REVISTA MOSAICO

ANTISEMITISM AND ART: A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON "HUGH OF LINCOLN" FOLKTALE

ANTISSEMITISMO E ARTE: UM BREVE COMENTÁRIO SOBRE O CONTO POPULAR "HUGO DE LINCOLN"

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ABSTRACT: Jews have been accused of blood rituals for much of English history. Unjust public trials and social imagery gave rise to many a folk story on that theme. Thus, this article aims to achieve the following goals: **1)** comment on the main literary aspects of "Hugh of Lincoln" folktale; **2)** reveal its hung artistic status between the antisemitic pamphlet and the mere fiction. The bibliographical research and the work of analysis aimed to contribute to the Literary Studies of folktales in order to broaden its field of vision beyond the dictates of the diachronic approach.

KEYWORDS: Hugh of Lincoln; folktale; antisemitism.

RESUMO: Os judeus vêm sendo acusados de rituais de sangue durante grande parte da história inglesa. Julgamentos públicos injustos e o imaginário social deram origem a muitas histórias sobre esse tema. Portanto, este artigo visa atingir os seguintes objetivos: **1)** comentar sobre os principais aspectos literários do conto popular "Hugo de Lincoln"; **2)** revelar seu estatuto artístico suspenso entre o panfleto antissemita e a mera ficção. A pesquisa bibliográfica e o trabalho de análise visam contribuir para os Estudos Literários dos contos populares de modo a ampliar seu campo de visão para além dos ditames da abordagem diacrônica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Hugo de Lincoln; conto popular; antissemitismo.

1 Introduction

From the remotest historical ages and among the most isolated peoples all over the world, plenty of oral stories have survived upon the tyranny of time by being retold over generations of taletellers, whose attempt to record the memory

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verbatim often runs against both memory gaps and the drive of making the telling unique. These phenomena, stated by Thompson (1946), persecute not only the general "laws" of *folktale* oral transmission but also a whole paradigm to be seen whilst commenting on a certain version of an ancient ballad, for instance.

Even though we assume that no work of art has a so deeply fictional status as to break any resonance of the social world into a totally abstract text – what would generate an incomprehensible "mass of letters", once the meanings depend somehow on that calling for our gathered knowledge – the very relationship between a literary text and its social reality is not ours either to see in its fullness (Candido, 2006). However, keeping in mind the existence of subtle links trespassing *social reality* and *fictional reality* is essential for a keen analysis of literary works, especially of folk narratives – which often have their origins in historical facts before they cease to be mere reports and enter on the sphere of literature[2]. In other words, there are many oral stories strongly funded by historical events, and so does my object of analysis.

According to the medieval manuscript *Chronica Majora*, an eight-year boy named Hugh was gloomy murdered on the 27th of July 1255 by the Jews living at Lincoln town, during the reign of King Henry III. After being sacrificed, the corpse was crucified and so dumped in a well, where his desperate mother would find him lifeless. After a while, the corpse miraculously appeared on the ground to be buried in the Lincoln Cathedral, and the Jewish people *alleged* guilty were executed (Paris, 1880).

Clearly funded on the motifs of that episode (which was visibly reported from an antisemitic point of view), many a version of folktale was spread in English-speaking countries, which have been documented through the hunting-and-gathering effort of folklorists as Jamieson (1806), Child (1885), Coffin (1950) and others. Moreover, the yeasty variance of the versions was in such a way that it stimulated Coffin to determine three great *types* of plots, according to the distribution of common characteristics.

[2] For further information about the changing of a *historical report* into a *folktale*, the reader might appreciate noticing that the origin of any folk story is a rebuilding with some degree of possibility – according to social consensus and research. As a current example, observe the nursery rhyme "The Muffin Man", whose motifs are highly believed to have its origin in the famous 16th-century serial killer Frederic Thomas Lynwood, who was also a baker and lived on Drury Lane, in London city (UK).

The selected version for this analysis is Child's ballad **No. 155-A**, which develops Coffin's **type B** and was collected from Jamieson's verbatim transcription of a recitation made by Mrs. Brown of Falkland, wife of the Rev. Dr. Brown. The main reasons that led me to choose this version are both antiquity and oral existence.

Many works have been published about the historical event of Little Hugh, but I could not find even an article focalizing the literary aspects of the version I chose. This emptiness owes its lack to the strongly influential tendency to analyze a folktale upon a **diachronic** approach – willing to build its life story – while I undertake here a **synchronic** approach – willing to comment on one version (to which the other diachronic phenomena are nothing but secondary elements).

