leak phenomenon *is not some banal observation*. It is part of the complex conceptualization of CA – yet in need of modification should it be juxtaposed to VA.

<sup>6</sup>There is one more leak, negation, problematic (see below).

<sup>7</sup>Sentences (1) are constructed by me to facilitate the discussion; Verkuyl does not use same-pattern examples like these.



Languages with VA – Proto-Germanic, Latin, Old/Modern Greek, Old/Modern Slavic, have perfective verbs as lexical entries. Languages without perfective verbs feature CA: today’s Germanic and Romance languages, Finnish, etc.; they *depend on CA to effectuate perfectivity*. As for imperfectivity, it is frequently effectuated in CA languages even grammatically: through the imperfect and/or the progressive (Spanish, English), special constructions (English *would/used to+inf*, German *am NP<sub>Dat</sub> sein*), etc.

The linguistic world owes to Verkuyl (1972) the understanding of the way perfectivity is effectuated in CA languages and of the function performed by the article/zero-article distinction for explicating aspect. But the description of this superimportant function in his publications appears only in sporadic and veiled statements, like “SPECIFIED is provisionally located in the Determiner” (Verkuyl 1972, p. 59). Today, five decades later, two papers endorsing Verkuyl’s theory have made an impact by viewing CA and the article-aspect interplay (the latter being part of the former) as so hugely important that the author insists they must be incorporated into English grammars (Bulatović 2020, 2022). Fully convincing as the proposal is, it conveys another requirement: grammars of other Germanic languages, including Verkuyl’s mother tongue Dutch, also need to incorporate CA and the article-aspect interplay – however difficult and time-consuming it may be to have to reform conservative material such as grammar.

Verkuyl’s (1972, 1993, 2022) work and other researchers’ developments of it (Bulatović 2020, 2022, Dimitrova 2021, Kabakčiev 2000, 2019, 2021b, 2022) show that the article (as a unified *a+the* entity vis-à-vis the zero article) plays *the major role* in effectuating perfectivity. Compare (1), where the article (definite/indefinite) explicates boundedness in NP-referents, while the zero article explicates non-boundedness. In sentences like (1a), belonging to Verkuyl’s perfective schema, the two NP-referents’ boundedness is mapped onto the V-referent, forcing it into perfectivity (Kabakčiev 1984, 2000, 2021b). In sentences like (1b–c), containing a subject- or object-leak and belonging to the imperfective schema, imperfectivity is, however, mapped onto the verb in an intricate way: (i) the non-boundedness of the relevant NP-referent, consisting in non-bounded iterativity, is mapped onto the V-referent coercing it into signaling imperfectivity (non-bounded iterativity); (ii) this non-bounded iterativity of the V-referent is then mapped onto the other NP-referent, eliminating its potential boundedness induced by the article – definite or indefinite (Kabakčiev 2019). But note that this mechanism is valid for situation-participant NPs; a sentence may contain NPs whose referents are *not* situation participants.<sup>8</sup> In sentences like (1d), containing a leak in the verb (atelicity), the explication of imperfectivity is again specific, and there is again V-NP/NP-V mapping. This time the lexical stativity of the verb overrides the tendency for NPs with determiners, quantifiers, etc. to signal temporal boundedness – the temporal non-boundedness of the V-referent is mapped onto the two NP-referents, suppressing, canceling their potential boundedness.

<sup>8</sup>The term “situation participant” was launched in Kabakčiev (1984) instead of Verkuyl’s “verb arguments”, for being better suited to aspectological research. But not all NPs are situation participants. While in (1a–d) they are, *the hill* in *The tourist visited the castle on the hill* is not a situation participant.

Some further notes about the zero article are necessary. This term is standardly taken to mean – somewhat illogically – that the relevant NP contains no other quantifier. In English many nominal modifiers are quantifiers (*many, my, all, some/any, this/these*), markers of what Verkuyl (1972) calls “specified quantity”. But the marker of “non-specified quantity”, i.e., non-boundedness, is *only one*, the zero article. An NP with an article is, hence, quantified by default and its referent bounded. Conversely, a zero-article NP is by default unquantified/de-quantified and its referent is non-bounded. But boundedness/non-boundedness are values that depend on other factors too.

It is now time to deal with an important issue unexplored by Verkuyl. It has to do with the way (non-)boundedness as V/NP-values relate to aspect effectuation. Compare (3) – extracted from (1):

- (3)      a. The tourist visited the castle.  
           b. The tourist visited castles<sub>LEAK</sub>.  
           c. Tourists<sub>LEAK</sub> visited the castle.  
           d. The tourist hated<sub>LEAK</sub> the castle.

Verkuyl’s remarkable contribution is that he managed to explain CA through the two schemata: if each NP is bounded (+SQA) and the verb telic (+ADD TO), the sentence is perfective (3a); if one NP or more than one is -SQA and/or there is -ADD TO in the verb, the sentence is imperfective (3b–c–d). Verkuyl (1993, p. 73) terms this “feature algebra”. But the process can also be labeled NP-V/V-NP mapping, as argued above (and in Kabakčiev 1984, 2000, 2019). In (3a) the boundedness of *the tourist* and *the castle* are mapped onto the verb to trigger perfectivity, complemented by the V-feature telic. Similarly, non-boundedness in the relevant NP in (3b–c) is mapped onto the verb to trigger imperfectivity. In (3d) there is V-NP interplay/mapping again: the two NPs’ boundedness is blocked by the atelic verb.

A problem here is that Verkuyl does not explain the status of NPs like *the tourist* in (3b) and *the castle* in (3c) as regards the following. These NPs continue to carry an article as in (3a). However, as the relevant sentence (3b–c) is no longer perfective, qualifying these NPs as bounded turns troublesome. Are they bounded because they continue to carry an article? Or are they non-bounded because the sentence is now imperfective? If *the tourist* and *the castle* in (3b–c) are to be considered non-bounded because they are associated with V-referent imperfectivity, what does the article, an exponent of boundedness, do here then? A long time ago (Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 123–151), these very serious questions were given definitive answers, providing additions to Verkuyl’s schemata and proving indispensable for their correct interpretation by incorporating the idea of the temporality of NP-referents. Boundedness and non-boundedness are *temporal* features, not spatial. Unfortunately, the temporality of situation-participant NPs systematically escapes the attention of researchers; Vounchev (2007, pp. 86–87) seems to be the first, among few, to have subscribed to the idea of temporality of NP-referents.

Finally, note that if in languages like English the article plays a key role for the effectuation of perfectivity, there are languages that are structurally different,

with no articles, yet falling again within the CA paradigm. Finnish is such a language, featuring “nominal aspect” (Kabakčiev 2019, p. 218). It has no VA and no articles – but has markers of boundedness on nouns. Boundedness materializes in Verkuyl’s perfective schema through the nominative/accusative case. And while in languages like English non-boundedness is realized by the zero article, in Finnish and similar languages this is effectuated through the partitive case, within Verkuyl’s imperfective schema.

### On the Possible Universality of Verkuyl’s Schemata

#### *Are the Schemata Valid for VA Languages?*

In essence, the answer to this question is negative. However, an important theoretical issue now arises which, sadly, systematically remains either outside the focus of interest of researchers or beyond their capacity. Verkuyl (2022), interestingly, uses data from several VA languages – Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Georgian – to show the explanatory power of his theory. But his attempt in this domain is generally unsuccessful, due to his belief that his schemata ought to work in VA languages precisely as they do in English.

