

**THE LABYRINTHINE SPACE AS REFLECTED IN PHILIP RIDLEY'S
PLAY *MERCURY FUR***

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Abstract

This study focuses on Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* (2005), a play which explores various meanings related to a physical labyrinth, memory as a maze, mirror/glass as a labyrinth, etc. The present study aims to disclose primarily the significance of the physical labyrinth, presented in Ridley's play mostly as a radical space, a reminiscent of Foucault's "heterotopia", in which the characters cannot be domiciled, but are rather haunted, their inevitable entrapment creating a perpetual existential feeling of anxiety. This study also attempts to discuss the issue of memory as a maze, revealing the playwright's concern for the precariousness of memory while the national or individual identities are pursued. In a space in which everyone and everything is manipulated, Ridley's characters, in their struggle for survival, are forced to re-negotiate all the known thresholds of cruelty and transgression in order to discover the path leading them to humanness and morality.

Keywords: Labyrinth, heterotopia, memory, reality, Philip Ridley, *Mercury Fur*

**PHILIP RIDLEY'İN KÜRKLÜ MERKÜR ADLI OYUNUNDA LABİRENTİMSİ
MEKANIN TEMSİLİ**

Öz

Bu çalışma, Philip Ridley'in bir labirent olarak hafıza ve ayna olarak labirent gibi fiziksel labirent ile bağlantılı çeşitli anlamları inceleyen *Kürklü Merkür* (2005) adlı oyununa odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, öncelikle Ridley'in oyununda Foucault'nun "heterotopya"sını hatırlatan bir şekilde radikal bir alan olarak yansıtılan ve karakterlere yersizliğin ve yönsüzlüğün musallat olduğu fiziksel labirentin önemini ortaya koymayı amaçlar. Karakterlerin kaçınılmaz tutsaklığı onlarda bir varoluşsal kaygı yaratır. Bu çalışma ayrıca labirent olarak hafıza kavramını tartışarak milli ya da bireysel kimlikler konu edilirken oyun yazarının hafızanın güvenilirliğine dair vurgusunu ortaya koyar. Herkesin ve her şeyin manipüle edildiği bir alanda varoluş mücadelesi veren Ridley'in karakterleri, kendilerini insanlığa ve ahlaka götüren yolu

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keşfetmek için bilinen bütün zalimlik ve yoldan çıkma eşiklerini yeniden değerlendirmeye zorlanırlar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Labirent, heterotopya, hafıza, gerçeklik, Philip Ridley, *Kürklü Merkür*

Introduction

The Labyrinth has served as a fascinating metaphor for human existence, having been productively expressed in literature from the times immemorial. Far from losing the interest in this *topos*, the postmodern literature strengthens this concern, and, as Kern explains in his work *Through the Labyrinth*, “a renewed interest in labyrinths has swept the globe” (Kern, 2000, p. 311). The postmodern writers discover an immense potential in the representation of the labyrinth, as it offers the possibility to explore it as a space reflecting inner and outer aspects of human existence. The very act of entering a labyrinth implies one single path into it, and respectively, out of it, a situation which creates a possibility for pursuit and quest, but also for disorientation, alienation, fear and anxiety. The physical and psychological act of traversing a labyrinthine space creates an opportunity for the exploration of existential emotions, obsessions and frustrations which have validity in the present-day world.

Philip Ridley's play, *Mercury Fur* (2005), is a controversial play, which was initially received with a vehement criticism for lacking any morality due to the use of explicit vulgar language, on and off-stage violence, child abuse, selling sex and representation of pain. As we have already expressed our idea that there is far more to this play (Golban & Benli 2017), we insist that it requires a learned reader and/or spectator, capable of discerning through the mazes of meanings which are suggested by the playwright. Sometimes latently, some others patently, Ridley reflects the labyrinth in some broad categories, which could be presented as following: a physical labyrinth; a memory maze; a metaphor for journey to the self; a space for guest-host relationship; a labyrinth through the looking glass, and so on. In this presentation only three of these categories will be disclosed.

A Physical Labyrinth

Right from the beginning of the play, Philip Ridley delivers the importance of the space where the action takes place:

A derelict flat in a derelict estate in the East of London. Layers of peeling wallpaper (many cleaner patches where framed photos once hung), several pieces of old furniture (armchairs, a table, shelves, etc.), well-worn carpet and smashed ornaments. Detritus and dust cover everything. As well as the front door there are doors to balcony, bedroom and bathroom. Most

of this, however, cannot presently be seen as, with the windows covered with plywood, the flat is in darkness (Ridley, 2005, p. 3).

