

CROSS-CULTURAL P E R S P E C T I V E S

in Literature and Language

Joanna Stolarek and Jarosław Wiliński
(Editors)



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The United States – A Nation of Immigrants: Multicul-
turalism and the American Democracy

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“The years are coming up fast behind us”: Representations of the Elderly Characters in Three Plays by Naomi Wallace

Abstract

The paper examines the portrayal of the elderly characters in the selected plays by Naomi Wallace. Content analysis of the play suggests that the elderly characters in *Slaughter City*, *One Flea Spare*, and *The Inland Sea* frequently address their pasts forming a network of life review narratives. The intergenerational relations establish the jumping-off base for the construction of late adulthood imagery in the analyzed plays. According to a Jungian psychoanalytic viewpoint, the ambivalent archetype of the senex is encoded in the characters of Sausage Man (*Slaughter City*) and Leafearer (*The Inland Sea*). The most prominent older adults in the discussed plays are female dramatis personae who subvert age segregation, i.e. Darcy (*One Flea Spare*) and Helen (*The Inland Sea*). Unlike women, elderly male characters evoke despair and anxiety. Once powerful William Snelgrave (*One Flea Spare*) and Leafearer (*The Inland Sea*) lose their authority in their old age and become unable to adapt to current changes. Old age in Naomi Wallace's dramas is represented as “Other” and simultaneously inherent in the broader age continuum subverting ageist gerontophobia.

Keywords: Naomi Wallace, late adulthood, *Slaughter City*, *One Flea Spare*, *The Inland Sea*, senex, sexuality, aging

1. Introduction

The theatre of Naomi Wallace “gives form to, and foregrounds, Otherness” (Cousin, 1996, p. 2). Wallace introduces “Otherness” into plots, characters, and language of her plays, developing a new mythology in contemporary drama. Magic realism in *Slaughter City* and *The Inland Sea* is spurred more by historical background than classical and archaic myths. One should mention that the Morse’s visions narrated in monologues from *One Flea Spare* belong to the same category of magic realism. The US woman dramatist revises and redefines facts of both distant and recent past. A political playwright and poet, in her plays (even those with British settings), Naomi Wallace largely relies on her American experience. Obscure historical events are transformed into a daring “Other” reality, with the elderly characters subverting regular stereotypes. The middle-aged protagonist of *The Inland Sea* closes the drama with the line quoted in the present paper’s title, expressing anxiety of aging, which steadily developed during the last century. The representations of aging in fiction, and particularly in drama, have become more frequent in recent times, although a number of contemporary writers put their elderly characters at the center of their fiction.

Wallace explores aging indirectly. The aged dramatis personae in *Slaughter City*, *One Flea Spare*, and *The Inland Sea* are not protagonists. Yet, their representations reveal understudied politics of the late adulthood in fiction, such as transgressed ambivalent imagery of wisdom and (destructive) power under the guise of an archetype of the old man; life review narratives; failed strategies of adaptation to old age among aged male characters; sexuality of the elderly female characters. The common denominator of the representations of older adults in Wallace’s plays is the intergenerational relationship. As in the US context youth culture is greatly emphasized, so old age is best considered in relation to youth discourses. The goals of the present paper are to identify the gerontological markers in the literary portraits of the fictitious older adults in Wallace’s three plays; to detect dramatis personae’s strategies of adaptation to the late adulthood; and to study sexuality of the elderly characters. As Gullette

(2004) notices, "an age consists of no uniform set of age-associated behaviors" (p. 172). Taking into account the tenet of literary gerontology and offering diverse approaches to the old age analysis, the paper employs various strategies to scrutinize late adulthood in the selected plays.

2. *Slaughter City* (1996)

In her play *Slaughter City*, Naomi Wallace mixes reality and dream, the radical and the mystic depiction of a drama about life in the meat-packing industry. *Slaughter City*, modeled after the actual Meat Packing Company of Kentucky, is set by author's definition "now and then." The chronotype is indefinite: the place is constructed as "the feeling... of the intensity of industrial labor here on earth and perhaps also in hell" (Wallace, 2001, p. 204) with temporal shifts. The preoccupation with aging is manifested in the epigraph excerpt from the Brechtian poem "To Those Born Later." Its repeating refrain: "So the time passed away / Which on earth was given me" (p. 202) underlies the velocity of time. The play has a two-tier structure: while the main naturalistic plot depicts the real experience of Louisville beef-boners, the surreal subplot represents symbolic characters of an adversary Sausage Man and a hermaphrodite Cod. The protagonist found in the exposition of the play as a male and a scab, Cod gradually shows the hidden gender of a female and the soul of a Wobbly. Cod is a generalized character, an embodiment of humankind entering "the eternal night of extinction," "the ultimate loneliness" (p. 208).

