

On Whales and Giants: Images of Leviathan in *New Model Army* and *The Unwritten*

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Abstract

*Fantastic and science-fictional narratives employ specific modes of representation. In both genres, figurative language can be used in a literal sense, so that symbols acquire a concrete representation in the text. The aim of this article is to examine how a specific image, the giant Leviathan as a metaphor for the aggregation of individuals in order to form the social body, is explored in two genre narratives. In the science fiction novel *New Model Army*, by Adam Roberts, the image of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan is used to suggest the notion of a radical democracy in which all members of the community have an organic participation in the social body. In the graphic narrative *The Unwritten*, by Mike Carey, Peter Gross and Vince Locke, Hobbes' Leviathan is explored in conjunction with Melville's *Moby-Dick* in order to investigate the nature of symbolic representation and the relation between culture and objective reality. The appropriation of the metaphor of the Leviathan as a concrete symbol determines the way the two narratives develop their main themes and articulate their meanings.*

Keywords: *symbol; representation; Leviathan; Moby-Dick; social body.*

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Introduction

In her collection of essays *In Other Worlds*, Margaret Atwood claims that science fiction, fantasy, and other kinds of genre literature can do things that realistic fiction cannot. They can, for instance, question the very nature of the human and of social organization by showing alternatives to what we are used to accept as the real. They engage the full range of human imagination, exploring fundamental questions that find their first representations in myths, while realistic fiction tends to limit itself to the world of the middle class and its norms. They “can move into (...) the cellars and attics of the mind, where figures that can appear in [realistic] novels only as dreams and fantasies take actual shape and walk the earth” (ATWOOD, 2011, loc. 865, 831-927). Genre fiction, therefore, involves different modes of representation that are peculiar to itself, in which these figures of the imagination acquire a concrete presence. In the fantastic, this takes the shape of the irruption of an inexplicable event in a narrative that in all other aspects follows the dictates of realistic representation. The sense of disruption this entails is reinforced by the use of various linguistic resources, even though the fantastic does not constitute a specific language in itself. Among these is the use of figurative language in a literal sense (ROAS, 2014, p. 164-165, 179). The same resource is frequently employed in science fiction. As Farah Mendlesohn points out, “[I]anguage is not trustworthy in sf: metaphor becomes literal” (MENDLESOHN, 2003, p. 5). Ursula Le Guin also points to the literalization of metaphor as “an essential maneuver of science fiction, serving to put reality into question, making us aware of our assumptions concerning what is real, as well as our perceptions or convictions of continuity and identity” (LE GUIN, 1993, p. 31), an effect that the fantastic narrative also tries to achieve (ROAS, 2014, p. 165).

The literalization of metaphor makes language and perception itself unstable, and is closely knitted to the way science fiction and fantastic narratives are conceived and interpreted. As Le Guin further points out, in science fiction nothing can be taken for granted (LE GUIN, 1993, p. 31), and its reading demands a constant process of revision that involves all levels of the text, including that of the sentence

itself (DELANY, 2009, 1-10). The same logic can be said to affect the way these narratives relate to other texts and appropriate them. What was originally a textual construction or an allegory can acquire a concrete presence, changing its meaning and affecting the way the text that absorbs it is articulated.

The two narratives I will discuss here offer the opportunity to see this process in action. Published only one year apart from each other, both of them establish a dialogue with Hobbes' *Leviathan*. One of them, Adam Roberts' *New Model Army* (2010), is a science fiction novel; the other, *The Unwritten: "Leviathan"* (2011), is a graphic narrative, written by Mike Carey, with art by Peter Gross and Vince Locke, which can be considered a fantastic narrative, with elements from other genres such as fantasy and science fiction. In both, the presence of the Leviathan is the result of the appropriation of a double image: the allegory of the state as a giant formed by a multitude of people, and its visual representation in the frontispiece of Hobbes' work, although in the case of *The Unwritten: "Leviathan"*, this is complicated by the doubling of Hobbes' Leviathan into Moby-Dick and other whales from several literary sources. And in both narratives, Leviathan acquires a concrete presence, either in the way it is described and represented linguistically, or in its actual manifestation as a visual image, especially in the case of *The Unwritten*. In what follows, I will discuss how the presence of Leviathan as a concrete image influences the way Hobbes' conceptualization of the modern state is perceived and re-elaborated in *New Model Army* and *The Unwritten*, and how it influences the notions of social organization and human nature both narratives propose. I will argue that this image is an important organizing element in both texts, and that it plays an essential role in the way the literary and the extra-literary are put in relation to each other in the elaboration of visions of an alternative social body.