As such, this article aims to comment – however briefly – on the literary aspects of "Hugh of Lincoln" ballad, in order to shed light on a relatively unexplored analytical path of it: the synchronic one. It also aims to reveal its tension between the *pamphleteering* and the *non-ideological* – which gives us a glimpse of the position of literature itself.

To investigate so, it was made bibliographical research based on some of the most famous collections of folktales (Jamieson, 1806; Child, 1885; Coffin, 1950), on some research published about "Hugh of Lincoln" (Gresham, 1934; Stamper; Jansen, 1958; Göller, 1987; Potter, 2017); and on a treatise on folktales (Thompson, 1946).

With this purpose, this work begins with a detailed analysis of the formal content, crossing semantics, rhythm, metre and other interesting features to contribute to the meaning. After that, I sketch a conclusion regarding the in-between place of the poem.

The discussion presented in this article intends to contribute to the field of Literary Studies in a way to foster debate on the rights of literary texts to fly beyond the boundaries of prejudice and its opposite, given that literature "[...] does not *corrupt* nor *edify*, therefore; but, bringing freely in itself what we call good and what we call mad, it humanizes in a profound sense, because it makes us live" (Candido, 1999, p. 85, translation mine). The discussion also intends to stimulate future research about folktales to devote some willingness to

synchrony, and not only to the historical-geographical approach – once the value of a folk story is not totally funded by the discovery of *archetypes* and *oikotypes*[3], but also in itself as a whole material to be considered.

As such, by the end, three questions are intended to be answered: **1)** what are the main literary aspects of "Hugh of Lincoln" ballad; **2)** how may they contribute to the poetical meaning construction; **3)** what is the place of this ballad in relation with the antisemitic pamphlet and the mere work of fiction.

2 The woeful bonny bairn

In a first moment, let us take a look on the ballad as it follows below.

HUGH OF LINCOLN

Four and twenty bonny boys
Were playing at the ba';
And by it came him, sweet sir Hugh,
And he play'd o'er them a'.

He kick'd the ba' with his right foot,
And catch'd it wi' his knee;
And throuch-and thro' the Jew's window,
He gar'd the bonny ba' flee.

He's doen him to the Jew's castell,
And walk'd it round about;
And there he saw the Jew's daughter
At the window looking out.

"Throw down the ba', ye Jew's daughter,
Throw down the ba' to me!"
"Never a bit," says the Jew's daughter,
Till up to me come ye."

"How will I come up? How can I come up?

[3] Based on the aims of the Finnish historic-geographical method by Kaarle Krohn and others, Thompson (1946) exposes to his readers the general steps to conduct research on a folktale on that approach. In brief, its utmost goal is to compare the features among versions in order to sound what may have been the very first version (*archetype*). While building the life history of the folktale, some special developments (*oikotypes*) are about to be discovered in certain places and ages.

How can I come to thee?
For as ye did to my auld father,
The same ye'll do to me."

She's gane till her father's garden,
And pu'd an apple, red and green;
'Twas a' to wyle him, sweet sir Hugh,
And to entice him in.

She's led him through ae dark door,
And sae has she thro' nine;
She's laid him on a dressing table,
And stickit him like a swine.

And first came out the thick thick blood,
And syne came out the thin;
And syne came out the bonny heart's blood;
There was nae mair within.

She's row'd him in a cake o' lead,
Bade him lie still and sleep;
She's thrown him in Our Lady's draw well,
Was fifty fathom deep.

When bells were rung, and mass was sung,
And a' the bairns came hame,
When every lady gat hame her son,
The Lady Maisry gat nane.

She's ta'en her mantle her about,
Her coffer by the hand;
And she's gane out to seek her son,
And wander'd o'er the land.

She's doen her to the Jew's castell,
Where a' were fast asleep;
"Gin ye be there, my sweet sir Hugh,
I pray you to me speak."

She's doen her to the Jew's garden,
Thought he had been gathering fruit;
"Gin ye be there, my sweet sir Hugh,
I pray you to me speak."

She near'd Our Lady's deep draw-well,
Was fifty fathom deep;
"Whare'er ye be, my sweet sir Hugh,
I pray you to me speak."

"Gae hame, gae hame, my mither dear;
Prepare my winding sheet;
And, at the back o' merry Lincoln,
The morn I will you meet."

Now lady Maisry is gane hame;
Made him a winding sheet;
And, at the back o' merry Lincoln,
The dead corpse did her meet.