In the main plot line, the audience is exposed to the relations of the workers – two middle-aged women, Roach and Maggot, and Brandon, in his early twenties. They discuss their personal and political troubles, sometimes in anger they even attack the pigs' heads with fingers and knives and each other with cruel words. The drama title implies cruelty of not only the meat-processing plant industry, but also the whole country, if not the world.

Most interest in terms of literary gerontology is generated by the figure of Sausage Man, "a white man, energetic, somewhat elderly"

(Wallace, 2001, p. 201). Taking into account demonic implications of the character, it is reasonable to approach Sausage Man by applying the archetypes framework – “psychic system of collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals” (Jung, 1981, p. 43).

The first reference to Sausage Man reveals the nature of his character: “The guy with a sausage grinder, old hand-held thing. Nasty” (Wallace, 2001, p. 208). The character makes his appearance in scene six, devoted exclusively to his monologue. With a light German accent, Sausage Man narrates his life in America. He construes a portrait of a self-made businessperson who built the sausage empire from nothing. Apart from the fact that Sausage Man must be approximately two hundred years old, the monologue manifests the elderly man’s complaint: he feeds people with ingratitude from those whom he feeds.

But I still grind and grind. I fill the skins with meat. I make it fun to be hungry. (*Grinds his grinder faster*) Ah, what a sound. The sound of hundreds, thousands of sausages filling up the empty spaces in the world. Sausages filling up the empty spaces in our very souls. I love that sound. Like the world in my hands. Like the world going to pieces in my hands. (Wallace, 2001, p. 217)

There is a temptation to ascribe to Sausage Man the traits indicative of the archetype of the wise old man. Jung (1981) argues that the archetype of the wise old man “can be directly experienced in personified form” (p. 37). Having both positive and negative aspects, this archetype “symbolizes the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life” (p. 35). Yet the Swiss psychologist advises to scrutinize the context with care whenever the archetype appears for heuristic and other reasons (p. 227). The archetype of the old man in Slaughter City represents the life-bringer (feeding people with his sausages) as well as death-dealer – in the final line of his monologue, Sausage Man talks about destructive intentions. From the historical perspective, sausages have positive implications, “once viewed as gifts or symbols of [...] the Mighty Father,” according to *The Lost*

Language of Symbolism (Bayley, 2007, p. 92). In the current context, the metaphor of sausage/meat grinder is interpreted as a meaningless genocide or a system that may have devastating consequences. The duality of the archetypal old man is justified by Jungian ruminations. Bringing Merlin as an example, the psychologist assumes the wicked elfin aspect of the wise old man (Jung, 1981, p. 227). Sausage Man represents a universal image, "(the obscure being who cut himself) [that] yields within the frame of the world dual effects – good and evil" (Campbell, 2004, p. 272). However, the evil aspect of the old man in *Slaughter City* decreases due to the ageist remarks of other characters. During the tour around the packing plant, Sausage Man delves into the reminiscence of old times, articulating sadness and frustration with the current state of affairs:

SAUSAGE MAN: I'm troubled. Deeply troubled. Too much talk and idleness. Kid gloves, cowardly tactics. Not how we used to do it. Those times then are here, now. I know the rules. I can say yes, no, stay, go. Open, close and fire! And this Company? Ah, if I had ulcers, they'd be the size of oranges by now. (Wallace, 2001, p. 220)

The company manager Baquin's response is biased, at the least: "I think you're a bit out of date" (Wallace, 2001, p. 220); "Ah, the muddled old School. Never get a business off the ground these days" (p. 221). Unlike in typical old people's discourse with positive focus on the past and negation of the present, Sausage Man links two temporal dimensions with a brisk riposte: "Out of date? I'm your future" (p. 220). Further development of the plot manifests this self-confident statement of the character. A catalyst of two deaths, the old man personifies Thanatos himself: "*Sausage Man slowly walks across the stage. Only Cod sees him. Sausage Man kneels beside Brandon, removes the knife, and gently blows into Brandon's neck as though blowing out a candle. Brandon is dead*" (p. 263).