First, Verkuyl analyzes Russian (4), arguing that in the perfective (4a) *pis’mo* “corresponds with the English NP *the letter* in contextually identifying a specific letter”. As for sentence (4b), imperfective, he finds that here *pis’mo* is “stripped off its referential force [...] Olga is ‘letter-writing’, so to say, although Olga may be working on a specific letter identified earlier in the discourse” (Verkuyl 2022, pp. 226–227):

- (4) a. Ol’ga            napisala<sub>pfv</sub> pis’mo.  
       Olga    wrote    letter  
       ‘Olga wrote a/the letter’  
       b. Ol’ga    pisala<sub>impfv</sub>        pis’mo.  
       Olga        wrote    letter  
       ‘Olga wrote habitually/was writing a/the letter’

Verkuyl’s first observation is wrong: *pis’mo* matches perfectly *the letter* and *a letter*, not only *the letter*. But in any case *pis’mo* stands for a specific letter, it does not cover a generic or generic-like meaning. Where Verkuyl’s observation fails is to establish what exactly *pis’mo* does *not* correspond to, something extremely important despite its negative content. In (4a) *pis’mo* does not correspond to the habitual (non-progressive) reading of (4b) – in which *pis’mo* has a non-specific meaning (generic or generic-like). Furthermore, in the habitual reading of (4b) *pis’mo* stands not so much for a physical/material entity as for a *kinetic object*, re-occurring, a temporally non-bounded concatenation of letters, a series of letters produced one after another with no known starting- and end-points (Kabakčiev 1984, 2000, 2019, 2021b) – *pis’mo* is here a plural object despite its grammatical singularity. Or, phrased otherwise, in (4a) *pis’mo* stands for a

*temporal* entity, a one-off instantiation in time of a letter, while in (4b) it is a temporal entity of a completely different kind – a kinetic pluralized object, indefinitely recurring. In Vouchev's (2007, pp. 86–87) aspectual analysis of the VP domain (not considering subject-NP referents) temporal values of *letter* are discussed on Bulgarian and Greek data and his conclusions are similar: the temporal values of *letter* (Bulgarian *pismo*, Greek *grámma*) differ, depending on the aspect of the verb.

Second, Verkuyl's observations overlook *the reasons why* there is such a dramatic difference between the interpretations of *letter* in the two sentences. As already established, it is due to the aspectual difference (*napisala*<sub>PFV</sub>/*pisala*<sub>IMPFV</sub>), and there is a crystal-clear V-NP interplay. The imperfective *pisala* allows readings of *pis'mo* such as: (i) definite; (ii) indefinite; (iii) specific; (iv) non-specific; (v) generic-like; (vi) a single temporal instantiation of *pis'mo* (progressive-like); (vii) recurrent non-bounded kinetic images of *pis'mo* (no definite beginning and end in time). Conversely, and significantly, the perfective *napisala* completely *rules out* non-specific, generic and generic-like readings, as well as recurrent (non-bounded) kinetic images. Instead, a single temporal instantiation of *pis'mo* arises, a letter in the form of a single kinetic entity in the mind of speaker/hearer, with a definite beginning and a definite end on the time axis. The boundedness is transferred onto the referent of *pis'mo* (coerced onto it) from the referent of the perfective verb.

It is common knowledge that V-perfectivity is incompatible with non-bounded iterativity associated with adverbials like *often* (Kabakčiev 2021b, pp. 38–39). Recurrent non-bounded kinetic images are disallowed. Indeed, perfective verbs sometimes allow iterativity – but only if the iterativity is bounded, effectuated a definite number of times (Kabakčiev 2021b, pp. 38–39). The regularity is due to the circumstance that the denotation of single perfective events is important, hence guarded by language structure (Kabakčiev 2021b, p. 39). And in this case the regularity shows that there is again an interplay – not difficult to perceive – between temporal adverbials and VA, on the one hand. And, on the other, there is another interplay, this one difficult to see, between VA and the possible configurations on the time axis of situation-participant NP-referents.

#### *Can Verkuyl's Schemata Somehow Be Transferred to VA Languages?*

Now it will be shown – on Greek, Russian, Bulgarian and Georgian data – that actually Verkuyl's schemata *can* be transposed to VA. But it is not in the way Verkuyl – along with other researchers – envisions it.

Russian, Bulgarian and Greek are Indo-European languages, the first two Slavic, the third belonging to the Hellenic group; Georgian has no known genealogical links to other languages. Let us consider CA in English – against aspect realization in VA languages, by comparing (3) to their translation correspondences (5)–(8) in Russian, Georgian, Bulgarian, Greek, respectively:

- (5) a. Turist posetil<sub>PfvPast</sub> zamok.  
Tourist visited castle  
b. Turist poseščal<sub>ImpfvPast</sub> zamki.  
Tourist visited castles  
c. Turisty poseščali<sub>ImpfvPast</sub> zamok.  
Tourists visited castle  
d. Turis nenavidel<sub>ImpfvPast</sub> zamok.  
Tourist hated castle
- (6) a. t'urist'ma<sub>Serg</sub> moinakhula<sub>AorPfv</sub> tsikhesimagre<sub>Onom</sub>.<sup>9</sup>  
Tourist visited castle  
b. t'urist'i<sub>SNom</sub> st'umrobd<sub>ImpImpfvSg</sub> tsikhesimagreebs<sub>SONomPlur</sub>.  
Tourists visited castles  
c. t'urist'ebi<sub>SNomPl</sub> st'umrobdnen<sub>ImpImpfvPl</sub> tsikhesimagres<sub>SONomSg</sub>.  
Tourists visited castle  
d. t'urist'<sub>SSdatSg</sub> sdzulda<sub>ImpImpfvSg</sub> tsikhe-simagre<sub>ONomSg</sub>.  
Tourist hated castle
- (7) a. Turistät poseti<sub>PfvAor</sub> zamäka.  
Tourist-the visited castle-the  
b. Turistät poseštavaše<sub>ImpfvImp</sub> zamätsi.  
Tourist-the visited castles  
c. Turisti poseštavaha<sub>ImpfvImp</sub> zamäka.  
Tourists visited castle-the  
d. Turistät mrazeše<sub>ImpfvImp</sub> zamäka.  
Tourist-the hated castle-the
- (8) a. O tourístas episkéftike<sub>Aor</sub> to kástro.  
The tourist visited the castle  
b. O tourístas episkeptótan<sub>Imp</sub> kástra.  
The tourists visited castles  
c. Tourístes episképtontan<sub>Imp</sub> tokástro.  
Tourists visited the castle  
d. O tourístas misoúse<sub>Imp</sub> to kástro.  
The tourist hated the castle

These examples demonstrate how aspect is realized across languages. The first sentence in each block is perfective, the following three imperfective. In English perfectivity-imperfectivity is compositionally realized by NP-V/V-NP mapping. As already mentioned, sentences (3a–c) are *especially constructed* to demonstrate the impact of the two NPs *simultaneously*. The de-quantification of *either* the subject or the object through a zero article (replacing *a/the*) imperfectivizes the previously perfective sentence. Verkuyl explains this impact for the subject and the object but does not use identical initial sentences – which veils the regularities. As for VA languages, (5)–(8), note that there is no difference in aspect effectuation in the four types of sentences: aspect is realized directly by the verb and at first sight the situation-participant NPs appear to have nothing to do with this. But, as already established, NP-referents are affected by the aspect of the

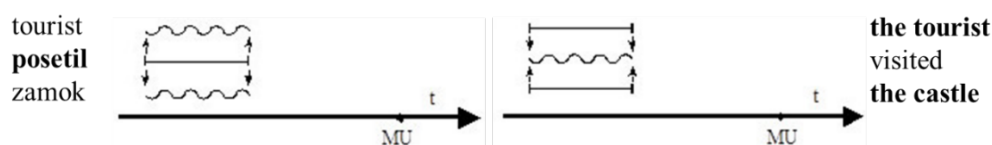
<sup>9</sup>Georgian does not use capital letters.

verb. When it is perfective, they explicate certain temporal values; when it is imperfective they explicate other values. Note that here the definite article in Greek and Bulgarian does not impact aspect effectuation,<sup>10</sup> nor does its absence in Russian and Georgian.