And a' the bells o' merry Lincoln,
Without men's hands were rung;
And a' the books o' merry Lincoln,
Were read without man's tongue;
And ne'er was such a burial
Sin Adam's days begun.
(Jamieson, 1806, p. 151-4).

In a general and yet beginning sight, one must not avoid perceiving the interrelation that the poetical dimension of the poem establishes with the narrative dimension of the story. What concerns this narrative dimension, the *fabula*[4] tells us the tragic story of a sweet little boy named Hugh, who was probably wandering the lanes of Lincoln town during the day until he found out a group of playing children tossing a ball. So witty and skillful was he that – in a spite – he mastered the game over all the others, until the tossed ball – by chance or by supernatural volition – fled into a Jewish dwelling that was set nearby.

Willing to recover the toy, Hugh went seeking it roundabout the **castell**[5] and so was surprised by the Jew's daughter looking out the window and seducing him – with a tasty apple – to come in as a condition for her to return the toy. Although fearful, he decided to do so, and was led through many a room until

[4] Tomachevski (1971) sets two analytical dimensions for dealing with a narrative. The *fabula* consists on the story events linearly organized in its progressive direction, going from the most distant past to the most recent present and its possible projections into the future. On the other hand, the *trama* consists on the story events in the way it is just told by the narrator.

[5] A **castell** is an old word for a fortified dwelling, which does not need to be a castle in its proper meaning.

his destiny was finally set: she stabbed him in the heart and let him die deep inside a sacred draw-well.

When late was the day and sung was the mass in Lincoln Cathedral, it was the time for a playing child to come back home to its mother dear, but little Hugh was not able to return once he was sinking. His desperate mother (Lady Maisry), in a hurry to find her lost **bairn**[6], wandered the town, called him thrice and, finally, the corpse answered asking the woeful woman to come back home, prepare his funeral garments, and meet him at the back of the town on the following day. As he said, the corpse was miraculously lying on the ground at the back of merry Lincoln, and it was made such a burial that even the Cathedral bells were willing to honor the little martyr.

Once brought this brief overview of the told story, it is possible to seek some subtle semantic details, once the status of each word in a poetical text must be put in doubt about its *for-free* appearance. As an antibiotic to possible misunderstandings of this need that I intend to sustain throughout my whole analysis, I invest some lines in further explanations in order to prove the following point: doubting the *for-free* appearance of an element in the poem does not imply wild openness to state everything about the meaning. In other words, it does not imply keeping the sensibility wide open to unfunded relationships among the elements; once the impetus must be chiefly reason-driven, and not merely sensation-driven.

The openness I am referring to is that which is ontological to art; about what Chklosvki (1971) commented in terms of *strangeness* and *singularization* and Valery (2018) by the means of the following question:

> [...] have you ever noticed, certainly, this curious fact, that such a *word*, perfectly clear when you hear or use it in *normal* language, not offering the slightest difficulty when engaged in the fast movement of an ordinary sentence, magically becomes problematic, introduces a strange resistance, frustrates all efforts at definition as soon as you remove it from circulation to examine it separately, looking for a meaning after having subtracted it from its momentary function? (Valery, 2018, p. 211-212, translation mine).

[6] A **bairn** is a Scottish word for a child.

Based on that, my reading of the first stanza of the ballad was able to find strange barricades on many an element, of which I will start with the verbs referring to the protagonist's actions:

> Four and twenty bonny boys
> Were playing at the ba';
> And **by** it **came** him, sweet sir Hugh, | *come by*
> And he **play'd o'er** them a'. | *play over*

When we persecute the usage of the verb *come by*, our mental movement of analysis isolates the sentence and projects the paradigm of other possible verbs to complete the space in which the focalized word appears; in a way, we are impelled to sink in plenty of comparisons among *come by ~ walk ~ wander ~ go* and so on.

On the one hand, the chosen phrasal verb may suggest that little Hugh was wandering around the town with no destiny, as it is enough common nowadays in small towns and villages, where almost every citizen is known by the others. In this possibility of meaning, the mother dear left his little son Hugh to come out home during the day and walk around Lincoln, probably with some asking for him to return – at the most – when the evening mass was sung.

From another point of view, the chosen phrasal verb may suggest that the mother dear asked his son to go walking in the direction of some other place for some reason until he – by the right or the wrong path – came by the group and left his mission (if there was any) to *play over* the children.