Even more terrible death happens to manager Baquin in the penultimate scene of the play: the manager complains of the illegal strike whereas Sausage Man makes up his mind to take things back

in his hands. The scene is surreal, it implies the process of dismemberment and transgression, cf.:

SAUSAGE MAN: Shhh. I can see it's time. Time for some new blood. Would you like some grass?

(Sausage Man pulls some grass from his pocket and holds it out to Baquin. He also reveals a cattle prod, which he's been hiding behind his back.)

BAQUIN: It's not my fault. That mob in there are tearing me limb from limb. They're cutting me to pieces. They're frying my bacon. The whole industry is being grilled to hell.

SAUSAGE MAN: It's fresh grass. I picked it myself.

(Baquin sniffs the grass. Suddenly, he chomps at it, chews hungrily.)

That's it. That's it. Yes. They've been cutting you to pieces. I can see that. Into little tiny pieces that are so small no one will have any use for them. No one but me.

BAQUIN: Stay away from me.

SAUSAGE MAN: I can turn you into something useful.

BAQUIN: No, thank you. I'm not in the moooooooooooooooooooooo.

(Wallace, 2001, p. 270)

The following nonverbal action demonstrates the manager's inability to speak human language and his further transformation into the animal. In the denouement, Sausage Man enters with Baquin's tie hanging from his grinder. Sausage Man's gerontological markers best correlate with Jungian definition of the senex:

Although the old man has, up to now, looked and behaved more or less like a human being, his magical power and his spiritual superiority suggests that, good and bad alike, he is outside, or above, or below the human level. (Jung, 1981, p. 230)

Yet, Sausage Man is fully represented in relation to middle-aged Cod. Cod is a crucial counterpart of Sausage Man – they cannot exist without each other (if Cod is an embodiment of working class, Sausage Man personifies capitalist exploitation). Huff (2011) argues

that Sausage Man and Cod "seem to inhabit a type of liminal twilight, capable of appearing in the past and the present" (p. 59). Cod's story takes place in the distant past via flashbacks, which start and end the dramatic action. There is a young pregnant Textile Worker, Cod's mother. Because of fire on the premises, Textile Worker jumps out of the window. Saving the life of her child, Textile Worker exchanges promises with Sausage Man, who is like the archetypal old man who "always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation" (Jung, 1981, p. 217). For the sake of her child's lie, Textile Worker accepts Cod's immortality. Thus, one can conclude that Wallace regards the eternal life, although so desirable, a curse. According to Jung, the old magician corresponds "to the negative parental imago in the magic world of the unconscious" (p. 235).

In his introduction to the performance of *Slaughter City*, Lester (2012) argues that it is "a play of magic realism, steeped in enigmatic symbolism and small miracles which stand as oases in a wasteland of gore and decay" (n.d.). All things considered, old age is personified by the ambivalent character of Sausage Man, both life-bringer and death-dealer in the play. Following the Jungian psychoanalytic viewpoint, Wallace's main character establishes the transgressed ambivalent imagery of wisdom and (destructive) power under the guise of an archetype of the old man. Sausage Man's reminiscences are detected as salient gerontological markers in the construction of old age. The intergenerational relationship of Sausage Man with middle-aged Cod constitutes the meaning of the elderly character's existence.

3. *One Flea Spare* (1997)

Spurred by the Los Angeles riots of 1992, the plot of the following drama, *One Flea Spare*, provokes the questions of class and body. A year earlier, four officers were filmed by a citizen while beating an African American, Rodney King. Because the jury found them not guilty, numerous incidents of riots, arson, and looting would take place. Tweaking the events of the L.A. riots in her drama, Wallace also revises Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, drawing

parallels between the events. The racial conflict that stirred the American west coast is transformed in *One Flew Spare* into a succinct matter of class. Woman playwright creates a myth of class transformation and self-elevation in her characters.

The action takes place in 17th century London during the plague, in two rooms of the comfortable house owned by a wealthy elderly couple – the Snelgraves. The owners are quarantined for about a month due to the independent intrusion of uninvited guests – teenage Morse and a middle-aged sailor, Bunce. In the course of the play, the characters change their roles and statuses. Almost at the beginning of Act Two, Darcy and Morse tie Snelgrave in a chair. There begins an intimate relationship between Darcy and Bunce. Snelgrave dies, still tied to his chair. Feeling the first tokens of the plague, helped by Morse, Darcy drives the knife into her own heart in the denouement.