The awful giant of democracy

In his introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes opens his discussion on the modern state with the suggestion that nature, "the art whereby God hath made and governs the world", can be imitated by the "art of man" in the creation of an artificial animal. Hobbes' mechanistic view, which reduces

life to the “motion of limbs”, allows him to speculate on the possibility that all automata have an artificial life, and he furthers his argument by comparing bodily organs to pieces of a mechanical apparatus, such as springs, joints and wheels. He then moves on to declare that art can imitate man himself, and that indeed it has done so in the creation of “that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE [...] which is but an artificial man”, intended for the protection of natural man (HOBBES, 1998, p. 7, emphasis in the original). With its allusions to automata and artificial life forms, the first paragraph of the introduction to *Leviathan* reads as a proto-science-fictional text. It is significant that one of the foundational texts of modern political philosophy introduces its subject, the state, in terms that would later be extensively used in science fiction in order to discuss the ethical issues involved in social inequality and domination, the nature of the human, and the ontological status of artificial intelligence (JONES, 2003, p. 167). For Gwyneth Jones, artificial beings are one of the icons of science fiction, “the signs which announce the genre”, and which indicate to the readers that they must engage in the process of translation that is the reading of science fiction, through which they negotiate the differences proposed by the science-fictional text in relation to the familiar domain of their own culture (JONES, 2003, p. 163-164). In his seminal “Science Fiction and the Novum”, Darko Suvin argues that what distinguishes science fiction from other literary genres is the presence of a novum or cognitive innovation, “a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality”, which “entails a change of the whole universe of the tale” (SUVIN, 2010, p. 68; emphasis in the original). The novum bridges the literary and extra-literary by offering an Other that is placed in relation to the author’s and the readers’ empirical reality, to which it is constantly compared, allowing the readers to re-evaluate their present reality, seen now from the new perspective presented by the novum (SUVIN, 2010, p. 68-76). If the first paragraph of the introduction to *Leviathan* is indeed a proto-science-fictional text, then it is possible to argue that the description of the modern state is Hobbes’ novum, its novelty lying not so much in the presence of the state itself, but

rather in the fact that it is an artificial collective constructed by man himself, and not an institution dictated to man by God.

Carl Freedman argues that science fiction has a fundamental affinity with social critical theory – a mode of theory that is essentially questioning and self-questioning, profoundly historical, “free of conservative epistemological canons of tradition, appearance, or logic in the merely formal sense”, and coeval with modernity itself (FREEDMAN, 2000, p. xiv-xx, 1-4). The presence of science-fictional elements in the way Hobbes builds the image of his Leviathan does seem to point to this special affinity between science fiction and modern thought, so that science fiction might be considered a privileged mode of discourse to elaborate and interrogate modernity. It is not surprising, then, that a science fiction novel such as Adam Roberts’ *New Model Army* should return to Hobbes’ foundational text in order to discuss the shortcomings of the modern state as a form of social organization, especially in its failure to guarantee a fully-developed democracy.

As one of its first theorizations, Hobbes’ *Leviathan* can be placed in the period of formation of the modern state; *New Model Army*, on the other hand, situates itself at the moment of its demise. In the novel, the United Kingdom is torn by war, and a new form of social organization is emerging: the New Model Army (NMA) hired by the Scottish Parliament to fight for the independence of Scotland. This is a mercenary army, without any national affiliation or hierarchy of command, whose soldiers take decisions on their actions and strategy by voting through a private virtual network that allows instant and constant communication. Echoes of *Leviathan* become clear when Tony Block, the narrator of the novel, compares the NMA to an “ungentle giant”, metaphorically imbued with organs, meat, skin and fibers (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 39, 121), just as Hobbes compares the components of the state to bodily organs in several passages in his book. Explicit reference to *Leviathan*, however, occurs much later in the novel, in a passage in which the narrator envisions NMAs appearing all over Europe as giants “striding (...) over the landscape. Leviathans, in motley, with massy arms and legs, and weighing a million kilos each” (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 240). It is interesting to notice how the concreteness of the image is reinforced by the stress

given to the massive corporality of the giant; indeed, it is the gigantic proportions of Leviathan that appeal to the narrator as an explicatory image of the development of humanity itself:

Hobbes saw truly that giganticism was the secret hidden in the narrative of mankind's evolution and his image is closer to the truth:



Though Hobbes had a feudal mind, and could not help but imagine that his giant would have a royal head, a guiding and directing organ. Somebody explain to him that this is not needful. The next stage in human evolution is *necessarily* away from the restrictions of feudalism. The next stage is the land of the headless giants: for without eyes their eyes cannot play them tricks, and without ears they cannot be lied to, and without a mouth they cannot be fed poisoned food, and without a nose they cannot smell the stink of mortality. (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 241-242; emphasis in the original)