A very striking depiction, the physical labyrinth is revealed in a manner that reminds one of Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia", presented in his essay *Des espaces autres* (1967), translated into English as *Of Other Spaces*, which could be understood as a mode of radicalizing the conventionalized or habitualized space. Foucault explains that we no longer live a long life which develops linearly through time, our existence being mostly perceived as "a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (Foucault, 2008, p. 14). He posits that the binary opposition between open and closed, private and public, sacred and profane has been blurred, opening to a homogeneity of space which might be understood, as Sudradjat explains, like "a web of divergent spaces (...) in a world of time that moves forward, but in networks of places opening onto one another, yet unable to be reduced to one another or superimposed upon each other" (Sudradjat, 2012, p. 29). Marc Augé, develops Foucault's concept, presenting it as a "non-space", which is dominated by an atmosphere of anonymity and conformity, since all markers of identity, history or any relations are erased from such space (Augé, 1992, p. 130).

Philip Ridley's depiction of a derelict place, devoid of life, abandoned by people in a dystopian universe, delivers exactly the impression of a non-space, in which the darkness and disorder suggest a state of anonymity, in which the characters cannot be domiciled, but are rather haunted from one space to another. The labyrinthine space is evoked by an entrance to the flat and some possible exits to the inner spaces, whereas the exits to the outer world, the windows, are covered by the plywood, indicating a closed space that functions mostly as an entrapment. This description of the space creates an emotional background, a kind of network in which the chaos, darkness and detritus correlate to the protagonists' existential feeling of anxiety. The labyrinth symbolism is also encouraged by intertextual relations to Dante's *Inferno*:

Darren (*calling, offstage*): Elliot? Ell? Where the hell areya?

Elliot *goes to the front door*.

Elliot: Where the hell are you? (Ridley, 2005, p. 3)

The interplay of the name 'Elliot' as "Ell' and 'hell' are homophones in the Cockney accent so widely spoken by locals in London's East End", which suggests that this is a hellish environment, strengthened by the depiction of a dead dog that should be stepped over in order to reach the wanted space; the dog, serving as a reminiscence of the mythical Cerberus, the

guide who stands “at the threshold between the realm of living and the underworld” (Attinger, 2017, p. 50). With the dead guardian of hell, the boundaries are blurred, producing a maze-like “luminal state without clear borders, thresholds or any higher, discernable social and political order” (Attinger, 2017, p. 50). The lack of order or any morality is also strengthened by the cruelty and indifference of the protagonists Elliot and Darren, who although so young, are apparently incapable of feeling any empathy towards a dead being, encouraging thus, once again the feeling of haunted beings, like the restless shadows of Dantean Inferno. The costumes of the characters also encourages the atmosphere of anonymity, the two brothers wearing “a zip-up, hooded jacket, jeans and trainers” (Ridley, 2005, p. 3), concealing in a way any identity markers, revealing instead some un-individualized beings, reduced to this state by the instability and insecurity of the space they live in.

A Memory Maze

The journey through the memory lane, which is carried out in a dystopian labyrinthine environment of the London's East End, is a tricky one. Philip Ridley, as many other postmodern writers, is preoccupied with the precariousness of memory, stressing out that collective and individual identities are at stake. Assuming the pursuit through the labyrinthine corridors of memory, Ridley's characters reveal that the manipulation of memory becomes an efficient tool of the mainstream ideology and it is an act of power to bring virtual death/obliteration or to stabilize an image of national identity.

From the very beginning of the play the problematic nature of individual and collective memory is disclosed. Related to earlier mentioned darkness of the space, Darren comments that they “Could get lost for fucking ever out there” (Ridley, 2005, p.4), but this statement is followed immediately by another question:

Darren: (...) but ... who *are* we?

Elliot: I told ya who we fucking were.

Darren: When?

Elliot: When we parked the fucking car.

Slight pause.

Do you remember parking the fucking car?

Darren: What d'ya think I am?

Slight pause.