The exposition scene opens with Morse's monologue:

Whose blood is on your sleeve? ... The blood of a fish. Is on my sleeve. Because ... We all went to sleep one morning and when we awoke the whole city was aglow with the fever. Sparrows fell dead from the sky into the hands of beggars. Dogs walked in the robes of dying men, slipped into the beds of their dead masters' wives. Children were born with the beards of old men. (Wallace, 1997, pp. 1–2)

In the teenager's apocalyptic narrative, the word becomes an image; repetition of such words as blood or men contains the idea of memorizing. In the final line, the age role reversal is chimerically enacted. Built on the visual orientation, the plague description is represented by an alternative vision of the past. Barnett (2002) argues that Wallace's imagery reconceptualizes not only "the potential change within each person, but also the essential changes among groups. Her plague affects the whole society" (p. 158).

Wallace's imagery of late adulthood is constructed in opposition to and in interaction with the representations of youth. One of the productive outcomes of such relations is the May–December

romance born between 54-year-old Darcy and Bunce, who is in his late twenties. It should be mentioned that passions and commitments of elderly women protagonists, the so called female young old age, are amply produced by what Waxman (1990) defines as *Reifungsromane* – contemporary novels of ripening. In drama, the sexual portrayals of aging female characters are underrepresented. The background of such a disregard in the history of literature is provided by King’s (2013) feminist study:

Relationships between older women and younger men subvert patriarchal power relations between the sexes, in which the male’s greater age reinforces his position of dominance. To neutralize such threats, the older woman must be ridiculed, or demonized, and the relationship must prove a failure. (p. 147)

With the advent of social changes, the representations of the female later in life acquire positive associations in fiction. Darcy Snelgrave is a character of a new literary discourse, which subverts prejudice toward the elderly. The portrayal of the young old woman is complex. On the surface the wife of an affluent husband, Darcy speaks in moralistic proverbs and denies forms of sexuality disapproved by the Church. In frank conversation with Bunce, Darcy finds it uneasy to accept the sailor’s bisexuality:

DARCY: You speak against God.

BUNCE: I’m speaking of God’s pleasure. (Wallace, 1997, p. 26)

Neither is it easy for Darcy to verbalize her own hidden sexuality: “she touches her own thighs. Not in a seductive manner, but as though she can’t bring herself to say the word out loud” (Wallace, 1997, p. 27). Yet, Bunce turns out to be a catalyst in revealing the elderly lady’s intimacy. His presence brings forth recollections of Darcy’s past:

I once had a lover, and his arms were so strong that my skull was crushed in his grip. With his bare hands he plunged between my

ribs and took hold of my heart. A wafer between his fingers, it dissolved. (p. 28)

This poetic reminiscence can be regarded as a life review, evoking corporeal self-actualization. A sort of entertaining narrative, this recollection also “serves the purpose of creating a ‘myth,’ a story that justifies a person’s life and is intended to be believed” (Coleman, 1990, p. 99). It is worth discussing the meaning of the title, which comprises an excerpt from John Donne’s poem “The Flea”:

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is. (John Donne, 1633)

In this poetic piece, a lover is depicted to be concerned with locating a human body within a network of a bigger universe. That is why a flea containing the blood of two lovers should be spared. Morse embodies the flea (Snelgraves directly refers to her as the flea), who connects the exposition and denouement of the drama, joining the microcosm of the Snelgraves’ residence and the outer world of plague.

The major secret to be exposed in the play is Darcy’s privacy: the elderly lady always wears gloves, dressed up from head to toe. There are two perspectives on an accident which took place 36 years ago. In William’s contrapuntal dry account, Darcy got burned saving her horse. In her turn, Darcy personifies the animal:

The dappled mare my father gave me broke out of her stall. Her mane was on fire. She kept leaping and rearing to shake it off but she couldn’t shake it off. The mare ran in circles around the garden. Faster and faster she ran, the fire eating its way to her coat. Her coat was wet, running with sweat, but that didn’t stop the fire from spreading out across her flanks. A horse on fire. In full gallop. It was almost. Beautiful. It would have been. Beautiful. But for the smell. (Wallace, 1997, pp. 32–33)

The mare turns out as a projection of Darcy's identity. Since the accident, Darcy and William have never lived as man and wife. Suspicious of Darcy's unfaithfulness, Snelgrave teases his wife and the sailor, whom he accepted as a servant in his house:

SNELGRAVE: Tell me, Bunce, what's her cunny like?