It is important to bear in mind that the section of the frontispiece of *Leviathan* reproduced above is part of the passage, so that not only the words in the text evoke the massive presence of the giant, but the visual image reinforces this presence, as if words alone were not sufficient to convey its concreteness. The image itself has a pull. It shows the form of the giant, whose body is composed by the mass of the individual citizens of the state, looming over a typical European landscape. But just as the giant could be striding the landscape, he could be rising from it, as if springing from the land itself. This reference to Hobbes follows a long passage in

which the narrator, flying from Strasbourg to the camp of an NMA deeper in the continent, sees the whole of Europe from the air. Almost delirious, he describes what he sees in a style reminiscent of Whitman's poetry,¹ offering an account in which human history seems integrated into the very texture of the land, spanning a period of time that goes back to pre-history and to the timelessness of myth, as in the allusion to Red Riding Hood walking in the "primal forests", the "forests of Grimm", her hood red "because it was dyed by human blood" (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 239-240). As in the poems from *Leaves of Grass*, nature and human action form an integrated whole, and the construction of European civilization seems like a natural growth of the land the narrator describes – so much so that the same bodily imagery used earlier to refer to social organization is used now to describe the landscape, in which the Norwegian coast is compared to a womb-wall, and the Gulf of Bothnia is composed of ventricles "reaching into the lobes of Finland and Russia, Estonia and Latvia" (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 238). The image of the giant rising from a largely natural landscape (he sprouts from the hills beyond the city on the foreground) thus seems to guide the conception of human civilization as an organic growth, whose process of development is not so much historical as the result of natural evolution, in which organisms may lose some of their organs, or, as in the case of the future projected by the narrator, their whole head.

This organic view of social organization is connected not only to its development in time, but also to the internal structure of the NMAs. The image of countless individual bodies massed together in order to form the gigantic body of the state is at the center of Roberts' conception of the new society he proposes in *New Model Army*. Just as the frontispiece of *Leviathan* is "a visual condensation of the central arguments of Hobbes' great work" (FRANK, 2015),² Hobbes' text offers the paradigm against which Roberts' novel is organized, including the internal logic of its own social giant and the rhetoric through which he is presented. This is only possible, however, by a manipulation of Hobbes' central allegory of the state as the giant Leviathan, and by the mutilation of the visual image that represents it. Jason Frank argues that the frontispiece of *Leviathan* dramatizes the artificiality of the metaphor of the body politic (FRANK, 2015) – an aspect stressed by Hobbes

¹ For the influence of Walt Whitman on Roberts' novel, see DOUGHERTY (2013, p. 520): "the unacknowledged figure of Walt Whitman (...) stands as *New Model Army's* most important predecessor and interlocutor".

² Both Jason Frank (2015) and Carlo Ginzburg (2014, p. 156, n. 34) point out that Hobbes overruled the drawing of the image of Leviathan for the frontispiece.

himself in his comparison of the commonwealth to an artificial being – but we have already seen how the insertion of the image of the frontispiece in the narrative of *New Model Army* goes a long way towards naturalizing the social body. Frank further notes that the frontispiece of *Leviathan* performs a “visual magic of subjection” in the way the sovereign power uses its own visibility to command the direction of its subjects’ gaze (FRANK, 2015). Ginzburg describes this process in more detail by pointing out that the myriad people who form Leviathan in the frontispiece are gazing upwards, towards the head of the giant, in awe and subjection (GINZBURG, 2014, p. 26). By cutting off the giant’s head, the narrator of *New Model Army* disrupts the whole composition of the image in the frontispiece and indeed the whole logic of Hobbes’ vision of the state, while still maintaining it as a central point of reference for the construction of his own text.

Ginzburg argues that, in Hobbes’ vision, the power of the state is based not simply on the actual force it controls, but rather on the awe it inspires on its subjects (GINZBURG, 2014, p. 28). With its head cut off, the giant loses this mechanism of internal control over its subjects. Actually, the very notion of subjection, which guarantees the stability of Hobbes’ commonwealth, is lost. Roberts’ NMAs have no subjects, being formed by individuals who work in collaboration. Personal contact, in the form of direct interaction with other members of the group through the NMA’s communication network, replaces subjection as the element that gives coherence to the social body. The fear inherent to hierarchical organization is substituted by love: “what you call love of those higher up than you is just fear, a desire to placate them. (...) True love can only exist between equals”, Tony declares at a certain point in the novel (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 176). A society based on “true love” would involve the full development of the individual and a total integration among its members, eliminating the notion of political representation: “you can’t love unless you take charge of your life, and you can’t do that if you’re handing over power to representatives to exercise it on your behalf” (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 176). In *New Model Army*, representative democracy is seen as a development of Hobbes’s conception of the absolutist state. As Dougherty notes, the novel attacks the notion of contractualism and of representation that lies at the

core of Hobbes' image of the body politic in favor of a radical democracy which strengthens the bonds of the community to an unprecedented degree (DOUGHERTY, 2013, p. 518, 520).