...No. (Ridley, 2005, p. 4)

Now, the fact that they could get lost forever, gains the significance of the memory maze, in which a quest for national or individual identity takes place, but the result of the pursuit could be deliberately manipulated by someone. To get lost in a maze of memory could be very easy, especially in the context when the power in their environment spreads some psychotropic "butterflies" that brings about amnesia and addiction. Labyrinthine effects of disorientation and hallucination are experienced by those who consume these psychotropic butterflies, erasing the past and leaving only the traumatic moments of angst to the individual. Paul Ricoeur stresses out the importance of memory and forgetting in the establishment of an identity:

The heart of the problem is the mobilization of memory in the service of the quest, the appeal, the demand for identity. In what follows from this, we recognize some disturbing symptoms: too much memory, in a certain region of the world, hence an abuse of memory; not enough memory elsewhere, hence an abuse of forgetting. It is in the problematic of identity that we have to seek the cause of the fragility of memory manipulated in this way. ... The fragility of identity consists in the fragility of these responses in terms of what, claiming to give the recipe of the identity proclaimed and reclaimed. The problem is therefore carried back a step, from the fragility of memory to that of identity (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 81).

We recognize throughout the play Elliot's and Darren's quest for both individual and collective identity, but their pursuit is thwarted by the manipulative operations of power which determine the individuals to live in a constant threat that would lead to the evacuation of any humaneness and sense of morality. Entrapped in a space of "Hobbesian outlook in which the *bellum omnium contra omnes* dominates everyday life, creating a world of mutual mistrust, sheer fear, violence and destruction", the characters in Ridley's play become dehumanized, the only emotions experienced by them now being anxiety and alienation (Attinger, 2017, p. 48). In such a nightmarish dysfunctional social and political order it does not come as a surprise that a group of young people provide a venue and a child who should be dressed and prepared to be raped and then murdered by a rich client. The fact that such young people are ready to cross the ethical threshold without asking any questions reveals their extreme vulnerability in the Hobbesian environment they live in. Struggling with a half-remembered language, Ridley's protagonists face an extreme situation that Anna Harpin calls when "[m]emory has dispossessed the rememberer" (Harpin, 2011, p. 107).

Abandoned by adults and even by their own language, forced to confront some amnesiac memories that cannot be reliable, these young characters experience extreme vulnerability and exposure. Being enmeshed in the corridors of memory maze, they attempt to

enter a space of a temporary tranquility, provided by the half-remembered familial hearth, where they once felt parental protection and care. Darren, the sixteen year-old brother, discloses to his elder brother, Elliot, his crippled memories of the past security:

Know what I liked the best? Whatching telly late at night. That musical Mum and Dad liked. The mountains and all those kids going, 'Do, ray, me.' ... Remember that, Ell? We'd all sit on the sofa. Me in the middle. Mom on this side. Dad on that. ... Dad would order a big takeaway pizza. American hot. ... Dad would cut it up into four equal parts. Dad made sure each part had the same number of sausage bits so we wouldn't argue. ... Where're you, Ell?

Elliot: The armchair (Ridley, 2005, p. 12).

Struggling for survival in this labyrinthine space, these adolescents are overwhelmed by sensations, feelings and memories which are heightened by the hallucinatory butterflies, and the interplay between true and false memories, the sense of guilt and their tortured psyche assume such confusing functions, making their possibility of finding a way out more difficult, if not impossible. Exposed to violence on daily bases and forced to re-negotiate the threshold of cruelty and transgression, they are dazzled and perplexed, so that they recurrently "retreat into memory, which is never reliable and always blended with the constant perception of dangers and also with fantasies of the present sexual desire" (Golban & Benli, 2017, p. 308).

Naz is another defenceless and vulnerable adolescent, who is alone and homeless and seeks protection and friendship in the company of Darren and Elliot. Drug-addicted and incapable of perceiving the reality of his world, he tries to re-connect with other children through the act of remembering his own identity, an act which divulges his confusion, as he becomes disoriented by the overlapping corridors of the memory maze, these overlapping labyrinthine passages reflecting his nostalgia for the safety of familial hearth, his exposure to menace in his environment and the new and unknown experience of sexual desire. Following his innate need of sharing, he delivers his private recollection to Darren:

Hang on ... Hang on. ... Yeah! We was in the supermarket. Me. Mum. And...Stacey! That's her name! Stace! ... I hear a noise. A gang's rushing down the aisles. ... couple are about my age. ... They are screaming and waving these big knife things. ... Can hear Stace crying but I can't see her. The crying is real close. It seems to be coming from this big smashed fruit. It's all red inside and very juicy. It's got an eye. It's Stace! ... The gang drags her away and pull off her knickers. She's pissing herself. ... One of them gets his cock out and says he'll plug the leak. He sticks his cock in her (Ridley, 2005, p. 33-4).