(BUNCE doesn't answer.)

SNELGRAVE: Bread that's left too long in the oven? ...

SNELGRAVE: I wouldn't expect much pleasure in return,
Bunce. She's an old woman. Her mouth stinks. ...

(Wallace 1997, p. 57).

SNELGRAVE: For years, the smoke rose out of her mouth as
she slept.

(Wallace, 1997, p. 59)

Darcy's burnt skin becomes a metaphor of her identity, tight and impenetrable outside and soft and tender underneath. On the one hand, Mrs. Snelgrave is as heartless and tight as her skin. Before their intimacy, Bunce calls Darcy by her first name, which makes the elderly lady angry, and she forbids him to call her like that. Bunce generalizes her class in a statement "you people always want to fuck your servants" (Wallace, 1997, p. 50).

On the other hand, the elderly lady is kind and caring – apart from scarifying her body to save the animal, she also rescues Morse from her husband and wraps bandages over Bunce's wound. Even after William Snelgrave's death, his wife remembers their relationship with warmth and love. Deprived of sex for 36 years, Darcy enjoys fear and pleasure when Bunce runs his hands along her arms, shoulders, neck, and the rest of her body. The older woman/younger man relationship encourages Darcy to reconceive her deserted self and distorted body as sensitive and desirable. Wallace's exploration of the aging female body disfigured by fire also proves Waxman's assertion that "love need not be banished from aging and ailing lives" (Wallace, 1990, p. 116).

Although in her late adulthood Darcy chooses an active strategy of adaptation to new circumstances, in the climax, the heroine

decides to end her life. From the point of view of geriatrics, elderly suicide is not spontaneous but rather planned for a long period of time (Worthington, n.d.). Being aware of her terminal disease, the character chooses dynamic death, a kind of “active euthanasia” (Santrock, 1999, p. 552). Besides, resolution in death, which has often been the distinguishing trait of the Southern US literature, “offers change as an ever-present possibility” (Barnett, 2002, p. 166).

Opposite Darcy, the elderly character of William is constructed in primarily negative overtones. Although his first and last names coincide with a historical figure from the 18th century (an English sea captain and a slave trader spared by the pirates for his kindness), the very character embodies stereotypical traits of a villain: arrogant, superior, uncompromising poltroon under the mask of an upper-class Londoner. The scene with the master-servant shoe exchange illustrates the class battle. Snelgrave allows Bunce to put on his fine leather shoes, commenting “[h]istorically speaking, the poor do not take to fine shoes. They never have and they never will” (Wallace, 1997, p. 21). Playing this game, Snelgrave is convinced of the power of his class. Even when the elderly character suggests that “the movement of history, which is inflexible as stone, can suddenly change” (p. 20), later, taking his shoes back, he declares, “history will be on course again. As a matter of fact, it never strayed from course...” (p. 21). By the end of the play the shoes belong to Bunce again: “Snelgrave’s ancient logic no longer applies to this world, at least not completely” (Barnett, 2002, p. 159).

However, the well-to-do elder manifests unexpected honesty under the guise of the fairy-tale playing with Morse. Even though Morse tries to rewrite the fire accident, Snelgrave confirms his cowardice towards his wife (after the fire he never embraced her). The elderly man’s death from being trapped within a socially “inferior” strata echoes Los Angeles events after the announcement of the Rodney King verdict, during which Parker Center was besieged by a large crowd of protestors. Likewise, William’s privileges could not protect him.

The Snelgraves share their memories in the course of the play, forming a network of random life review narratives. If William’s rec-

ollections are mainly of instructive and didactic nature, Darcy's are poetic and captivating. As the strategy of reminiscence helps older people achieve "integrity" (Coleman, 1990, p. 96), each character gains their sense of dignity and meaning. Both William and Darcy describe themselves as aged people, in an ageist manner. Darcy hides behind her years ("I'm just an old woman") in order to keep her secrets from strangers. In the illustrations mentioned earlier in the paper, the detected self-stereotypization becomes a form of defense.