Roberts' NMA thus surfaces as a fictional incarnation of Negri and Hardt's multitude, which "poses a clear challenge to the entire tradition of sovereignty" (NEGRI; HARDT, 2004, loc. 1795).³ Like the NMA, the multitude is a network in which individuals can express themselves freely and equally, communicating and acting together, so that they can "work and live in common" (NEGRI; HARDT, 2004, loc. 84-88). For Negri and Hardt, recent developments in information technology and the establishment of a global communication network, whose logic influences the whole realm of production, offer the material conditions for the rise of the multitude as a new form of social organization, a utopian experiment in radical democracy similar to that of the NMAs, which is also shaped by its use of information technology. Even the combat tactics of the multitude, already present in several popular movements, are identical to those of the NMAs: "*When a distributed network attacks, it swarms its enemy: innumerable independent forces seem to strike from all directions at a particular point and then disappear back into the environment*" (NEGRI; HARDT, 2004, loc. 1705; emphasis in the original), just as the forces of the NMA dissipate "into the country as a whole, as breath dissolves into the air" after a battle (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 73).

But if the NMAs are the concretization of a "new e-democracy utopianism (...) fuelled by new technologies that make it much simpler to canvas everybody's opinion quickly and efficiently", on the other hand this radical form of democracy approaches a "complete Zamiatin transparency" (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 3, 8). This reference to Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, one of the classical dystopias of the 20th century, blurs the boundaries between utopia and dystopia. Zamyatin's transparency also has a very concrete representation in *We*, the glass houses in which the inhabitants of his dystopia live under the absolute vigilance of the state. The narrator of *New Model Army* appropriates this image by dissociating it from the state and turning it into a symbol of mutual transparency and absolute visibility. Although he is aware that this notion will cause discomfort in the reader due to the loss of privacy it implies, he nevertheless demands that this dystopian element

³ In his homepage, Roberts himself directs the reader to a blog which compares the novel to Negri and Hardt's work. Available at <http://www.leninology.co.uk/2011/01/new-spirit-of-armed-combat.html#disqus_thread>. Accessed on 04/20/2017.

be accepted as a component of his utopian vision. His reasoning indicates that what we consider dystopian may be simply a departure from the values that support our social norm, but his explicit allusion to Zamyatin renders his presentation of the NMA more ambiguous, inviting the reader to see it as disquietingly dystopian.

As Dougherty points out, democracy in *New Model Army* is unstable, since it “destroys the influence of tradition and opens up the present to a contingent future” (DOUGHERTY, 2013, p. 519). Similarly to Hobbes’ commonwealth, the new social organization of the NMAs emerges from a state of war – the war among the several factions that hire the NMAs, and the war of the NMAs against the modern state. It is in this context that the terror associated with the mechanism of subjection within the commonwealth, displaced by the figurative decapitation of Leviathan, is reinscribed in the representation of the NMAs. The rhetoric of the narrator of *New Model Army* insists on the enormous dimensions of his “ungentle giant”, on his power and invincibility: “And in the morning we would rise up, mightily. For the heart of our creed is: rejoice not against me, o my enemy” (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 121). The awe inspired by the giant, which was a central aspect of Hobbes’ image of Leviathan, also shapes the conception of the giant of democracy in *New Model Army*, not as a means to guarantee the subjection to a sovereign, but as a manifestation of the power of the new social order. It is also a manifestation of “the people’s authority”, a sublime expression of “the vitality and significance of popular will”, which is typical of the visual representation of the people as a mass (FRANK, 2015). As such, awe also becomes the expression of the vital energy which imbues the individual merged with the body of the giant: “I was part of a single organism (...), and was gifted with purpose and meaning and strength and agency in my life” (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 121).

The image of the giant as an organism finds its culmination in the end of *New Model Army*, when each NMA acquires a single conscience as their members are connected into a hive mind. The scientific means through which this is achieved is never clearly explained in the novel – captured by the traditional army, the narrator had been armed with something similar to a computer virus meant to infect the

communication systems of the NMAs, but which he uses instead to turn their members into the components of a vast neural network. This vagueness seems to indicate that, rather than plausibility, what is at work here is the drive to carry the image of society as a single body to its utmost limits. The awe inspired by the giant, as Dougherty argues, becomes a symbol for the frightening and mysterious possibilities ushered in by the new social organization the NMAs represent (DOUGHERTY, 2013, p. 519). But this new incarnation of the NMA creates problems for its function as a representation of radical democracy. While the narrator of *New Model Army* insists on the importance of conflict in the form of debates for the functioning of any real democracy, the new Leviathan that manifests itself in the last pages of the novel speaks as a single individual. Instead of a multiplicity of voices trying to find a consensus in their diversity, we hear the voice of a single "I" who frantically reasserts himself (ROBERTS, 2010, p. 275-281).