When we consider this second perspective, we are able to perceive in ourselves a special volition to link the boy's tragic death to the detour he made, in such a willing way that we cannot avoid identifying this volition to something that seems to be a general trend in reading. A great reason for this tendency is that we have a considerable repertoire of nursery rhymes – socially spread in the tradition of nursering the children – in which the motifs of *detour* and *misfortune* are put into causality, as it occurs in the famous German *Märchen* "Little Red Riding Hood", for instance. That being the case, the fate of little Hugh resonates with the destiny of children who disobey their mother's advice and go out of the way due to the impulses of pleasure.

Once saw the succulent opportunity of considering the detour as a possible *cause* for the *effect* of dying so prematurely, the uncomfortable end without explanation sees hope of appeasement in a `cause → effect` relationship.

In comparison with the hypothesis of a youth walking with no target place, the hypothesis of the goal walking may be gifted in promoting that volition to define the cause of misfortune. However, I do not claim to defeat the probability of finding a causality for this other perspective, but only to warn that the same associating state of mind – equally eager to find an explanation for the murder – must be considered with caution: a boy wandering the town may not be the specific cause in itself for the effect of being murdered, but perhaps the *cautionless wandering*, or even the *disobedient attitude* of going into the Jewish house.

In any case, both points of view indicate a pedagogical function of warning, in which the advising content makes itself present by the means of the polyphonic answer given by Hugh to the maiden's invitation:

> "How will I come up? How can I come up?
> How can I come to thee?
> For as ye did to my auld father,
> The same ye'll do to me."

This stanza is highly suggestive of some previous settings to the told story, such as the fact that little Hugh may be a fatherless child and his mother, as a consequence, a widow. Once considered this information, we are able to have a glimpse into the difficulties of a solace mother growing a little child during the Medieval Ages; and the desperation felt by Lady Maisry when she – besides a widow – became childless after discovering the dead corpse of her little bairn.

It is an immediate thrust of reading (but not a lower one), in which we recognize ourselves so willing to associate the destiny of his old father to the destiny of the child itself as if to say that Hugh had a hunch of the deadly occurrences that will take place if he yields to the Jew daughter's charms. However, we must not keep out of mind that what she probably did to his **auld father** is not ours to see in its explicit meaning, once our only source of

information about his father's fate is by the means of **sweet sir Hugh**'s telling. The highlighting I gave to the designation of these characters performs the function of emphasizing the motifs that the ballad itself brings to the plot, in such a way that we are led to recognize a web of innocence-and-experience voices in this polyphonic stanza:

INNOCENCE	**EXPERIENCE**
sweet sir Hugh	*mither dear*
	auld father

Considering the sweetness of the bonny bairn, we could say that he did not mean to insinuate to the maiden that she was going to kill him as she had done to his old father because the boy is expected to be so wee that – by innocence – he is not able yet to perceive devilish intentions behind the charming *femme fatale*. Thus, the origin of the warning presented in the passage may be considered in a possible speech of his mother dear, who – by experience –advised him to be careful with Jews, or with those Jews in special.

Alternatively, the current development of our studies on childhood allowed us to break, in some ways, with this myth of a totally pure and innocent child, in such a way that an interpretative position – aware of the construction of experience in children – could say that Hugh had the wit to insinuate to the maiden that she was going to kill him. This being the case, the boy had a right guess about his own fate, in a manner we are impelled to imagine a *blood libel*[7] behind the murder, as we may perceive by the following couplet:

> She's laid him on a dressing table,
> And stickit him like a swine.

After conducting the boy through many a room, the maiden laid the bonny boy on a dressing table, where she stabbed him with a weapon until death, like it is commonly done to a **swine** – a domestic pig or other animals one strikes to make food of it; such animalization made of the bairn. This refinement of

[7] During most of English history, dying children cases were commonly associated with Jews living at ghettos, in such a way that it was widely said that they kidnapped the bairns in order to use them in blood rituals (Child, 1885).

cruelty brings a strangeness to his murder in such a way that we cannot only imagine a blood ritual of which the very old father of the boy was also a victim, but also a serial killing in which the maiden – with no mystical purpose – murdered both father and son by her own please of killing, or by some retaliation, or even by some familiar conflict between those Jews and them.

As I said previously, the ballad is not clear enough for us to state that the old father was murdered, as well as to state that he is dead at that time – although the omission of the poem seduces us to say the opposite, and to see in the absence of a seeking father for the lost son a prove that he is dead. The meaningful implications of this caution I am proposing lie in realizing a brilliant key to reading the poem: if the old father is not dead, what did the Jew's daughter do to him?