As Barnett (2002) argues, "[t]he forces that exist in Wallace's somewhat fictionalized 1665 world are very much alive in our contemporary society – including divisiveness among class, gender wars, and the plague" (p. 155). Although similar divisiveness is detected among late adulthood/youth age groups, there are active and passive strategies of adaption to old age in *One Flea Spare*. Darcy Snelgrave manifests active dynamics of aging, subverting prejudice toward the elderly in establishing an intimate relationship with a much younger man. William Snelgrave embodies a failed strategy of adaption to late adulthood in negation of current changes. The elderly couple's discourse often contains reminiscences that hypothetically can stand for the life review narrative in the structure of drama. A limited number of the aged characters' lines are of ageist or self-stereotyped nature.

4. *The Inland Sea* (2002)

Wallace, the woman dramatist, continues to explore age i.e. in *The Inland Sea*. The drama set in the 18th century Britain follows the conventions of Naomi Wallace theatre. It suggests haunting images, sexuality, abuse, etc. The drama theme centers around historical innovations in the British landscape design, namely the intent to island the estate in a sea of lawn. The conflict focuses on the tenant-villagers, who protest against moving out so as not to obstruct the view from the grounds of the local lord. In the run of the play, the initial goal of reshaping the whole landscape fails and one of the main characters drowns in the flooding. The composition of the play is rather manifold, consisting of several episodic plots. In terms of

the genre, the text may be considered as a modern descendant of the morality play.

Borreca (2013) singles out two main plotlines in *The Inland Sea*, i.e. the love story of the landscape artist protagonist and the Leafeater's tale. There are two older adults in *The Inland Sea*, namely, Leafeater (aka Ash Puddock), in his late fifties, and villager Ellen, in her mid-fifties. Both are minor characters, yet each of them is equally important for their plot lines, and their destinies are intermingled. Leafeater opens the action, appearing as a digger. His Prologue role encodes the main message of the drama – the past is always in the present. With the request addressed to his haunted past to leave Leafeater alone, the digger sets the suspense. His further scenes are built as life review monologues. The bastard brother of the local lord, Leafeater had to become a gamekeeper and a sailor. His self-reference as “gentle youth” adds to the digger's gerontological portrait. Apart from monologue scenes, Leafeater participates in dialogues, which set the intergenerational interaction between late adulthood and other ages. Whereas in several scenes Leafeater interacts with “real” dramatis personae; in other episodes, the digger is depicted in the company of the specter of a young girl he had killed 15 years before. The digger's anxiety, prompted by landscape redesigning, bursts out in fits of violence (e.g., breaking shovels). As Everett (2011) notices,

The disturbance of the soil has turned up human bones – bones that hold the answer to a number of questions surrounding characters in the play. Leafeater pockets a skull, while Nutley the soldier continues collecting the bones they find, thinking that he hears them speak to him. Disturbing the remains of the dead is, as always, a really bad idea. The ghost of a young girl begins appearing in people's dreams (or broad daylight if they have a looser hold on reality). (Everett, 2011, “There's something dark...”)

While the bulk of Leafeater's narratives is coherent and meaningful, his monologue still holds an irrational motif, “like dancing at

the gallows," implying strong fear of revenge. Mysterious *It* chased Leafeater across his voyages:

And it never left me alone, no matter where I swam, and that's how it felt: swimming from colony to colony, bulging with spices and tea, with *It* gnawing down my neck, whispering sweet nibblings into my ear, hurrump hurrah hooray... And me always me swimming, swimming and *It* gnawing at my back. (Wallace, 2002, p. 26)

During interactions with other characters of *The Inland Sea*, Leafeater demonstrates signs of internal struggle. His efforts to communicate are interrupted by fits of fear and arrogant superiority. At the same time, the digger shows practical experience and wisdom expected at his age. Yet, Leafeater manages to threaten much younger men with his "evil green spirit." Predicting in detail his own death, which he saw in a dream, the digger complains of someone gnawing through his back to reach his heart. When other characters examine his body, they detect no signs of blood or trauma. The dramatic tension is achieved when Leafeater is left on his own with the dead girl. Again, the elderly man is torn with contradictory emotions – violence and empathy toward his victim. In the penultimate scene, the setting corresponds to the action. The landscape is ruined and flooded, and there is a lifeless form (a man trapped inside) caught in a broken tree-moving machine. The plot reaches its climax when Leafeater realizes that the dead man is him. Being the initiator of the accident (it was him who opened the sluice and released the river), the digger seems to have committed suicide. Only with the help of water could Leafeater wash the dirt off his face and his soul. The revenge takes place and justice is restored, which is indicative of the morality play.