Despite the six decades of prolific work, Verkuyl sidestepped language typology and the prevalence across languages of markers of boundedness in verbs and nouns. In my model of aspect (Kabakčiev 1984, 2000, 2019, 2021b), based on Verkuyl's (1972, 1993), languages are classified into three types. In European ones such as Germanic, Romance, Finnish, the markers of boundedness are on nouns. These languages entirely rely on CA for the effectuation of perfectivity – the more special, marked member of the perfective-imperfective contrast.<sup>11</sup> Prototypical and highly prevalent markers of boundedness in Germanic and Romance languages are the articles, represented by the regular pattern of *a/the* – vis-à-vis the zero article explicating non-boundedness. In Slavic and Greek (also in Georgian) the markers of boundedness are on verbs, with perfectivity-imperfectivity grammatically encoded. There are, however, languages that are hybrid, with markers of boundedness on *both* verbs and nouns, e.g., Bulgarian and Greek – VA languages with a definite article and no indefinite (Kabakčiev 1984, 2000).

In my understanding of aspect in both synchronic and diachronic terms (Kabakčiev 2021b), CA and VA are different phenomena, yet similar and constituting mirror images of each other. Here is a diagrammatic representation of perfectivity – cf. English (3a), Russian (5a):

(9)



The elements featuring boundedness (perfective verb, +SQA NPs) are in bold. In Russian, the boundedness/perfectivity of the V-referent is mapped onto the two NP referents, see the left part of (9). In English, see the right part, the boundedness of NP referents is mapped onto the V-referent, creating two mirror images (Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 158–161).

This cross-language regularity would not have been established without Verkuyl's discovery. Note that the discovery of CA invalidated Jakobson's (1957) previously acclaimed contention that VA is a category *per se* that has nothing to do with participants in situations. Exactly the opposite: VA maps its temporal boundedness onto situation-participant NP referents, and the perfectivity-imperfectivity contrast in CA languages is mainly effectuated precisely through

<sup>10</sup>But it can in certain other conditions (Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021).

<sup>11</sup>My aspect model has been endorsed by Lindstedt (1986), Leiss (2000), Abraham and Leiss (2012), Bulatović (2013), Dimitrova (2021) and Shabashvili (in Shabashvili and Kabakčiev 2021); my conception of the NP-V-NP interplay of temporal features was first subscribed to by Vounchev (2007, pp. 86–87).

situation-participant NPs. They either map their temporal boundedness onto the referent of the aspectually ambivalent verb, coercing it from aspectual ambivalence into boundedness and perfectivity, or, in cases of imperfectivity (3b–c), there occurs complex NP-V/V-NP mapping, whereby the sentence is finally assigned imperfectivity. In cases such as (3d) there is again V-NP mapping: the verb's stativity cancels the potential NP boundedness.

Table 1 shows how Verkuyl's schemata work in CA languages. Table 2 shows how aspect is realized in VA languages:

**Table 1.** *English, a CA Language*

<b>The tourist</b> [bounded]	<i>visited</i> [telic]	<b>the castle</b> [bounded]	[perfective meaning]
<i>The tourist</i> [bounded]	<i>visited</i> [telic]	<b>castles</b> <sub>LEAK</sub> [non-bounded]	[imperfective meaning]
<b>Tourists</b> <sub>LEAK</sub> [non-bounded]	<i>visited</i> [telic]	<i>the castle</i> [bounded]	[imperfective meaning]
<i>The tourist</i> [bounded]	<b>hated</b> <sub>LEAK</sub> [atelic]	<i>the castle</i> [bounded]	[imperfective meaning]

**Table 2.** *Russian, a VA Language*

<i>Turist</i> [unmarked]	<b>poseřil</b> bounded	<i>zamok</i> [unmarked]	[perfective grammatically]
<i>Turist</i> [unmarked]	<b>poseřčal</b> non-bounded	<i>zamki</i> [unmarked]	[imperfective grammatically]
<i>Turisty</i> [unmarked]	<b>poseřčali</b> non-bounded	<i>zamok</i> [unmarked]	[imperfective grammatically]
<i>Turist</i> [unmarked]	<b>nenavidel</b> non-bounded	<i>zamok</i> [unmarked]	[imperfective grammatically]

In both tables, the sentence components governing the aspectual reading are in bold. As can be seen in Table 1 for English, the effectuation of the final aspectual interpretation is *extremely complex*. Tribute must be paid to Verkuyl for his insight and ingenuity in building the two aspectual schemata and for ultimately busting the myth that Slavic aspect has no systematic correspondence in languages like Dutch or English.

In cases of verbal aspectual ambivalence, as here with *visited*, a preterit form ambiguous vis-à-vis aspect, perfectivity is triggered in sentences like (3a) as a result of mapping the temporal boundedness of the two situation-participant NP referents onto the V-referent (Diagram 9). Verkuyl (2001, pp. 378–386) does not subscribe to the mapping mechanism. But it is beyond doubt that, without a NP-V/V-NP transfer, (non)-boundedness in verbal and nominal referents would remain incapable of affecting the aspectual interpretations of verbs.

The verb is the prototypical exponent of a Vendlerian situation, either holding – as a lexical or grammatical item, or acquiring – by coercion, the two values. Therefore, the verb must be assigned the capability to acquire aspectual values brought about by the impact of sentence/context components. Note that temporal (non)-boundedness is found in referents of both verbs and NPs. But when found in

NPs, boundedness and non-boundedness are *not* called perfectivity and imperfectivity. When in verbs, non-boundedness is equalled with imperfectivity. But boundedness in verbs does not equal perfectivity – because perfectivity is boundedness *plus* reached telos. And whenever a sentence is said to be perfective or imperfective, the assumption is that these values are assignable to the verb too, although it does not encode them – when it is aspectually ambivalent. But it explicates them – after they are mapped onto it, as in (3).

In cases of imperfectivity – in Verkuyl's imperfective schema with a leak/leaks, the mapping is more complex. Described exhaustively in Kabakčiev (2019, pp. 210–212), here are its main points. A sentence beginning with *The tourist visited* is ambiguous as to perfectivity/imperfectivity, the hearer perceives this as an aspectually ambiguous string. Complemented with *the castle*, it becomes perfective. Complemented with *castles*, it yields imperfectivity – (3b). What happens is that *castles* is interpreted by the hearer as a non-bounded recurrent entity, and this entity is transferred onto the verb. Note that the direction of transfer is opposite to the flow of speech. Now the verb is perceived as signaling imperfectivity. But does the mapping/transfer stop here? No. The non-bounded recurrence feature of the V-referent is transferred farther back – onto the subject.