Once again, we are put into rotation within the polyphony, and the boy's answer to the maiden may reflect advice given to him not only by his mother but also by his father, in which the *seducing/enticing* may be the very thing she did to him. It accuses a socially biased reading of the content because the Jewish women were understood to be prostitutes and associated with the biblical *Whore of Babylon*.

Enough commented on the pedagogical function and the moral content behind the boy's speech, let us take a look at what happened after the trap:

> And first came out the **thick thick** blood,
> And syne came out the **thin**;
> And syne came out the bonny heart's blood;
> There was **nae mair** within.

A ravishing image is created around the woeful destiny, in such a way we are put in front of the scene to witness the exact moment when the boy, suspended between life and death, abandons life and ceases to be (in a material dimension of existence). The telling drags along in an upward gradation that rushes from torrential flow towards total sanguine exhaustion by the following steps: *thick thick* → *thin* → *no more*.

By the mean of this gradation, the ballad imposes a great dramatic intensity on the murder, so that it oscillates between the sublime and the animalistic, once

we have a similar image when killing a swine: it comes out the thick blood until the flow decreases into a thin "thread" and stops.

Moreover, the refinements of cruelty are also configured in the very means that the maiden found to spawn the dead corpse:

> She's thrown him in **Our Lady**'s draw well,
> Was fifty **fathom** deep.

She threw him into a sacred draw-well associated with the Holy Mary, which can be considered a final act of sacrilege if we highlight the hypothesis of a blood libel – as if the daughter, not satisfied with taking his life, decided to make a *grand finale* act of offense to Christendom.

Considering what I have initially said about doubting the *for-free* status of the features, we are impelled to guess why the draw-well was fifty fathoms deep; in which ways it contribute to the meanings of the poem. At first, it is essential to decode the period references: a **fathom** is an ancient unit of length for the depth of water, in which one of it equals 1.8 meters or 6 feet; which implies that the depth underground where the corpse was lying is **90 meters** – a huge number for the human length.

One of the contributions of this information to the overall meaning of the poem is the proposing of the following question: how could the corpse go out of the draw-well, once the great depth establishes a huge difficulty for removing it even by means of external aid? The answer for this may lighten the miraculous conditions themselves, which may have probably frightened the murderess, similar to what occurred in the historical report of Hugh of Lincoln:

> And by hand he was put hidden, the earth ate him and vomited him, and the corpse appeared unburied several times above the ground, whereupon the Jews were horrified. At last, in a well he was thrown, and yet it could not be hidden[8] (Paris, 1880, p. 519, translation mine).

[8] In the original version: "Et cum mane putatur absonditum, edidit illud terra et evomuit, et apparuit corpus aliquotiens inhumatum supra terram, unde abhorruerunt Judaei. Tandem in puteum praecipitatum est, nec adjuc tamen poterat occultari".

In whatever manner the corpse found his way out of the deep well, the interim between its entry and its exit is when the greatest dramatic weight is set, by the *recognition* of woe by the characters. This is the main *peripeteia* in a tragedy, once it is also the means to promote *catharsis*, which constitutes a tragical text (Aristoteles, 2020).

And so it happens when rung were the bells and sung was the mass: the mother dear has a slight suspicion that something has occurred to her son. What she does then is expressed in the following stanza:

> She's ta'en her **mantle** her about,
> Her **coffer** by the hand;
> And she's gane out to seek her son,
> And wander'd o'er the land.

Lady Maisry, perceiving that it was late evening and her beloved son was not at home yet, she wore her mantle about her back and took her **coffer**, what is a kind of case where someone carries valuables of some kind (with a similar function to a purse nowadays). This image suggests a hurried and desperate movement of the woman who, in the middle of the night, went out to seek her lost bairn.

I am going to invest a further explanation on the time hint *late evening* because it is highly important for the association to be made. In fact, the twelfth stanza brings a line that says "Where a' were fast asleep"; and when we consider the coordination between temporal data, we are able to guess the very hour when the mother came at the Jewish castell and prayed Hugh to her speak, and this assumption is made by summing *after mass* + *fast sleeping* = *late evening*.

The asking for his mom to meet him in the next morning and the meeting itself evokes a deep relationship with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, although it did not last the same period of time as those of Hugh. This relationship is set mainly on the opposition between *night* / *morn*, *underground* / *on the ground*, in which the very changing of place is enough to bring the motif of resurrection, once it implies an imagery movement of rising (↑) from a lower to an upper place.

Finally, the resurrection is also sensed by the name similarity between *Maisry ~ Mary* and by the fact that she is mother to the character who represents Jesus in the ballad, in such a way we may create a parallel Hugh (Jesus) / Maisry (Mary).