Contemporary experts, like Gardner (2002) and Everett (2011) traditionally consider political and social parallels between the 18th century England and current America. Along with their public (macrocosmic) implications, it is noteworthy to address private (microcosmic) dimension inherent to all the époques in Western

civilization – i.e. mental health. Psychological studies argue that the quality of life in old age may be severely distorted by a mental disorder. Leaf eater seems to experience major depression, “a mood disorder in which the individual is deeply unhappy, demoralized, self-derogatory, and bored” (Santrock, 1999, p. 517). Although it is a common mental disorder, indicative of various ages, “major depression can result in not only sadness, but also suicidal tendencies” (p. 517). Gerontological portrayal of Leaf eater holds basic symptoms of major depression accompanied with the paranoid syndrome (persecution complex, alleged physical damage): the character is in poor and listless condition. Besides, the data on life-span development presume that “the older adult the most likely to commit suicide is a male who lives alone... and is experiencing failing health” (p. 518). Taking into account short life expectancy of the previous centuries, Wallace succeeds in constructing a convincing elderly character with salient and ambivalent traits. On the one hand, Leaf eater embodies the Shadow archetype, demonic personification of the Self. On the other hand, the digger personifies the senex or wise old man archetype, similar to Sausage Man in *Slaughter City*. The combination of both archetypes, the Leaf eater character produces “the Bifurcation of Self” (Pryhodii, 2008, p. 7), one of the common models in modern fiction. Curiously enough, the elderly digger never eats the leaves: he smells them, fingers them absent-mindedly. It is common knowledge that leaves represent fertility and growth; however, dead leaves are symbolic of decay and sadness. It bears mentioning the “official name” of the character, Ash Puddock, whose etymological definition stands for his inner self and his occupation: 1) ash is dust produced by fire; 2) puddock (Scottish for paddock) is an area to keep animals in. In terms of the archetypal analysis, Leaf eater is a transmogrified image of old Greek Tiresias, a blind old prophet. Suicide of the elderly man in *The Inland Sea* somehow parallels with the death of the mythological prophet, who drank water from a tainted spring.

Ellen, mother of the young girl killed by Leaf eater, embodies the woman senex. The widow appears for the first time when the villagers discuss the proposal to move their houses. She suggests that they

wait and see, thus demonstrating practical wisdom. Unlike with Leafeater, there is nothing contradictory in Ellen but her unhidden exuberant sexuality. In the conversation with her middle-aged daughter Hesp (the sister of Leafeater's victim), Ellen misbehaves verbally and nonverbally. The older woman uses erotic puns and a "piece of firewood as an erection" (Wallace, 2002, p. 19). Next, Ellen pokes her daughter with the wood from behind and produces kissing noises. Hesp is a widow, like her mother, and Ellen wants her not to miss her chance of finding a new partner. Ellen's story is tragic not only because she lost one of her daughters, but also because the woman lost her husband. Years ago, starvation and despair made the villager poach in the local lord's estate but he was caught by Leafeater, who then had the poacher hanged. The villager's younger daughter followed her father that night, and was bludgeoned by Leafeater to death. Meanwhile, Ellen wrongly believes that her husband and their daughter left for America. Her belief results in the letters she sends to various oversea addresses. Ellen asks a literate villager to write them; they constitute "erotically charged lyricism" (Cummings, 2013, p. 1) of the play. Calling her man either "My Dearest Piss Hole – Husband" or "My Darling Dumpling Husband," the elderly villager is quite straightforward in transferring her emotions:

The hair on my head is grey. Yours must be too... Is your hair grey on your pudding stick. ... I have not fucked another man in all this time... I know you probably have, but I don't care. You bastard. I want you under my skirt every night, I think about it still. Your tongue between my legs was so (*Beat.*) unforgivable and hard... Like the finger of God. (Wallace, 2002, pp. 33–34)

These excerpts and further references to the text of the play demonstrate the strong anti-ageist position of the playwright. The elderly widow character subverts the stereotypes indicative of Western civilization:

In the United States, however, there has been an erosion of the social foundations that once contributed to a sense of dignity and

meaning in the lives of our older citizens. We are a youth-worshipping society in which reverence for the wisdom of age has been replaced by awe for youth (Byer & Shainberg, 1994, p. 460).

Unfortunately, our society does not really expect older people to be interested in sex (Byer & Shainberg, 1994, p. 468).