Note the huge difference between the subject-referents in (3a–b). In (3a) the subject-referent represents a one-off (single) instantiation in time. In (3b), conversely, it is a non-bounded recurrent (pluralized) kinetic entity. The same kind of mapping takes place in (3c), with the difference that the direction is from the subject onto the verb, and then from the verb onto the object. As for cases like (3d), there is mapping again, the direction being from the verb onto the NPs. Here the verb's stative nature overrides the tendency for NPs with articles, quantifiers, etc. to signal temporal boundedness, hence the V-referent's non-boundedness is mapped onto the two situation-participant NP-referents, suppressing and canceling their potential boundedness, despite the presence of an article or some other exponent of boundedness.

Let us now move on to VA languages, as shown in Table 2, with Russian translation equivalents of the English sentences in Table 1. Here situation-participant NPs play *absolutely no role* for effectuating aspect – there is direct encoding of perfectivity/ imperfectivity, not covert effectuation (explication) as in Table 1. In the other VA languages – Georgian, Greek, Bulgarian, the regularity is the same: the situation-participant NPs play no role for effectuating aspect. This is valid for Greek and Bulgarian despite the presence of a definite article (no indefinite). The definite article can in no way impact aspect effectuation, as aspect is directly expressed, not explicated. In Georgian, a language with VA and no articles, aspect effectuation is broadly the same as in Russian. Situation-participant NPs do not have an impact on it but are coerced by the verb into signaling certain values when the aspect of the verb is perfective, and other values when the verb is imperfective. As already shown in the discussion of Finnish aspect, Verkuyl's schemata function as in English, with the difference that (non-)boundedness is effectuated through the case system in the absence of articles. As for VA languages, it must be concluded that Verkuyl's schemata are not directly applicable to them. But *they*



can be investigated through the schemata, taking into account the specificity of the V-NP interplay in the opposite direction, with the impact from the verb onto NPs.

However, even here things across languages are not as straightforward as linguists would like them to be. Dimitrova (2021) and Dimitrova and Kabakčiev (2021) show that, despite the definite article, Bulgarian functions in a way analogous to the other Slavic languages – the verb-encoded aspect maps certain values onto situation-participant NPs. Greek, however, features an idiosyncratic trait, an interplay in which values of situation-participant NP are mapped onto verbs marked for aspect, defacing the verb's grammatical aspect. Cf. (10a–b), from Dimitrova (2021):

- (10) a. I kórimou den échei diavásei<sub>PFVPERF</sub> pote kítrines efimerídes  
 The daughter my not hasread never yellow newspapers  
 'My daughter has never read yellow newspapers'  
 b. Aftó to paidi den échei akoúsei<sub>PFVPERF</sub> pote klasikí mousikí  
 This it child not has listened never classical music  
 'This child has never listened to classical music'

In each sentence there is a perfective perfect verb form and a zero-article situation-participant NP (*kítrines efimerídes* 'yellow newspapers'; *klasikí mousikí* 'classical music'). These sentences ought to be perfective, they ought to express a Vendlerian accomplishment through the verb's perfectivity. But they do not. They are imperfective. The non-boundedness of each object-NP is mapped onto the verb and, despite the verb's grammatical perfectivity, it is coerced into imperfectivity (Dimitrova 2021). Serious questions arise: how should these Greek cases – that are systematic, not at all rare, be explained? As grammatical perfective aspect in the verb coerced into imperfectivity? Or as CA: Verkuyl's imperfective schema with an NP leak ultimately determining the aspect of a sentence in contradiction to the grammatically encoded VA? The answers to these questions are not easy and are left for future research – but in any case these Greek examples highlight the explanatory power of Verkuyl's theoretical model – working on specific VA-language data.

Note now that, apart from those in (4) with two situation-participant NPs, there also exist English sentences demonstrating simultaneously the interplay of quantification/ de-quantification not in two but in three sentence components that are situation participants. Cf. (11) – the first sentence is perfective, the other three imperfective:

- (11) a. The valet parked our car in the nearby garage.  
 b. The valet parked cars<sub>LEAK</sub> in the nearby garage.  
 c. The valet parked our car in nearby garages<sub>LEAK</sub>.  
 d. Valets<sub>LEAK</sub> parked our car in the nearby garage.

Such sentences, rare to find and difficult to construct (analyzed in Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021, p. 193, Kabakčiev 2021a, p. 4, 2021b, pp. 34–38, 2022, pp. 336–339), are perfect exemplars for revealing the quantification/de-quantification

interplay in which a perfective sentence is imperfectivized separately by each of the three NPs. Intriguingly, this interplay is also found in specific conditions in VA languages (Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021, p. 193), a circumstance forcefully corroborating yet again the thesis that *Verkuyl's CA model has an enormous explanatory power*. But it must be modified in certain ways to be able to realize its potential.

Finally note that Verkuyl insists that the leaks in his imperfective schema are not two but three, the third one being negation (Verkuyl 1993, 2022, pp. 90–91). Cross-language data, however, shows that negation cannot be a leak.

### **On Some Specific and Controversial Issues in Verkuyl's Monograph**

The main idea in Verkuyl (2022) is that not only can aspect be analyzed binarily, tense and modality also can, and actually must, despite the fact that a ternary approach to tense is usually used – in three domains (past, present, future). Aspect is generally analyzed binarily, through the perfectivity/imperfectivity contrast. To what extent a binary approach to tense is more rewarding scientifically than a ternary one will not be explored here. Let the future decide. But if the binary approach to tense is novel and well-represented in Verkuyl (2022), it seems to need some sophistication. The problem emerges early in the book, when the notion of temporality is assigned an extremely narrow sense. It is equaled with tense, and it is thus left out of consideration that there are many other linguistic entities that are temporal notions, related to time, including the major aspectual ones. Concepts employed by Verkuyl himself, e.g., (non)-boundedness, are not simply associated with time, they are directly time-related. Even the major exponents of aspect – perfectivity/imperfectivity, are time-related, conceptualized as properties of time, as a cognitive phenomenon (not a physical one). Temporalization in the sense of assigning the value “tensed” is obviously important for Verkuyl's enterprise. A better way could then be proposed for distinguishing “tensed” from the temporality of other aspectological and aspecto-temporal concepts.

Enormous space is allotted in Verkuyl's publications, including Verkuyl (2022), for interpreting sentences like *Three girls lifted two tables*, with an emphasis on the possibilities for “building quantificational structures”. Such analyses may be useful for capturing the semantics of certain sentences for the needs of computer-based language processing, digital translation, etc. But from a mainstream linguistic perspective they do not make much sense, in my opinion. Faced with *Three girls lifted two tables*, the hearer hardly starts to make computations as to how many table liftings were executed by this or that girl. Nor does the hearer become troubled with whether this sentence is perfective or imperfective, because clearly it can be both – knowledge of the world overrides the rules of Verkuyl's schemata. The hearer uses one's intuition and the available context to work out *only the most plausible possibilities* for interpreting such sentences. And if the context proves insufficient and/or intuition fails, such sentences are *simply left uninterpreted*. In grammatical analyses they are treated as questionable, problematic. Language is a flexible tool for the broad apprehension

and communication of actual or hypothetical worlds through cognitive and grammatical concepts. It is not mathematics. If mathematicians or formal semanticists are intrigued about how many table liftings were executed by every girl in every combination of girls and tables in such sentences, linguists are not. Being strange, such sentences do not – in my opinion at least – pose serious problems for linguistics.