For Negri and Hardt, the multitude "is not unified but remains plural and multiple"; it is "composed of a set of *singularities* – and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different". As a consequence, Negri and Hardt emphatically reject the image of the social body, which would erase these differences by coalescing them into a single organism, in favor of the image of the multitude as amorphous, "*living flesh* that rules itself" (NEGRI and HARDT, 2004, loc. 1783, 1799; emphasis in the original). By turning the NMA into a giant that has actual presence in the narrative, *New Model Army* effectively contradicts the dynamics of discussion and deliberation that characterized its vision of radical democracy in the beginning. The Leviathan looms again over the landscape, a concrete manifestation of the social body as a vast, unified being.

Inside the body of the whale

Leviathan has many faces in *The Unwritten*. First, he is Moby-Dick; then he is the whale Sinbad mistook for an island; after that, he becomes the whale who swallowed Jonah and Pinocchio, among other characters; finally, all these images converge into Hobbes' social giant. The narrative structure of

The Unwritten, especially in the story arc “Leviathan”, follows the logic of a dialectical symbolism. One symbol refers to another, the possible meanings they convey being restructured in their succession and interaction. At another level, the story works on the assumption that symbols affect reality, but not in the Platonic sense of ideal forms projected into empirical reality, even though a character in the narrative states that “[w]hen the world’s **flesh** is scoured away, **metaphors** will be all that’s left” (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 22, p. 16; emphasis in the original).⁴ In *The Unwritten*, symbols help shape reality, but at the same time they are an artificial creation, being a product of the fiction we write. This interaction between the real and the fictional is the premise of the narrative of *The Unwritten*, which focuses on the adventures of Tom Taylor, the son of the author of a hugely successful series of fantasy novels, whose hero, Tommy Taylor, is supposed to have been inspired by Tom (the series is a reference to the Harry Potter novels, including corny pseudo-Latin magic words). While searching for his own origins (he may or may not be a fictional creation of his father, a reincarnation of Tommy Taylor in the real world), Tom discovers that he can perform magic just as his namesake. In order to understand how his power works – and, more broadly, how stories can influence the world (his magic already being a concrete symbol of how fiction interferes with reality) – Tom decides to follow a trail of stories marked on a map found in his father’s study, a map of stories: “Big ones. Stories that hit the world like **bombs**” (CAREY et al., 2009, n. 4, p. 10; emphasis in the original).

He begins his exploration at a place marked as “the source” on the map: the Herman Melville’s Arrowhead Museum, at the farm where Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*. Melville’s novel first appears on the pages of “Leviathan” as a series of evocations that point to its overwhelming presence: the museum which acts as a monument for its writing, the bus mounted with a whaling boat on its top that carries Tom and his friends there, the objects in display which attempt to physically recreate the atmosphere of the novel, the copy of *Moby-Dick* which Lizzie, one of Tom’s friends, carries with her during their visit to the museum. The passage from *Moby-Dick* which Lizzie quotes at the museum entrance already points to the interpretive view that guides the appropriation of Melville’s

⁴ *The Unwritten*: “Leviathan” was originally serialized as *The Unwritten*, n. 19-24, in 2011, and collected in a single volume later in the same year. Neither the individual issues nor the volumes of the collected edition have page numbers. In order to facilitate the location of quoted passages, I have provided the issue number and my estimate of the page number within each issue where the passages appear.

text in *The Unwritten*: “As yet, however, the great whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature. Far above all other hunted whales his is an *unwritten* life” (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 19, p. 4-5; emphasis in the original). The whale emerges as a sublime being – for Barbara Glenn, “Moby Dick himself (...) is the epitome of the sublime leviathan”, not only because of the terror it inspires, but also because of his unknowability (GLENN, 1976, p. 169-171). The whale cannot be completely grasped by reason, nor can it be fully represented; it presents an excess that overflows the boundaries of literature and that remains unwritten. As Camille Dumoulié argues, in having its excessiveness exacerbated, Moby Dick turns into a figure of emptiness, since he remains an inscrutable being, his whiteness representing at the same time the absence of color and the excessive presence of all colors, the innumerable meanings ascribed to him revealing the absence of an ultimate meaning that could explain him (DUMOULIÉ, 2007, p. 17, 23). Using a concept borrowed from Umberto Eco, Peter Wilkins calls *Moby-Dick* an “open work”, since it demands the reader to connect all its narrative threads and different discourses that compose it, and because it remains incomplete, insofar as Ahab never achieves the ultimate knowledge he was looking for, and Ishmael never manages to satisfactorily represent the whale (WILKINS, 2015, p. 217-218). For Wilkins, *The Unwritten* engages with this sense of incompleteness in *Moby-Dick*, focusing on the indefiniteness of the whale as symbol rather than on the plot of the novel, and playfully manipulating its elements, for “[i]n place of the ‘don’t touch me’ aura of the ‘masterpiece,’ *Moby-Dick* says ‘play with me’” (WILKINS, 2015, p. 225).

