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Abstract

UNDERWORLDS IN DELILLO'S UNDERWORLD

After an introduction that briefly summarizes the persistence of representations of subterranean and underworlds, relevant connotations and frames of reference of some of these notions and their reinterpretation and re-contextualization, from Plato to Hillman, the paper analyzes the images and figures of the underworld in the eponymous Don DeLillo's novel, and with the underworld-connected motifs, known as katabasis (descent to the underworld) and nekylia (invocation of dead souls). Underworld in this novel is not only the eponym of the narrative or of the apocryphal attributed to the Russian film director Eisenstein, but topos, "hidden chronotope" (Bakhtin) and the symbol of the omnipresence of the other, hidden, repressed, secretive. It appears in countless versions and variations, at the individual, social, political, cultural, and national level ... of the represented world and is, also, transmitted into the structure of the novel, becoming part of its formal organization and figure of several narrative strategies, such as the descending-ascending chronology, inserted "black" story, and so on.

Some of the details and elements analysed are as follows: Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* with its Hell entrance and Hoover's projections from the picture into the world and vice versa, an act echoed in the Sister Edgar's vision of open Hell and the old dead entering the world; analogy between Bruegel's pictorial and DeLillo's diegetic space; allusions and references to T. S. Eliot's "Hollow Men" and "The Waste Land" and to Odysseus's summoning of the dead at the beginning of the first chapter, in the desert, after a temporal ellipse that suggests Biblical forty years of temptation, expiation and redemption, which are also "forty years of underground" lived by Dostoyevsky's underground hero, and so on. Intertextual aspects of DeLillo's evocations of the atmosphere of the underworld and unessential, dreamlike, hollow and image or idol-like existence, as the life of the dead is represented in Homer and Virgil, and is specifically stressed, so as the coincidence of Nick's and novel's motifs for re-memory, counter-narrative and re-enactment of the past with Odysseus personal and Aeneas' national and constitutional motifs for going under world and looking for his mother or father, respectively. Some of the parallels between Oedipa Maas' experiences "among the shadows" in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and the experiences of DeLillo's characters are found to be heuristically important, too.

Allusions to the symbols, figures, typical scenes and topography of many different representations of the underworld, including not only ancient Greeks and Romans, but Egyptian and Tibetan books of the dead, too, and the nature of being there are found at the different levels of the novel, in its content, as in its structure and form. For example, the novel is segmented in nine parts – six chapters, prologue, epilogue and tripartite story Manx Martin, story marked by the black pages running through the rest of the novel like a black river – which is the number of Hell circles in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the number of circles of the hellish river Styx surrounding Virgil's underworld. The narrative is organized according to the *myse en abyme* technique – inverted chronology of the main six chapters, in its meaning and its scopes similar to the graphically marked descent of lyrical subject of William Carlos Williams' "Descent", functions as a kind of a temporal underworld embedded in the frame made of the prologue and the epilogue; in the middle of it there is an apocryphal "Unterwelt" in the middle of which is an episode from the double underground – socio-cultural underground of minority gay anarchist graffiti artist and physical underground rail.

Relationships between the everyday life of a lot of very different characters and the official history of the period are also represented as the ambivalent and ambiguous contacts and communications between the ground and the underground, the world(s) and the underworld(s) but the question concerning their mutual insideness / outsideness remains unresolved and indecisive, suggesting coincidence of their complicity and their antagonism. Every underworld and underground is both the mimicry and the parody of the official institutions and their structures of organisation and administration, and every official institution is simultaneously secretive and underground. There are many minor underworlds in the novel and every one of them is a kind of the waste and a way of waste management, not

only dumps as the manifest monuments of death and use, but the subways communities, slums, graffiti group members, governmental scientific operations in the desert, financial currents, and so on. So many essentially dystopic underworlds in the psyche, society, culture, economy... produce the effect of the omnipresence and, simultaneously, of the fleeting and floating borders and frontiers pushing the narrative always toward the edges and voids.

As the inter-zones always struggling to get detached from the socio-political and economic circumstances that have produced and determined them, DeLillo's underworlds are not just the ubiquitous points of surfaces' fissures and fractures but, also, the affirmations of quest for always new liminal positions which subvert and disable monologist and uniform point of view.

Key words: Underworld, *underworld*, *underground*, *Hades* (Haidēs), *katabasis*, *death*, *memory*.