### **On Some Other Issues in Verkuyl's Model of CA**

#### *On Temporal and Atemporal*

As already argued, assigning the meaning “tensed” to *temporal* creates issues: *temporal* is severely narrowed down to what is encoded by a grammatical value found in almost every verb in a sentence in languages like English. A problem occurs in cross-language terms. How can the meaning of *temporal* in the sense of “tensed” be upheld in languages in which the verb does not encode tense: Chinese, Malay? Given that dozens of sentences in English and other European languages are analyzed by Verkuyl as encoding tense – along with entities such as present perfect, aorist, imperfect that are not purely tense grammemes – exactly how will Chinese and Malay sentences be identified as realizing values such as preterit (an aspectually unmarked past), aorist (bounded past), imperfect (non-bounded past), present perfect? Even take Russian, a European language. Given that almost all Slavic languages lack perfects, how do we decide whether Russian *Maria napisala pis'mo* carries “the meaning” ‘Maria wrote a/the letter’ or ‘Maria has written a/the letter’? It is problematic to argue that these two English sentences carry two different meanings (perfect/non-perfect), precisely because in many languages they are compressed into a single sentence, with a single preterit verb form which can be said to house the perfect also and provide it a symbiosis with the preterit. Native speakers of “perfectless” languages certainly do not feel deprived: they understand each other perfectly without perfects. Therefore, if Verkuyl wants to see his theory applicable universally, he ought to take into account these issues.

In Verkuyl (1972), verb arguments (here called situation-participant NPs) were assigned temporality: according to Verkuyl (1972, pp. 96–97), +SQA and -SQA, NP features, “pertain directly or indirectly to the time axis”. But in 1993 Verkuyl gave up the temporal model he advocated in 1972 (read carefully the quotation above) to replace it with an atemporal one in which situation-participant NPs are purely atemporal creatures – which obviously means spatial. This decision, criticized harshly in Kabakčiev (2000), is not only reconfirmed in Verkuyl (2022), it is developed further, by refusing temporality even to verbs. Verbs turn out to be atemporal creatures too. Indeed, they are temporalized (tensed) but at the very last stage of aspectual composition (Verkuyl 2022, pp. 166–168). What strikes the eye in the diagram on page 167 (ibid.) explaining Verkuyl's current concept of aspectual composition is that, first, it applies to the strange sentence *Three girls lifted two tables*. Second, this sentence is assigned perfectivity – simply because of the NP quantification and in disregard for the “knowledge of the world” factor. Third, S-

level perfectivity is obtained mechanistically by “multiplication” of the bounded situation-participant NP *two tables* (Verkuyl 2022, p. 167). The idea of mapping temporal values between NP-V referents proves again not to be to the author’s liking. Certainly, among the most sacred rights of a scientist is to maintain one’s ground against all odds. But it appears that the rejection of the idea of mapping temporal values between NP- and V-referents underlies Verkuyl’s failure to provide a reasonable explanation of how his two schemata, otherwise ingenious and unquestionably valid for CA languages, can be related to the way aspect is realized in VA languages.

*On the Necessity to Recognize Default Meanings*

Verkuyl maintains that sentences have their aspectual readings based on “their quantificational structure”, reflected in the two schemata. More importantly, the aspectual readings are fixed. There is no way, Verkuyl (1993, p. 182) insists, for sentences like *Judith ate sandwiches* to be perfective. In Verkuyl (2022, p. 123) this position is reconfirmed: “the NP *sandwiches* [in *Judith ate sandwiches*] is [-SQA], just like *nobody* in [*Nobody ate sandwiches*]: their denotation cannot be determined as finite or bounded”.<sup>12</sup>

It is not true that *Judith ate sandwiches* and similar sentences cannot be perfective. Compare the sentence extended: *Judith ate sandwiches and is no longer hungry*. Here the phrase *ate sandwiches* and the verb *ate* are coerced into perfectivity by the extension, despite the outward non-boundedness of *sandwiches*. Furthermore, implicated here before *sandwiches* is the quantifier *some* (Kabakčiev 2000, p. 239, Bulatović 2022, p. 500) – sometimes called “silent *some*”. Recall that aspect coercion on verbs happens even in VA languages (Dimitrova 2021 about Greek, Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021 about Bulgarian and Greek); furthermore, in Greek this is a systematic phenomenon (ibid.). The thesis that sentences such as *Judith ate sandwiches* cannot be perfective is also refuted by other cross-language comparisons. Bulgarian (12a) below is indeed non-grammatical. But it is for another reason, a specific Aktionsart, not because the non-bounded *sandviči* is incompatible with the perfectivity of *izjade*; there exists another Bulgarian perfective verb, *hapna* ‘eat’, perfectly compatible with non-bounded NPs like *sandwiches*:

- (12) a. \*Judith izjade<sub>PfVAor</sub> sandviči.  
       ‘Judith ate sandwiches’  
       b. Judith hapna<sub>PfVAor</sub> sandviči.  
       ‘Judith ate sandwiches’

As already emphasized, Verkuyl’s desire to see his theory universal, applicable to all languages, *is not without grounds*. But it needs to be modified in ways that deviate from his overall approach – and must be made to comply with cross-language data.

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<sup>12</sup>See the following section on negation.

Verkuyl's (1993, p. 182) insistence that sentences such as *Judith ate sandwiches* cannot be perfective because *sandwiches* is -SQA reveals a weakness observed elsewhere too. His Dutch sentence (13a) and its English translation (13b) allow two different readings, imperfective/perfective (Verkuyl 2022, p. 61), despite the outward -SQA value of *liederen* 'songs'. What is more, when (13b) is transferred into the past, as in (13c), it explicates not two but three aspectually different readings: perfective, imperfective and quasi-perfective (called episode – Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 286–307), a bounded situation not brought to its telos (songs sung to the end):

- (13) a. Maria zingt liederen van Schubert en Brahms.  
 b. Maria will sing songs by Schubert and Brahms.  
 c. Maria sang songs by Schubert and Brahms.  
 d. Maria sang some songs by Schubert and Brahms.

When imperfective, based on the -SQA value of *songs*, (13c) describes past singing performances by Maria, temporally non-bounded. When perfective, seemingly countering the outward -SQA in *songs*, (13c) describes a Vendlerian accomplishment, a performance by Maria of several songs – with a silent *some* assumed before *songs*, cf. (13d) with *some*. As noted by Bulatović (2022, p. 500), sentences like (14a–b) are perfective with an implicated *some* (this time in the subject):

- (14) a. Passers-by signed the appeal.  
 b. Children found a bird.

But here is yet another difference: (14a) equally allows perfectivity/imperfectivity, while (14b) favors a one-off situation, as per “knowledge of the world factor”.

All this must have been recognized as a problem by Verkuyl who surely knows that sentences with zero-article NPs containing silent quantifiers are countless and pose a threat to the validity of the perfective schema. And his insistence that *Judith ate sandwiches* cannot be perfective does not solve the problem. It worsens it. A solution already proposed (Kabakčiev 2019, pp. 206–207) consists in differentiating between default (primary/prototypical/basic) and non-default (non-primary/non-prototypical/non-basic) readings of sentences. In its default reading, *Judith ate sandwiches* is imperfective due to the -SQA value of *sandwiches*. But it is perfective in a non-default reading, with a silent *some* before *sandwiches*. In fact, Verkuyl himself occasionally allows different aspectual readings of a sentence. For example, he argues that the set of receipts in (15a) can only be settled upon when it is clear that “the sentence is about one eventuality index *k* or about a series of these indices” (Verkuyl 2022, pp. 162–163):

- (15) a. John kept the receipts.  
 b. John kept the receipts for a year.