This recollection reveals an incident that took place in Naz's past, depicting an apparently ordinary day, when he is in a supermarket, shopping with his mother and sister.

However, a normal routine of a family is transformed into a nightmare, as the mother is incapable of protecting her children from other children. The supermarket assumes the significance of a mythical labyrinthine space, in which monsters devour innocent children in order to appease their fury. What is perplexing is that the family is entrapped between the aisles of the supermarket, incapable of finding a way out, but more shocking is that the monsters are some children, who are also enmeshed in this maze of cruelty, as a result of “butterflies” and constant exposure to violence, where the need to rape or murder someone emerges from the children's own precariousness and fear of being abused.

The act of remembering assumes the significance of resistance, since in this maze-like environment the chronological or spatial orientation becomes more and more difficult, as the protagonists not only struggle for survival, but also for maintaining some meaning in language which gradually fails to mean anything. Since language represents the vehicle which brings back to present the anterior experiences, the characters in Ridley's play reveal the courage to confront their traumatic past, regardless how painful it is, and they share it through telling, as a collective, disowned and disembodied present, used against the monstrous attempt at dismemberment of an identity through eradication. The abolition of the cultural heritage, through the destruction of museums, of any objects of cultural significance, as well as the obliteration of myths, lead to the creation of the lack of collective memory and this prevents the awareness of a national identity or unity in a group. Everyman explains that

[m]emory provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map, helping orient who they are, why they are here and where they are going. Memory in other words is central to individual and collective identity. ... Theories of identity formation, socialization, tend to conceptualize memory as part of the development of self and personality. Notions of collective identity building around this model (like the collective behavior school) theorize a ‘loss of self’, and thus of the constraints of memory (as super ego or ingrained habit) in accounting for collective behavior and the formation of new collective identities (Everyman, 2004, p. 161).

As a result of this vehement attempt to destroy memory, the confused, half-remembering, half-hallucinating adolescent characters fail to build a unity which would contribute to the strengthening of their common history or collective identity. Andrew Wyllie, in his article *Philip Ridley and Memory* (2013), explains that “[o]nly by retaining a sense of history can an individual or a culture exercise moral judgment or even self-preservation” (Wyllie, 2013, p. 72). Since Elliot states that “[e]veryone round here's a fucking customer” (Ridley, 2005, p. 23), the question of the possibility to escape from this space of amoral void

emerges, as the characters seem to be completely enmeshed within the anonymity of this non-space.

Ironically, although Elliot seems to have the most intact memory and knowledge of history, and also possesses a greater capacity to control the language, he does not prove trustworthy to find the exit out of this labyrinth. Although he always struggles to protect both collective and individual memories, the act of remembering empowers and simultaneously abuses him. He shares his vulnerability with Darren, confessing that

I've got things from before you were fucking born. Get inside my skull. You wouldn't last a minute. You'd be screaming to get out (...) Slit my skull open. Know what it will be like? Like slitting open guts of a great white shark. Stuff'll come out like you wouldn't fucking believe (Ridley, 2005, p. 9).

His desire to break the anonymity through his struggle to remember history, myths and cultural heritage collides with the desire to erase from his memory the fact that he contributes to the spreading of obliteration by selling butterflies and arranging outrageous "parties". Elliot's tortured psyche and his sense of guilt entrap him to the degree of wondering whether "he ever gonna find his way back out of the labyrinth? He could be trapped in there for ever" (Ridley, 2005, p. 82). His enmeshment in his memory maze reverberates his constant exposures to violence and tests his boundaries of human endurance. Questioning his sense of agency in his world and

[p]erceiving his own "I" as a reduction to some repeated moments in history, Elliot considers life as unbearable. Without an essence or an agency of Being, Ridley's character seems to question death as the only way out of this inescapable labyrinth. Since he is unable to act outside the imposed ideology, Elliot finds himself as a victim of a cruel and inescapable organization, where death seems to be a release from the never-ending torture (Golban & Benli, 2017, p. 315).