3 A bonny way of telling

It is not merely interesting, but also essential to perceive that the first word ("four") sets the rules of versification in this poem, once all those stanzas are composed of four lines each. However, far beyond what the written dimension of a folktale allows us to see, there is a songlike feature on the background of Jamieson's record, who was not aware (or even able) to take note of the singing material in a musical sheet, in order to avoid this immaterial compound ceasing to live.

That musical dimension – if put in the foreground of our analysis – also accuses the irradiation power of the first word, because the boundaries among the written verses may be sung with discriminable interruptions according to the power of each caesura. Based on that, even in the singing dimension, we are put in front of a four-way split unit of repetition:

Four **|** and **|** twen**|**ty **|** bo**|**nny **|** boys **||**
Were **|** play**|**ing **|** at **|** the **|** ba'; **|||**
And **|** by **|** it **|** came **|** him, **|** sweet **|** sir **|** Hugh, **||**
And **|** he **|** play'd **|** o'er **|** them **|** a'. **|||**

Worried about possible misunderstandings around this idea, I dedicate some further explanations about the mirroring between *poem* and *song*, in order to make it enough clear that whichever dimension we are willing to adopt, we may see the four-way split structure, although the boundaries are not established by the very same parameters. Commonly, the *stanza* in the written dimension acts like a *unit of repetition* in the musical dimension, in such a way that all the stanzas with similar sound patterns are sung alike throughout the folksong – with few singing adaptations depending on the metrical feet and the final sestet. Moreover, the *verse* in the written dimension acts like a *distinct fragment* inside

the mass of sounds in the musical dimension, which can only occur if we consider the existence of *pauses* (interruptions in sound) delimiting sections in the sound mass.

Of course, the length of each pause depends somehow on the nature of the sentence, and the pauses themselves make the singing speech last longer than it would do if the mass of sounds was emitted continuously. Without wishing to fall into the formalist error of considering the structure I found as the utmost truth, I make here a caveat: the proposed division of caesural pauses is true until other analyzing parameters say otherwise. In fact, I used single bars (**|**) for the common boundaries among poetical syllables; dual bars (**||**) for the short caesural pause; and triple bars (**|||**) for the long caesural pause as it may suggested in written marks as semicolon (**;**) and period (**.**).

Observe below why the presence of pauses is a prerequisite for considering discriminated fragments (verses) within a musical stanza:

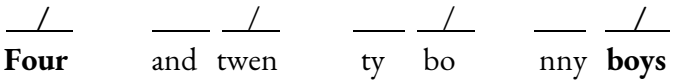
——————————————— (continuous sound mass)
——— ——— ——— ——— (four-way split mass)

Once this mirroring between music and poem is proven, we are referred back to the following problem: is it reasonable considering such a common feature (the initial "four") as a meaningful element to the poem?

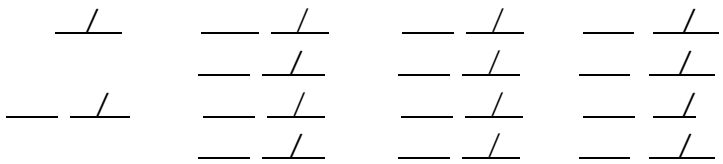
On the one hand, it may be possible to defeat the iconic power of the first word by saying that the quatrain is the chiefly common pattern of stanza in folktales all over the world: thus, noticing that the first word is "four" would be a mere mathematical coincidence which cannot contribute deeply on a critical commentary on our poetical material. However, on the other hand, I am not able to find a sensible argument funding this easy dismissal of a reading hint, since even the most repeated pattern in poetry may cause us *strangeness* by means of *singularization* (Chklovski, 1971). In brief, an easy dismissal of poetical indexes on the label of "mere coincidence" is a highly probable hint of an unkeen reader.

In fact, the initial "four" is not a *for-free* element in the poem, because of the following reasons together: **1)** the stanza where it appears has four lines; **2)** the verse where it appears has four metrical feet; **3)** the word "four" is a stressed syllable, so it has the upper hand over the other unstressed syllables; **4)** the word

"four is a stressed foot, so it has the upper hand over the other unstressed feet. Observe the sound scheme for the first line:



The isolation of the stressed foot of one syllable puts it in a status of the accentual head, which shines over the whole poem constituted of iambic feet (also the most famous verse pattern in Medieval Literature). This is made in such a way that it creates an oscillation inside the first stanza, with one single variation: the very word "four"; a core of tension:



It does not seem keen to ignore this deep dimension of iconization only due to the quatrain is not a newish feature at all for folktales. Even in those cases in which the verse pattern is highly stable (as the *haiku* structure of three verses of 5-7-5 syllables) we must not judge the phenomenon *for-free* and put the much of art in a place for not to thrive.