Put otherwise, sentences like (15a) have two major readings, one perfective – a one-off situation in which all the receipts are grabbed by John in a single instant, and another one, imperfective, with non-bounded iterativity – in which John receives and keeps receipts regularly in the past, one by one. But there is even a third reading, in which the situation is bounded – but not perfective because there is no telos achieved. This reading of (15a) – especially when it is complemented by *for a year*, see (15b), represents an episode, a Vendlerian situation (Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 279–307).

Episodes are not an exotic Vendlerian situation type. On the contrary, they have *huge* cross-language presence: English sentences with *for*-time and similar adverbials of limited duration, sentences in Romance languages with atelic verbs in the aorist, Slavic delimitative verbs, Bulgarian imperfective aorists, Greek aorists and imperfects with *for*-time and similar adverbials (Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021), etc. In (15a) the “knowledge of the world” factor urges the hearer to interpret the sentence as imperfective, indefinitely iterative, not as a situation encompassing the sudden withholding of all the receipts – because life experience tells people the indefinitely iterative reading is more plausible, despite the rules of Verkuyl's schemata.

### **Other Weaknesses in Verkuyl's Model: Negation, Mistreatment of Vendler's Schemata, Incomplete Explanation of Temporal Adverbials, Failure to Pinpoint the Slavic-Germanic Aspect Difference**

#### *On Negation, Allegedly Encoding Imperfectivity*

In my opinion, this is the severest flaw in Verkuyl's overall conception. In his advanced model, Verkuyl (1993) assumes the existence of a third possible leak in the perfective schema that leads to imperfectivization: negation. The thesis that sentences with a negative V/NP are durative (i.e., imperfective) is re-confirmed in Verkuyl (2022, p. 90): “negation is important for neutralizing the difference between terminativity and durativity”. A postulate derived from some idiosyncratic precept of formal logic or some branch of philosophy is adhered to: negation is incompatible with perfectivity because it generates a -SQA feature in NPs or -ADD TO in verbs. A negative subject or object, or a negative verb in simple sentences like (16) below, Verkuyl insists, *invariably make such sentences imperfective*:

- (16)    a. Nobody entered.  
          b. Mary wrote no letter.  
          c. Mary did not write the letter.  
          d. Mary has not written the letter.

Whatever sense this might make in whatever formal logic or philosophy, it is blatantly untrue in cross-language terms. There is *not a single Slavic language* in which a negative subject or object or a negative verb in sentences such as (16) can

coerce a sentence into imperfectivity. Cf. Bulgarian (17), perfect translation equivalents of (16), in which all the verbs are perfective:<sup>13</sup>

- (17) a. Nikoj ne vlez<sub>CPfvAor</sub>.  
Nobody not entered  
b. Mary ne napis<sub>CPfvAor</sub> nikakvo pismo.  
Mary not wrote no letter  
c. Mary ne napis<sub>CPfvAor</sub> pismoto.  
Mary not wrote letter-the  
d. Mary ne e napis<sub>CPfvPerfect</sub> pismoto.  
Mary not is written letter-the

A negative subject or object or a negative verb *does not* lead to imperfectivity in Georgian too (Giuli Shabashvili, personal communication). Hence, the idea about negation as an exponent of imperfectivity constitutes a serious weakness in Verkuyl's model – because of preoccupation with concepts divorced from natural language reality. Despite criticism two decades ago – a whole chapter in Kabakčiev (2000, pp. 263–277) arguing that negation in the Slavic languages is fully compatible with perfectivity, Verkuyl (2022, p. 90) stands by his right of dissent and continues to insist that sentences such as (18) are imperfective simply because of the negation.

#### *Mistreatment of Vendler's Time Schemata*

Despite respecting Vendler's insight and having visited him in the US decades ago (personal communication with Verkuyl) out of scientific curiosity, Verkuyl (2022, pp. 1–3) heaps criticism on Vendler, labeling his schemata “Aristotelian-based naive physics” and a “roadblock to compositionality”. Leaving aside in what way physics or naive physics may have to do with language regularities and broadly language, a product of the collective human brain, the Vendlerian schemata are interpreted by Verkuyl (2022, pp. 113–116) as a quadripartition, hence an obstacle to the binary approach pursued by him. Verkuyl's criticism of Vendler is *difficult to understand* – not only for one but for several reasons.

First, Verkuyl's model of aspect *actually rests on Vendler's*, the latter dealing with terms different from Verkuyl's but underlying more or less the same concepts. Verkuyl's understanding of what happens at the VP-level entirely coincides with Vendler's: *caught dogs, drank wine, drank* and *ruled* said of a man are imperfective VPs, *caught a dog, drank a gallon of wine* and *died* said of the same man are perfective VPs – in both models (Vendler's and Verkuyl's). Vendler, in his inimitable essayistic manner, deals here expertly not only with VPs but also with the contribution of the verb as a lexical item to the aspectual semantics of a sentence: *drink* is primarily a state or an activity as a lexical entry but, combined with bounded NPs, is an accomplishment or an achievement; and combined with non-bounded NPs (*drank wine*) is again a state or an activity.

<sup>13</sup>Imperfectivity is not impossible but implicates a rather specific meaning.

Second, Vendler's classification is indeed nominally a quadripartition but it can equally well be used in a binary approach. It is common knowledge that Vendler's states and activities perfectly cover the notion of imperfectivity, and accomplishments and achievements precisely cover the notion of perfectivity.

Third, Verkuyl rejects Vendler's time schemata for being also "too Slavicist", where "Slavicist" stands for "an uncritical adoption of Vendler's quadripartition based on the notion of V and VP providing the aspectual value, not the sentence" (Verkuyl 1999, p. 113), see also Verkuyl (2022, pp. 1–9). My opinion differs radically. I myself am equally an Anglicist and a Slavicist, and equally critical of the Slavicists' long-time (since 1971) ineptitude and refusal to deal properly with CA, and of the Anglicists' condescension towards VA – assuming it must be some by-product of CA, resulting in a failure to identify its nature.

At first sight, there seems to be only one step between Vendler's and Verkuyl's models. It appears tiny and consists in recognizing the contribution of the subject to the compositional buildup. But the history of linguistics *proved this step to be gigantic*, extremely difficult to make, a circumstance admitted by Verkuyl himself, in his confession that *it took him ten years to accomplish it* (Verkuyl 1999, p. vii). Furthermore, as already pointed out, and obviously for the same reason – the difficulty to grasp the difference between VP- and S-level aspect, the literature continues to abound in publications persistently regarding CA not as S-based but as VP-based. In other words, Verkuyl's discovery of CA and his theoretical model are accepted as valid but at the same time drastically misconceptualized (Kabakčiev 2019, pp. 212–218). Verkuyl's vision of aspect in these publications is thus *illegitimately reduced to Vendler's*: aspect composed solely within the VP, not at the S-level. On the one hand, this has nothing to do with Verkuyl's unfair treatment of Vendler's model. On the other, the reason for the existence of vast numbers of publications incapable of making the step from VP- to S-level aspect might perhaps also be sought in *Verkuyl's own failure* to fully convince the aspectological community in the correctness of his S-level approach.