Darren and Naz, the characters suffering mostly from a deficient language and a deceptive memory, seem to find a way out of the labyrinth eventually. Only when they should cross the threshold of complete depravity and confront their own monstrosity, as Naz should replace the "party piece" to be raped and murdered, Darren, Elliot and Lola acknowledge the precariousness of the human condition and develop an awareness of their existential despair which triggers their capacity to act.

Reality through the Looking Glass

The relationship between labyrinth and mirror/glass is frequently used in literary tradition, and Lewis Carroll's character Alice's journey through the looking glass represents one of the most vivid literary examples of this connection. The prototype created by Carroll's protagonist is easily recognizable in Philip Ridley's play *Mercury Fur*. The persisting reference to windows, bottles, glasses, TV screens, lenses of the camcorder, and others strengthen the idea of an optical labyrinth in which all the characters are enmeshed. The maze-garden, a reminiscent of the rose garden which Alice must confront during her journey, is reinforced in Ridley's play by the Duchess's reference to it:

Duchess: Oh, don't let me get in the way of your men's talk. I'm perfectly happy sitting here – Oh! I can smell flowers.

Spinx: There's a lovely garden out back, Duchess. Roses.

Duchess: Roses! I adore roses. (...) A toast! To roses and nuclear weapons.

All: Roses and nuclear weapons (Ridley, 2005, p. 74).

The confusing space of the mirror-labyrinth usually alters the character's perspective of the real world, the effect being the result of an optical illusion. Although the Duchess is blind and wears a pair of dark glasses that might render her immune to the optical distortions of the mirror-labyrinth she is still affected enormously in this space. The physical description of the Duchess should also be taken into consideration. From the stage directions, she is introduced as "wearing a dress (covered with ice-blue sequins and rhinestones) and a white fur coat. Pearl earrings, diamond rings, necklace, bracelets and a sparkling tiara" (Ridley, 2005, p. 71). All the objects she wears function like mirrors/glasses of the labyrinth intending to attract, dazzle, but also confuse whoever sees her. Worried for her well-being, Spinx creates the reflection of a space which is infinitely more splendid than reality:

Spinx: A chandelier. A million teardrops of glass all twinkling and sparkling. A rainbow burst of light – oh, Duchess!

Duchess: What, Papa, what?

Spinx: The furniture! It's all wood. Looks like antique stuff to me. Some of it's got carvings. Mermaids. Unicorns. There is gold leaf on some of the – oh, Duchess! (Ridley, 2005, p. 71-72).

The Duchess, though blind, is allured into this space of sparkling glasses and crystals. Her earlier statement of being perfectly happy here reveals her seduction by the myriad of signifiers like mermaids and unicorns, among others, that divulge the absence of the real in

presentation. Monica Schmitz-Emans claims that “[m]irror-worlds epitomise the “reversed world” (Schmitz-Evans, 2012, p.15) and this idea definitely should be taken into consideration, since the derelict and hellish space depicted in the play is definitely a counter-world to the space in the mirror into which the Duchess is seduced. This counter-world where simulations of reality or fantasy/virtual reality reigns represents the realm of what Baudrillard would call “hyperreality”, in which the signs of real substitute the real and lead to the “desert of the real itself” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1).

Spinx seems to be Duchess's guide through this labyrinth of mirrors, and though he claims to be her saviour and the only one capable of dealing with Duchess's fits, his persistence in deluding her when he tries to posit a reality makes one notice the ambivalence of his motives. At first glance, Spinx's intention to protect the Duchess from the brutal reality of losing the comfort of familial hearth with her loving husband and two sons, the fire and the ongoing violence of the world might seem to be a generous act. However, it becomes clear that her seduction into some myriads of virtual experiences robs her totally of the possibility of experiencing anything genuine, no matter how painful it is. Deprived of her identity as Elliot's and Darren's mother, the Duchess is allured more and more into her constructed identity and reality, looking at the world through the glass framed for her by Spinx, in this way surrounding her by a wall of signifiers which indicate her retreat within the safety of the provided frame. The satisfaction from the simulated realities might be appealing at first, but since they are in a mirror labyrinth, everything is misleading here, the Duchess's earlier claim of her perfect happiness in this space is also deceiving, and hence is Spinx's reluctance to leave her alone:

Spinx: She's getting more and more fretful when I ain't with her. (...) She shit herself last time I left her alone for too long! Ya hear that? There was crap coming down her legs. I had to bath her. Dig shit from her crack (Ridley, 2005, p. 76-77).