Moreover, numerology is also a promising path of reading, if we consider the compositionality of *four and twenty* in both ways: as a common numeral during Middle English Literature (mainly by Geoffrey Chaucer); and as a special phrasal building to mean in the poem. The first way will accuse a more prosaic meaning; whilst the second, a more poetical one – once we have already suggested our agreement on Chklovski's treatise on the art as a special status of a thing.

In the first way, we may state that *four and twenty* is a common inversion of *twenty-four* during the medieval period; thus it is not so interesting at all. However, not being that the case, we find conditions to follow a more gifted path of analysis.

When we fly a bit away from this pure mathematical abstraction and bet on the meaningful contributions it may thrive upon the story to be told, we are able to better comprehend the deepness of such a numerical image. Once Hugh's

playmates (associated with the even number **24** or the even components **2** and **4**) are the very ones who were not harassed by the Daughter's devilish trap; and once Hugh (associated with the odd number **1** or to the odd amount **25** of the new total of playing children after his arrival) is the very and only one who was harassed by the trap; there is a strong reason for us to invest earnest consideration in dealing with this feature.

Besides, the Jews are also associated with even numbers, as in "She's led him in through **ae** dark door, / And sae has she thro' **nine**"; although the draw well in the garden is "**fifty** fathom deep", what creates the following net of oppositions:

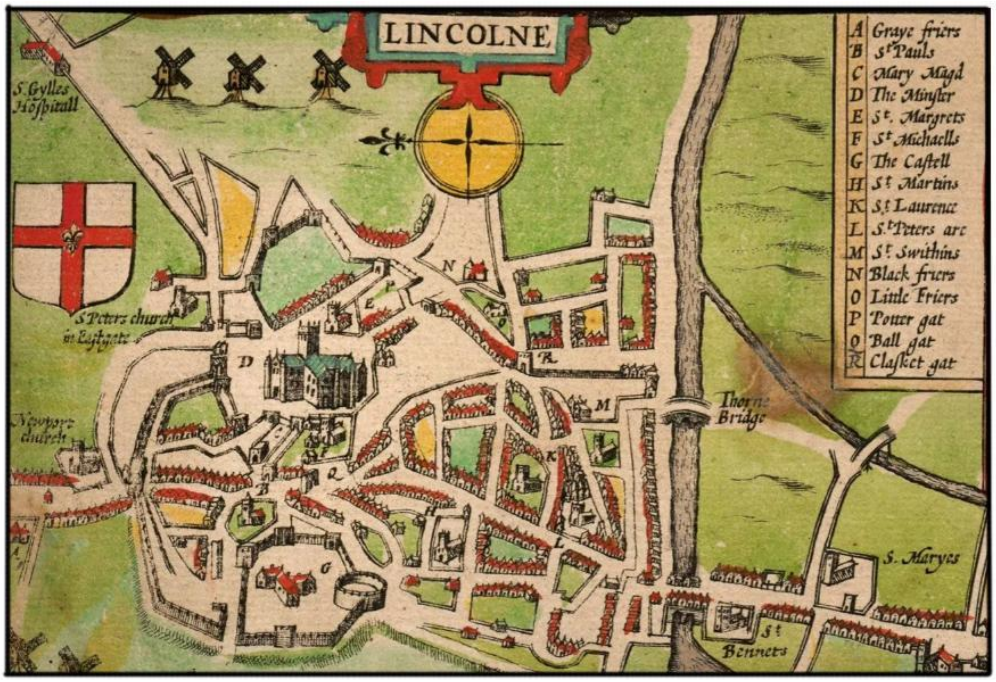
EVEN	**ODD**
playing children	*sir Hugh*
Our Lady's draw well	*the Jew's daughter*

The *oddness* of the number projects itself over the oddness of the murdering; and the conflicting presence of oddness (the doors) and evenness (the draw-well) makes the Jewish castell the very place of tension.

Coming back to the first stanza, we can also have a glimpse of strangeness in the expression *at the ba'*, once the preposition *at* is a common starter of locative adverbial phrases as [*at* the kitchen]. On the one hand, [*at* the ball] can be considered an old-fashioned use of [*with* the ball]; but it can also be considered the very locative usage of this preposition, in such a way that [the ball] corresponds to a place in Lincoln town.