But while *The Unwritten* engages with *Moby-Dick* in a sort of literary game, its appropriation of the novel as a symbol still involves the reaffirmation of its canonical status as a “masterpiece”. The focus on the museum in the first pages of “Leviathan” places Melville’s novel as the center of a cultural cult, which further manifests itself in the festival where people gather in the town park to read it aloud, often dressed as characters in the book (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 20, p. 7-8, 10-11). Its identification with “the source” also points to it as a central cultural reference. This finds a concrete representation in the image of the giant whale penis displayed in a jar in the museum (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 19, p. 11). The penis is an

obvious symbol of the generative power of the whale, but it is also one more reference to the novel, more specifically to chapter 95, "The Cassock", where it is compared to an idol and called "the grandissimus", in a description packed with allusions to religious worship (MELVILLE, 1979, p. 429-431). As a museum piece, the penis still evokes the power of creation, now associated with the novel itself, and remains part of a different kind of worship; nevertheless, it is a dead object, and both it and the novel it represents must be revitalized by the creation of new objects and new texts. The succession of gaudy motel signs carrying names such as "The Mizzen Mast", "Whaler's Rest", "Top Gallant", and "The Spouter Inn" are examples of such objects, which turn *Moby-Dick* into a commodity economically exploited by the town near which Melville's museum is located. The spectral whale which Tom spots from the window of his motel is another object of this kind, since it turns out to be just a prop used in the festival (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 19, p. 14; n. 20, p. 5-8). These objects, together with the myriad copies of *Moby-Dick* the characters carry with them, lend the novel a physical presence, while the websites Tom reads in his motel room highlight the interpretive difficulties imposed by *Moby-Dick* and its mystery, transferring the sublime indefiniteness of the white whale to the novel itself (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 19, p. 17). *Moby-Dick*, then, turns out to be, first of all, the abundant source of products which are indeed "not just the physical determinants of our imaginative life but also the congealed facts and fantasies of a culture"; they are commodities which embody both material and immaterial aspects, their material presence pointing to an almost metaphysical possibility of meaning, and their constant reproduction and consumption creating the sense that we are possessed by them (BROWN, 2003, p. 4-5, 28).

As a cultural fetish, *Moby-Dick* emerges also as the source for a production of meaning that remains open because it never reaches an end, its sublimity as a text reinforced by the fact that it can never be fully grasped or even known. Tom himself has never read the whole novel, which in no way prevents it from haunting him. But the cultural commodities that maintain the novel's power to haunt can be frustrating when their condition as mere simulacra becomes too obvious. Disappointed in finding out that the whale he had taken for

a spectral manifestation of Moby Dick was just a carnival prop, Tom longs for a more direct contact with the source he is looking for, and ends up physically sucked into the novel itself. *Moby-Dick* acquires then its full status as a concrete presence in the narrative of *The Unwritten*, and this also leads to the consummation of its pull as a cultural artifact. In the role of a minor character in the novel, Tom notices that all the other characters follow the script imposed by the novel, their dialogue being pulled verbatim from the text, and that they only stare blankly when he asks them about information that is not contained in the narrative. "Perhaps there was an elementary force, like gravity or magnetism", he wonders. "A force that compelled the visitors to a fiction into a blind obedience to its words and structures" (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 21, p. 16). Moreover, he feels that this process will eventually take over himself; this is a threat to his identity, since he would become indistinguishable from the character whose part he plays, and also a threat to his life, since he would die with the rest of the crew if he stayed on the Pequod. From an open narrative, *Moby-Dick* becomes a trap, probably because acting as one of its characters means adhering to the surface of its text and to its plot. The solution is to open up the narrative again by reclaiming its status as a symbol and by reestablishing its contact with other narratives. Tom takes over the narrative voice of *Moby-Dick* in order to force it to an end, a point of equilibrium that would allow him to get out; what he achieves, though, is to bring it to a standstill. Interestingly, he does so by taking charge of the metaphors used to describe a storm and therefore controlling the symbolic language of the novel. Immobilizing the story seems to mean containing it, turning *Moby-Dick* into a cultural artifact that can then be inserted into a larger body of fictional creations.