#### *Incomplete or Partly Inadequate Explanation of Temporal Adverbials*

Of course, Verkuyl (2022, pp. 196–209) deals with this issue, already banal in aspectology, of *in-time* and *for-time* adverbials, labeling them durational. This is a misnomer, in my opinion. Neither *in-time*, nor *for-time* phrases are durational adverbials. He could have called them temporal adverbials. But the term temporal would also be inappropriate, given that Verkuyl (2022) is focused on an extremely narrow meaning of the word temporal, namely "tensed".

Why are *in-time* and *for-time* adverbials not durational? *In-time* adverbials are not durational because the main thing they signify is not duration but the time needed for an eventuality to, first, effectuate itself, second, to end in an achieved telos. Recall that the term durational is related to Verkuyl's older term durative that he still uses but has – correctly – replaced it by "imperfective" in most (but not all) of his recent publications.

*For-time* adverbials are not durational for a number of reasons. First and foremost, they are not at all "imperfective" – recall that Verkuyl equals durational and



imperfective. *For*-time adverbials do not impart imperfectivity to the phrase or clause or sentence they are complemented to. Compare (18a–b):

- (18) a. The neighbor drank beer.  
 b. The neighbor drank beer when he was younger.  
 c. The neighbor drank beer for ten years.  
 d. The neighbor drank the beer for ten days [here *the beer* is a keg of beer].

Sentence (18a) is imperfective, featuring an NP leak; (18b) is also imperfective, because *when he was younger* does not bound the relevant interval; *drank beer* remains an imperfective phrase. However, given that (18a) is imperfective, the “durational adverbial” (wrongly called so) *for ten years* in (18c) ought to make it either more durative or imperfective – should this somehow be possible. Or at least it ought to maintain the imperfectivity of (18a). Does it? Not at all! Precisely on the contrary, *for ten years* when complemented to (18a) makes the sentence quasi-perfective, explicating a Vendlerian situation termed episode (Kabakčiev 2019, Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021). The episode stands between Vendler’s imperfective situations state and activity and his perfective situations accomplishment and achievement. It represents a state or an activity that has been terminated (18c) or an accomplishment that is again terminated, but has not achieved its telos (18d).

Apart from “durational”, Verkuyl (2022, pp. 197–199) calls *for*-time adverbials “duration-measuring”. This makes more sense than “durational” but still does not match the essence of these adverbials and fails to differentiate them from *in*-time adverbials. Verkuyl (2022, p. 198) goes on to say, surprisingly, that “the *for*-adverbial in sentences such as *Mary walked for three hours* [...] operates on the VP”. This means that it does not operate on the subject, which reconfirms his refusal to accept NP-V/V-NP mapping as *the only adequate way* to explain CA vis-à-vis VA. Due to the presence of a single situation-participant NP, here it is actually very easy to explain the mapping. Even in traditional-grammar terms, the meaning of *for three hours* can be seen as mapped onto the meaning of the verb (*walked*). But traditional grammar stops here. With respect to the issue how *Mary* should relate to *walked for three hours* it is helpless. Conversely, the mapping mechanism launched in Kabakčiev (1984), later sophisticated (Kabakčiev 2000, 2019), has no problem in solving the issue. *Mary* is not a physical/material entity. *Mary* is a temporal entity, a one-off instantiation of the “ordinary individual *Mary*”, and this entity *Mary* exists, so to say, *for three hours*. Prior to and after the three hours, *Mary* also exists, but no longer as a one-off instantiation in time. And why does *Mary* have an extension of *three hours*? Because this is the value of the VP *walked for three hours*, and this value is mapped from the VP-referent onto *Mary*. As already established (Kabakčiev 2019, p. 212), aspect as a universal, cross-language phenomenon, constitutes

*an all-pervading and perpetual process of mapping temporal features between different elements of the sentence, mainly NPs and verbs –*

and it does not matter whether aspect is verbal or compositional.

*The Aspecto-Temporal Aorist-Imperfect Contrast in Terms of the Slavic-Germanic Aspect Difference*

There is a consensus in linguistics that, apart from the purely aspectual perfective-imperfective distinction, aspect also comes in the form of the aspecto-temporal aorist-imperfect hybrid contrast. Analyzing the French Passé simple, Verkuyl (2022, p. 239) finds that its analysis “is incompatible with the compositional approach”. Soon after that, his analysis of my Bulgarian sentences (19a–b) with perfective and imperfective aorists (Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 7–8) comes to the conclusion that “the plus-principle does not work for aorist tense forms” (Verkuyl 2022, p. 245) – to confirm a hypothesis that the aspecto-temporal grammemes aorist and imperfect also fail to match the two schemata:

- (19) a. Deteto izyade<sub>PfvAor</sub> yabalkata.  
 Child-the ate apple-the ‘The child ate the apple’  
 b. Deteto yade<sub>ImpfvAor</sub> yabalkata.  
 Child-the ate apple-the  
 ‘The child ate the apple’ [as if with a *for*-time adverbial]  
 c. Deteto yadeše<sub>ImpfvImp</sub> yabalkata.  
 Child-the ate apple-the  
 ‘The child ate the apple [habitually or in the progressive meaning]’

It is common knowledge that the Bulgarian perfective aorist covers the Slavic perfective past. Therefore, as noted by Verkuyl (2022, p. 243), it is the semantics of the imperfective aorist that could be regarded as problematic. However, as the imperfective aorist matches the semantics of *for*-time adverbials (see above), it is no riddle at all. In Bulgarian it is a residual product of the occurrence (at some point in the language development) of the imperfect, which serves to eliminate the boundedness triggered in sentences like (19c) by the definite article (Kabakčiev 1984). The English progressive executes the same function, described long ago (Kabakčiev 2000, pp. 168–180), namely, to eliminate the NP-boundedness of situation participants triggered by the article in sentences such as *A/the kid ate a/the fig*. Similarly, the Greek imperfect also, formed from imperfective verbs only, serves to eliminate the NP-boundedness of situation participants triggered by the definite article (Dimitrova and Kabakčiev 2021).

**On the Massive Misunderstanding of the Quintessence of CA**

There are hundreds of publications, impossible to inventorize, in which Verkuyl’s model of CA is held to be valid, on the one hand. But, on the other, researchers in most cases completely fail to grasp the CA-VA difference. Two major examples of this misunderstanding are Borer (2005) and Borik (2006). They insist almost in one voice that there is “violability” in Verkuyl’s generalization

when it is applied not to Dutch/English but to Slavic or similar VA languages. They fail to realize that Slavic are not CA- but VA-languages, yet ultimately CA and VA are manifestations of *the same universal phenomenon* – and are *mirror images* of each other. See Borer’s and Borik’s inadequate treatment of “Verkuyl’s generalization” in Kabakčiev (2019, pp. 212–214).