The response of the literate villager (representative of the society) is refusal to record so intimate information. Another refusal to recognize sexuality of older people comes from Ellen's daughter. While planting potatoes, Hesp talks about her own private needs, accusing Ellen of "dryness" and of having a "husk" between her legs:

HESP: Each morning I wake my bed is wet. I'm still alive inside.

I could fill a mug a day from between my legs. That's how much.

ELLEN: Shut up.

HESP: That's how much I... Why can't you hope the best for me? You've no idea what it's like. I want...

Ellen grabs her daughter threateningly.

ELLEN: I've no idea? A husk? That what you think? Because

I'm old? For every mug you've filled, my daughter, I've filled a bucket. But I don't whine and squawk about it. I work.

I rake the fields. I make your home. Pphhh. You're not the first woman to go without. Won't be the last. Here.

She releases Hesp, slapping a potato into Hesp's hands.

Plug that between your legs and get to work.

Ellen goes back to work. Hesp stands holding the potato.

(Wallace, 2002, p. 54)

Unlike Leaf eater, Ellen chooses an active strategy of adaptation to her late adulthood as well as widowhood, being a model to follow for Hesp. Unlike male aging, female sexual expression endures the double standard in old age. Yet, Ellen's gerontological portrait busts the myth that the elderly are not interested in sex. The character embodies the assertion that older adults are "sexual beings in as valid a sense as are young people" (Byer & Shainberg 1994, p. 475).

It should be mentioned that the sex motif is strong among other characters, too:

There's a lot of frank talk about sex... But sex is commerce. Sex is about power. Sex is about class. Sex is how two people connect in the most direct way possible. So sex is just as much a part of radically changing the landscape in this play as anything else. It's just a shame for the characters in this case that sex is hardly ever about love. But that's one of the many elements that keeps things interesting in *The Inland Sea*. (Everett, 2011, "What will you leave behind?")

Although Everett is right speaking about other characters, the expert's assumption of loveless sex does not refer to Ellen. She replaces the physical loss of her partner with open (albeit one-sided) communication with him by means of letters. Apart from intimate expression, Ellen stands out as a brave and smart leader in her village. In the exposition scene, the elderly widow rebels against hired soldiers who compete with the villagers. Personifying the archetype of a wise old woman, Ellen suggests to tax the "rivals": "The lord taxes us, we'll tax the diggers. Not much, just a pinch at the end of each month" (Wallace, 2002, p. 30). In the denouement, she is the one who makes the decision not to move. In one of her interviews, Wallace declares that women characters in her plays break real and invisible laws: "They're resisting against the ways they've been taught to be as women" (Julian, 2004).

To conclude, the elderly characters in *The Inland Sea* bear the gerontological markers similar to those of the aged dramatis personae in *One Flea Spare*. The elderly widow chooses an active strategy of adaption to late adulthood. Unlike Ellen, Leafeater represents aging as decline. He embodies demonic personification of the wise old man archetype.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, in the discussed plays, Naomi Wallace elaborates dark crimes and haunting images from the past in a somewhat grotesque manner. The elderly characters in *Slaughter City*, *One Flea Spare*, and *The Inland Sea* frequently address their pasts, forming random life

review narratives. As Gullette (2004) writes, “Aging involves a narrative. Aging is a set of narratives” (p. 129). The elders in Wallace’s dramas review episodically their experiences. The revisions help the characters evaluate the significance of their current lives. Likewise, intergenerational relations establish the starting point for the construction of late adulthood imagery. There are repeating patterns of gerontological markers in each of the plays analyzed. The ambivalent archetype of senex is encoded in the characters of Sausage Man (*Slaughter City*) and Leaf eater (*The Inland Sea*). The most prominent agers are female dramatis personae who subvert age segregation; Darcy (*One Flea Spare*) and Helen (*The Inland Sea*) are active, dynamic and sexual older adults. Unlike women, the elderly male characters evoke despair and anxiety. Once powerful William Snelgrave (*One Flea Spare*) and Leaf eater (*The Inland Sea*) lose their authority in their old age and become unable to adapt to current changes. Suicidal ideations are considered by Darcy (*One Flea Spare*) and Leaf eater (*The Inland Sea*). Old age in Naomi Wallace’s dramas is represented as “Other” and it is simultaneously inherent in the broader age continuum, subverting ageist gerontophobia.

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