Centered on the search for "the source", the narrative of "Leviathan" takes the archetypal shape of the hero's quest, and Tom, as the hero of the story, also finds helpers who guide him in his voyage. While still stuck in the immobilized narrative of *Moby-Dick*, he is visited by Mingus, a winged cat who was his namesake's companion in the Tommy Taylor novels, and by the creature of Frankenstein, who, as another artificial son in conflict with his father, stands as Tom's double. This visit is providential, as is often the case in adventure quests, for the

creature shows Tom the way out from his dilemma: he could use the ocean as a passage to another tale, for “[t]he **ocean** flows through many stories. It has no **borders**”, and “stories are porous. Interpenetrating. (...) [T]he **seals** between them are imperfect” (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 22, p. 6, 7; emphasis in the original).

The ocean, then, becomes a concrete symbol for the fluidity among stories, a physical means that allows not only Tom to travel from one story to the next, but also motifs and images to be transposed across different texts. Hence, when Tom plunges into the ocean, he surfaces again in a different story. He is fished out of the water by Sinbad and his crew, and taken to an island which famously turns out to be a giant whale. Tossed into the ocean again when the whale wrecks Sinbad’s ship, he surfaces once more to meet the Baron von Münchhausen travelling over the sea on horseback, since his horse is unaware that walking on water is impossible. The ocean doubles as fluid means of passage connecting different stories and as a motif within the stories themselves which points to the sublimity of an apparently endless fictional landscape. The effect of the sublime is replicated in the image of the whale, not only because of the enormous proportions with which it is represented, but also because of its repetition throughout the later part of the narrative – as Burke points out, objects whose bounds cannot be perceived by the eye, and the repetition of similar objects in succession create the illusion of infinity, a privileged source of the sublime (BURKE, 1998, p. 67).

But precisely because they are sublime, both the ocean and the whales in *The Unwritten* are essentially unknowable, symbols whose physical presence as visual images seems to demand interpretation, at the same time that their materiality as massive objects make any interpretive effort extremely difficult. As a consequence, symbols in *The Unwritten* are unstable and ambiguous. The waters from which Tom is rescued by Münchhausen are actually trapped inside yet another giant whale, where Tom also finds Sinbad, Jonah, Pinocchio and the mariner swallowed by a whale in Kipling’s short story “How the Whale Got His Throat”, from *Just So Stories*. This particular whale, then, is a nodal point of several stories that have the same theme, and as such it acts as a

concrete representation of the cultural world in which we are inserted – or, in Darko Suvin’s words, the Leviathan that is a “collective, politico-economic as well as ideological, hegemony, the World Whale inside which all of us are condemned to live” (SUVIN, 2010, p. 323). It may come as no surprise, then, that there seems to be no escape from this living prison: the whale does not behave as expected from the tales in which it appears, and refuses to sneeze or spit out its prey when its throat is irritated. The solution for this problem is in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.

Hobbes’ work is first mentioned early in the last issue of “Leviathan”, when Tom’s father shows him the passage on the formation of the giant of the commonwealth, when Tom is still a child: “A multitude of men are made **one** person, when they are by one man, or one person, **represented**. And unity cannot otherwise be understood in multitude” (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 23, p. 1; emphasis in the original). This is a central passage in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, and the fact that it is quoted in *The Unwritten* is significant, for it points to the way the multitude of people are united and to the way this process is related to the notion of representation – and the ideas of unity and representation are stressed in the emphasis given to the words “one” and “represented”. The sense of individuals merged in a totality is further reinforced in a later section in the same issue, when Tom’s father shows him a colony of ants in a museum, a section titled “The Power of a Nation”, in another reference to Hobbes’ text. The ants are compared to cells in a body, which have no sense of themselves as individuals. But while these first references engage *Leviathan* as a text, in the last pages of the story arc, it appears as an image. While the characters trapped in the whale are trying to escape, Tom’s winged cat brings him a copy of the frontispiece of Hobbes’ book. This physical manifestation of *Leviathan* triggers Tom’s hidden memory of the text, and he quotes the passage in which Hobbes compares the commonwealth to an artificial man. The same elements of Hobbes’ book that were appropriated by *New Model Army* are put into use here to reconstruct once again the image of the giant formed by the fusion of a multitude of bodies. And here an act of decapitation also takes place. In the moment of illumination that follows Tom’s encounter with the frontispiece, visually represented as a blinding explosion, the image of

the giant is shown among other debris with his head torn off from the paper. The next panel shows the decapitated head, and the panel after that zooms in to one of its eyes. A large blank panel then divides the page in half, followed by another large panel that focuses on Tom's eyes. Tom is surrounded by the sublime whiteness that is a central aspect of the mystery of *Moby Dick* as a symbol, but instead of incomprehension, this brings understanding. He realizes the true nature of the whale: it is a symbol for the power of the masses, the fictional unconscious, the minds of the millions of people who read his father's books, or any books. This is the source of his power, for in believing Tommy Taylor can use magic, this collective mind makes it possible for Tom to use magic as well. It is "**Hobbes's** whale, not Sinbad's or Jonah's, or Münchhausen's" (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 23, p. 16-17; emphasis in the original).