Ironically, Spinx's desire to provide a hyperreal space of safety for the Duchess is a complete failure, as no matter how many distortions of reality he creates for her, he cannot prevent her experience of fear. The very explicit and crude depiction of the Duchess, who “shits herself” in this simulated world of mermaids, unicorns, glitter and glamour, creates a brutal interruption of the sensation of her felicity, as the counter-reality produces an awareness of her genuine terror that cannot be diminished by any simulated realities. Regardless of Spinx's attempt to bar the Duchess from cruel reality through her

depersonalization and dehistoricization, the simulated external reality does not stop completely the flood of internal realities experienced by the protagonist:

Duchess: No! My boys are in the corner of their bedroom. The big one is trying to protect the little one. My husband is hitting them with a hammer. He's hitting my eldest son on the leg. It's all smashed. And the little one – the little one's been hit on the head! No! No! There is so much blood! Oh, the look on their faces. How can Daddy do this? I grab my husband round the neck. He hits me on the head. Everything goes dark. I ... I ... can't see. I ... can't move ... I can hear my boys crying ... I hear my husband run down the stairs ... He's in the pub! Glass smashing. Bottles smashing... (Ridley, 2005, p. 89).

The induced sound of the smashing glass has the effect of a crash into the myriad of images produced in the mirror-labyrinth, as the authentic horror experienced by the Duchess derives its authority from the *really* lived moments in life. However, Spinx's desire to control her *safety* by an injection of a substance breaks that possible authentic experience and allows the Duchess slide back into a world of deceiving realities, where the evil and the good have virtually merged and the perception of certain stability is disclosed to an ontological dependence.

The control over the perceived realities seems to be lost in a world which sees everything through the looking glass. If simulation which replaces reality enmeshes the Duchess into the mirror-labyrinth out of which there seems to have no exit, the young people who inhabit this deceiving space become entrapped even more. Paradoxically, the seduced Duchess becomes the seducer in this universe of counter-reality:

Spinx: They are gazing at you in wonder.

Duchess: Who?

Spinx: The owners of this magnificent place. They can't believe you are paying them a visit.

Duchess: Tell them not to be silly, Papa. I am flesh and blood like them (Ridley, 2005, p. 72).

The presence of the Duchess, who is both "flesh and blood" and an alluring glimmering and glamorous Duchess, creates a lasting effect upon the young people, who are kneeling in front of her as an expression of a sense of awe experienced by all of them. This situation reminds of Baudrillard's concept of seduction, which points out to the distance between the copy and original, the breach between the presentation and the real. Seduction should be understood as a space that simultaneously bridges the presentation to the real and detaches them from one another. This concomitant engagement and withdrawal of the real from presentation is explained by Mike Gane as "self-annulment, or the gift and its

cancellation" (Gane, 1991, p. 42). Reflecting upon Baudrillard's theory, Gane clarifies that presentations of objects emerge as a result of seduction by the experienced desire for the real.

Revealing the space they are in as "[a] million teardrops of glass all twinkling and sparkling" (Ridley, 2005, p. 72), the playwright divulges Spinx's illusion of being able to offer the real in the presentation, but the audience's attention is alerted to the distance itself and, respectively, the absence of the real in this presentation. From the unrepresentability of the real stems the desire for the real which is recognizable in all characters in *Mercury Fur*, though each of them is seeking it in different manners or in different objects. In case of the young adolescents of the play, the fulfilment of the desire for the real becomes even more ambiguous, as the butterflies they consume produce hallucinatory effects of a possible happiness. In this respect, Fukuyama's warning against the consequences of the biotechnical revolution comes to mind, as in *Our Posthuman Future* (2002) he refers to the serious difficulties the world will have to deal with, since there is an impressive growth in the consumption of anti-depressants like Prozac or Ritalin, used frequently to control the hyperkinesia or anxiety in children's behaviour. Fukuyama's concern for the proximity of a world inhabited by happy but narcotic people somehow evokes the image of the young adolescents in Ridley's play who consume the psychotropic butterflies to the degree of having most of their feelings numbed, so that they mostly forget about human values, morals and ideals, as when they are capable to provide Party Piece in order to be abused and then killed by the Party Guest without any qualms. Allured by the space of a deceiving safety of their own wall of signifiers, these children are gradually depersonalized and dehumanized.