Misunderstanding of CA is also demonstrated in numerous other recent and less recent publications belonging to the so-called incremental-theme trend (Krifka 1989, 1992, 1998, Filip 2000, 2017, Padučeva 2004, MacDonald 2012, Tatevosov 2015, Czardybon and Fleischhauer 2014, Fleischhauer and Czardybon 2016, Martin et al. 2020). Failing to conceptualize the hallmark of Verkuyl’s theory, that the CA-domain is the sentence, something distinguishing it from Vendler’s conception that VP is where aspect resides, the advocates of the incremental-theme approach flaunt an idea appropriate for a fairy-tale. In sentences such as (20a) they claim that the spatially bounded entity *the apple* performs a Cinderella-like metamorphosis, jumping from a physical feature – of the apple, into a temporal one – of the verb. They insist that there even exists “a science called mereology” explaining the Cinderella-like transfiguration. When the entity *the apple* is consumed to the end, its spatial feature boundedness, marked by the article (vs the zero article), is mapped onto the V-referent and this spatial feature miraculously turns into a temporal one there – temporal boundedness with an achieved telos (perfectivity). The fairy-tale metamorphosis is perfectly articulated by Padučeva (2004, p. 50): “the boundedness of a situation in time arises on account of the boundedness of the incremental object in space”. The proponents of this idea, conceptualizing aspect as located in the VP, demonstrate lack of understanding of Verkuyl’s fundamental postulate: that CA is an S-level phenomenon. If they had this understanding, they would have guessed that there are sentences in which perfective phrases like *ate the apple* can easily be coerced into imperfectivity (20b), cf.:

- (20) a. The child ate the apple.  
b. Ants ate the apple on the floor incessantly.

In (20b) this temporal non-boundedness, mapped onto the V-referent by the subject-referent is then mapped from the V-referent onto the initially perfective phrase *ate the apple*, coercing it into imperfectivity. Hence *the apple* becomes a temporal entity, a recurrent kinetic object with no start- and end-point in time, which makes it radically different from *the apple* in (20a), where it is a temporal entity with a definite start-point (when the eating begins) and a definite end-point (when the eating ends). Note also that in (20b) the apple is, as it were, never finished: ants cannot eat a whole apple with the skin. See criticism of this popular yet incongruous fairy-tale explanation, upheld in numerous articles belonging to the so-called incremental-theme trend, in Kabakčiev (2018, 2019, pp. 214–218). What is more, the faulty explanation bypasses the following honest admission by an advocate of the incremental-theme trend (Krifka 1992, p. 44):

*Take as an example the reading of a book; every part of the book corresponds to a part of the reading and vice versa. With other thematic relations, these properties normally do not obtain; for example, there is no correspondence between parts of the person that is reading and the reading event.*

Aspect is realized at the S-level – with no exception at all, and the impact of the subject is described fully consistently in Verkuyl (2022, p. 125) and throughout his decades of research (Verkuyl 1993, p. 23, 1972, p. 104), with examples such as (21)–(23):

- (21) a. Policemen walked from the Mint to the Dam.  
b. Greetje walked from the Mint to the Dam.
- (22) a. For months patients here died of jaundice.  
b. These two patients died of jaundice.
- (23) a. Bombs exploded everywhere in town.  
b. The bomb exploded.

The (a) sentences are imperfective. Non-boundedness, explicated by the zero article, is mapped onto the V-referent – coercing it from aspectual ambivalence into imperfectivity. Sentences (b) are perfective. Boundedness, explicated by an article, a demonstrative (*these*) or a proper name (*Greetje*), is mapped onto the verb coercing it from aspectual ambivalence into perfectivity. Sentence (23a) explicates imperfectivity for the following reason. The referent of the NP *bombs* is interpreted by speaker/hearer as a non-bounded temporal series of occurrences with no definite start- and end-point – bomb explosions, and *not a set of bombs*, physical objects located somewhere in space. Conversely, (23b) explicates perfectivity, because *bomb* is interpreted by speaker/hearer as a bounded occurrence, a bomb explosion – not a bomb as a physical object located somewhere in space.

The failure to properly conceptualize CA is reflected in the way of handling the illustrative material in hundreds of publications. Examples are used predominantly with subjects represented by proper names and pronouns, almost never with zero-article situation-participant NPs – that can show the role of the subject. Contrary to the massive unawareness in numerous articles and monographs of the fundamental CA regularities, two recent papers subscribing to Verkuyl's theory (Bulatović 2020, 2022) not only demonstrate perfect understanding of it, they pour devastating criticism onto English grammars and the global system of teaching English for their lack of knowledge of CA and the article-aspect interplay. But Verkuyl himself, strangely, sidesteps these grave omissions in grammars. This may have to do with humbleness or indisposition to declare the status of CA. Therefore, let me spell it out for him. CA is not “gaining ground”. It is a breakthrough in linguistics, recognized long ago (Kabakčiev 1984).

## Prospects for the CA Theory

Along with Leiss' (2000) diachronic theory of the birth of a definite article (and later an indefinite one) in the history of the Germanic languages triggered by the demise of VA, the CA theory has already been employed for clarifying serious issues in the development of English through the centuries, related to the *raison d'être* of the article, its previous absence and its emergence between Late Old English and Early Middle English (Kabakčiev 2021b). With the conception of aspect as an all-pervading and perpetual process of mapping temporal features between sentence elements (Kabakčiev 2019, p. 212), it can provide a definitive explanation of aspect in *any* natural language – both synchronically and diachronically.

Verkuyl's and similar models of CA – properly architected and applied, can radically change grammars of English and other languages, even of VA languages.<sup>14</sup> Bulatović (2020, 2022) argues that while CA and the article-aspect interplay have been banal topics in theoretical linguistics for decades after the discovery of CA, they are still a sad *terra incognita* in English language teaching, despite the immense significance of this language for world communication. The two phenomena are not simply valid, she argues. They are so hugely important that they must be taught not only to speakers of VA languages, they must be taught *to all learners of English*, including native speakers.

## Conclusion

Verkuyl's latest book crowns his "oeuvre" spanning a period of some six decades of creative insight, represented by several monographs and countless papers. Despite certain mistakes, faults and the limitations of an approach heavily relying on bizarre concepts of formal logic and philosophy, some of them distanced from natural language reality, Verkuyl's enterprise marks a new era in modern linguistics, allowing such cross-language and universal generalizations to be made – not always from his own perspective – that were unthinkable and unimaginable earlier. Today and in the foreseeable future it remains to be recognized by the world linguistic community that, despite an analysis too heavily based on Dutch and English, despite a failure to identify the essence of Slavic aspect and VA in general, despite flaws due to the specificity of formal logic, despite contradictions in semantic descriptions of certain sentence types, despite a rigid approach disallowing non-prototypical aspectual meanings of sentences belonging to either of the two schemata, despite some other mistakes and omissions,

*it undoubtedly takes nothing short of a genius to be able to see – through the thick curtain of innumerable, intricate and controversial data in numerous domains – the system of explicating perfectivity and imperfectivity in non-VA languages.*

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<sup>14</sup>VA languages feature CA, albeit peripherally (Dimitrova 2021, Kabakčiev 2021a).

Verkuyl managed to capture mentally and conceptualize in depth the monstrously complex system of CA, something no one had ever planned to do, let alone managed, something earlier thought impossible to achieve, something still misunderstood by most linguists. He crafted with precision two almost faultless aspectual semantico-syntactic schemata for CA languages that – with some modifications – are applicable to VA languages as well, which ultimately means universally, for all languages, with no exception at all. Verkuyl's aspectual schemata will go down in history as benchmarks in linguistics together with Vendler's (and his colleagues') time schemata, with Verkuyl's theoretical model on a higher footing, due to the identification of the operation of CA at the S-level and the incorporation into the model of the impact of the subject and the precise contribution of the semantics of the verb.

It remains for the linguistic community to live up to this epochal achievement by carrying out a reform in aspectology – because the CA theory remains severely misconceptualized. It needs to be understood properly, certain modifications and improvements must be introduced in it and incorporated into the existing models for carrying out future successful studies of the intriguing phenomenon of aspect – whether in verbal or compositional disguise.

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