This realization, however, is not simply the result of reasoning, but rather of the visual manifestation of the source in the form of a gigantic whale composed of millions of bodies. The effect once again is sublime. As Burke points out, any object that creates an impression of danger or terror can be a source for the sublime; but for the sublime to occur, it is necessary that the observer be at some distance from these objects, so that his or her own self-preservation is never actually threatened (BURKE, 1998, p. 36). Tom's position as an observer ensures that his identity is not at risk of being swallowed by this new Leviathan (he will not become just another cell in the social body, without any sense of self), at the same time that he is able to channel its energies. There is, then, the sense of belonging to a totality while still preserving one's individuality. This is only possible because the symbol is represented as having a concrete presence, something that can be touched and that has actual power, but which can nevertheless be externalized as an independent being. In one of the panels that precede the final revelation of the source, Tom remembers something Lizzie had told him earlier, and which was already a clue to the nature of the source: "Some **symbols** become more real than what they stand for" (CAREY et al., 2011, n. 23, p. 15). But what is a symbol that becomes more real than what it stands for if not a symbol that denies its connection to a referent, a symbol that exists as a concrete, independent entity?

Conclusion

Both *New Model Army* and *The Unwritten* appropriate the image of the Leviathan as a symbol for the cohesion of disparate individuals into a larger social whole. In *New Model Army*, the appropriation of the symbol is part of a political project which criticizes the incomplete realization of democracy in the modern state, in favor of the notion of a radical democracy based on widespread discussion and direct participation of all members of the community. However, the organic nature of the unity thus achieved, based on the image of the social body, creates a contradiction, since it erases the differences necessary to maintain the kind of debate presented as being at the core of any real democracy. In *The Unwritten*, the appropriation of the same symbol leads to a discussion on the nature of symbols in general, of their relation to the imagination and reality, and of the construction of identity in a symbolic world. In both cases, the representation of symbols as a concrete presence influences the way their meanings are elaborated in each narrative. This is a consequence, as I have argued in my introduction, of the special way figurative language can be used in science-fictional and fantastic texts – and also, I might add, in graphic narratives, where symbols can be visually represented as an image. This concrete representation lends a peculiar weight to the way symbols are employed in these narratives, often making them more ambiguous and leading to contradictions, as in *New Model Army*, or to the fear that they can entrap us, as in *The Unwritten*. In both these narratives, however, the concrete representation of the symbol points to a desire to do away with the idea of representation, to let the symbol stand as immediate presence. In political terms, this translates itself in the desire that the individual should participate in the social body – merged with the idea of a universal culture in *The Unwritten* – as an integral part of it, with the power to directly influence or even shape it. The contradictions entailed in the representation of symbols as a material presence, as well as the safeguards taken to preserve the integrity of the individual in the fusion with other bodies, reveal the difficulties in presenting this ideal as a coherent alternative to our familiar social norms.

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Resumo

Sobre baleias e gigantes: imagens do Leviatã em *New Model Army* e *The Unwritten*

*Narrativas fantásticas e de ficção científica empregam modalidades de representação específicas. Em ambos os gêneros, a linguagem figurada pode ser empregada num sentido literal, de modo que os símbolos adquiram uma representação concreta no texto. O objetivo deste artigo é examinar como uma imagem específica, a do gigante Leviatã como uma metáfora da agregação dos indivíduos para formar o corpo social, é explorada por uma narrativa fantástica e outra de ficção científica. No romance de ficção científica *New Model Army*, de Adam Roberts, a imagem do Leviatã de Hobbes é usada para propor a noção de uma democracia radical em que todos os membros da comunidade têm uma participação orgânica no corpo social. Na narrativa gráfica *The Unwritten*, de Mike Carey, Peter Gross e Vince Locke, o Leviatã de Hobbes é explorado em conjunto com o *Moby-Dick* de Melville para investigar a natureza da representação simbólica e a relação entre cultura e realidade objetiva. A apropriação da metáfora do Leviatã como símbolo concreto determina a maneira como as duas narrativas desenvolvem os seus temas principais e articulam os seus significados.*

Palavras-chave: símbolo; representação; Leviatã; *Moby-Dick*; corpo social.