Party Guest is another character who is seduced in this mirror-labyrinth by the desire for the real. He seems to believe in the possibility of the positive accomplishment of the desire for the real. His possibility of grasping the real is envisaged by him in the enactment of a "party" in which "the horniest fucking fantasy of your whole fucking life comes true" (Ridley, 2005, p. 92). He becomes obsessed with purchasing a "real" experience, contrary to the one provided by the psychotropic butterflies. He shares his desire when he states: "Ya know, I've tried the odd butterfly (...) Ha! And ... well, they are okay. But it ain't ... it ain't *real*, is it? It ain't real skin. Real blood. Real pain. Oh, fuck, I'm so bloody excited. I feel like a little kid" (Ridley, 2005, p. 96).

His infatuation to frame this "real" experience as an elaborate fantasy of the Vietnam War in which he wants to molest and then kill a ten-year-old boy who represents Elvis and which should be video recorded for the posterity becomes preposterous. This attempt divulges

the consumerist promises of satisfying the customers' desire for the real, but the Party Guest's explicit intransigence of looking at the world only through the camera's eye reveals the manipulation of reality and, therefore, the withdrawal of the real. The horrid film which aims to satisfy the desire for real is no more than a narrative or a dramaturgical device in which every act or object is controlled. As Anna Harpin claims,

the manipulation of sight renders an audience vulnerable. In the dark, seeking light and recognizable shapes, one is alive to notions of perception, occlusion and unseen menace. Rather than simply borrowing a horror film technique, however, Ridley has gestured towards the constructedness of viewing and the looming possibility of what we cannot yet imagine within an environment we already know (Harpin, 2011, p. 108).

The orchestrated symphony of violent "reality" given in the stage directions of the play is unsettling for both the participants in the act as well as for the spectators who witness this act. Between real and presentation, Ridley's stage becomes a hall of mirrors, adorned with cameras, glasses, windows, lights, and flames, in which the characters are captured suddenly by their own images in the mirror. This mirror-image of the self makes them experience simultaneously the loss of identity and the self-reflection in the others, thus forcing them question their sense of safety in the labyrinthine space of an anarchic world. In the multiplicity of reflected images, Ridley's characters discover not only their multiple and ever fluctuating identities – as when they recognize themselves in Party Piece, then Naz, then Spinx, then Party Guest, and so on – but also they acknowledge the fact that they cannot find a way out of this labyrinth as long as they are not able to determine how reliable is what they know as reality. From all virtual hypotheses that they have witnessed so far, they are confronted with the *bloody real*. When they truly see one of themselves, Naz, covered with real blood, Party Guest splashed with blood, and then Spinx's blood, they grow aware that to the constructed or virtual real, there is a counter-world for real-life experiences, like real blood, real pain, and real death.

Conclusion

Philip Ridley's play *Mercury Fur* can be read as a labyrinthine journey in which his young adolescent characters experience the search for, the confrontation with, and possibly the loss of the self. Since the labyrinth represents a dark and unknown realm of interlinked passages, whether physical or reflected ones, the questers who traverse this space find themselves entrapped in it. Looking at the world behind the looking glass makes them experience fear, anxiety, vulnerability, uncertainty, and an omnipresent menace. Yet, even

though Ridley represents this space as a constant threat to his maze-runners, it becomes a place of enquiry (illusory or real), a space of discovery, indeed of self-discovery. In the moment they are mostly vulnerable and exposed to the external threats of being bombed, Darren acknowledges their position here, as he suddenly exclaims: "Space explorers! (...) That's what you said. (...) Who we were gonna be while we did all this. Space explorers" (Ridley, 2005, p. 125). Despite the initial impression that Ridley's labyrinth might signify a place of death, one can discover that this space represents a metaphor for life, the inescapable life of the self, especially after the recognition of the Other.

Surprisingly, in their very transgression, Ridley's characters find fortitude and determination to get out of this suffocating labyrinth through "the manifestation of human love and common humanity. The young people's disentanglement from their labyrinthine experience functions almost like a cathartic irruption into an uncertain future that still bears hope to the ethical embracement of the Other" (Golban & Benli, 2017, p. 315). As a group or as friends, sharing the same exposure, vulnerability and mortality, they can change the present ethics and create a new generation which would transcend individual isolation, avoid precariousness and meaninglessness and renew humanism and love. Although future is still ambiguous, the genuine humanness and love seem to be the salvation of humankind out of the enmeshment of the labyrinth.

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