Putting apart the absence of capital letter in *ba'* – once this ballad was transcribed by an oral source – we are able to find out a real resonance when we check out ancient maps of Lincolnshire, as it follows below:

Figure 1 – Ancient map of Lincoln town



Source: Speed (1988, p. 118)

Understanding the two occurrences of *ba'* as homonyms, in which the first refers to the place and the second refers to the object, we create an interesting reading key: the twenty-four boys were playing at the Ball gate, next to the **minster** – which is an important church in the center of a city or town. Once little sir Hugh tossed the ball through and through the window of a Jewish castle, it occurs to be near that gate, which gives us a hint of where (in the fictional world) the ghetto was.

After seeing that the twenty-four children were playing near the ghetto, we may guess that they were also in danger, or that they were Jewish themselves – once we do not have even another reference to these very boys, other than the generic passage "When bells were rung, and mass was sung, / And **a' the bairns** came hame".

Enough said about the opening moments of the ballad, we are going to persecute some other formal features at the end of it.

By chance or by the magic of praying thrice, the mother's request was granted and her little son spoke to her. It is interesting that all three asking speeches of the woman have a refrain "**Gin ye be there**, my sweet sir Hugh, / I pray you to me speak", which is changed a bit in the third and decisive speech "**Whare'er ye be**, my sweet sir Hugh, / I pray you to me speak" – what can also

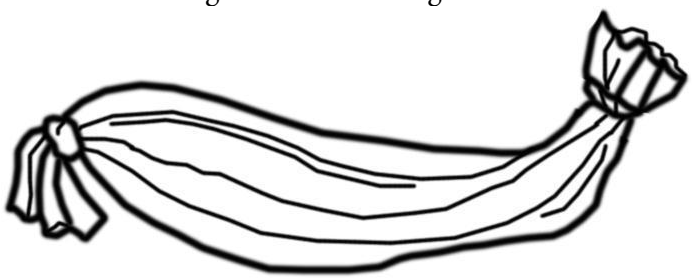
be an explanation for the granting to the request, as if to say that she did not receive her asking previously because the magic formula was not correct yet.

And so, the little dead bairn answered:

> "Gae hame, gae hame, my mither dear;
> Prepare my **winding sheet**;
> And, at the back o' merry Lincoln,
> The morn I will you meet."

It was a tradition in England to wrap the corpses in a winding-sheet in order to bury it, which was constituted of a kind of cloth to totally cover the dead or to allow a view of the face to be buried:

Figure 2 – A winding-sheet



Source: draw of mine

Thus, in an act of funeral march, his mother goes out the Jewish garden in direction to her home, with the newly discovered information of her child's fate. At home, she would prepare the final garments in which the naked young dead was about to be wrapped the next morning; and so came the day, and there was the mother dear to meet her bonny bairn.

Such a sublime burial was made and the final stanza resonates this characteristic by the stanza length: as if it was paid a longer speech in poetry for an episode that deserves this.

4 Between the pamphleteering and the non-ideological

After walking this detailed route through the main literary aspects of the ballad, we are faced with the great all-time dilemma: what are the very rights of

literature and art to fly beyond the boundaries of prejudice and the non-prejudice; or better said, what position art should take in relation to human rights as they are constituted for ages in which author and readers exist?

In all the versions of "Hugh of Lincoln" folktale, there is a secret gale of antisemitism, even in the Kentucky mountains version "Water Birch", in which

Stamper & Jansen (1958) could recognize a whole meaning that can only be perceived by someone who is aware about the specific setting of Appalachian familiar groups.

It is not necessary to go far back in time to recognize how alternate the material of a folktale can be while living through human lips. A microscopic time-lapse usually is enough to demonstrate this variation – as Gresham (1934) proved by reconstructing the transmission flow of a "Hugh of Lincoln" version through a few family generations. However, for some reason, the motif of *antisemitism* can yet be easily identified in any of the versions.

This fact states the agonizing survival of the same ethnic prejudice present in the original records of the historical case by Paris (1880). The historical record – highly fictional in itself – is not just a common failing of medieval historiography, but a cultural genocide, due to:

> Seeking to **incriminate the Jews** beyond any doubt, Matthew fabricated several significant details in this report. By comparing the Chronica with several contemporary sources, Gavin Langmuir has shown that Matthew made three key mistakes: 1) he incorrectly claimed that John of Lexington intervened before the arrival of Henry III in Lincoln; 2) he concocted the idea of Jewish auguries or magical rites, though Matthew actually borrowed this detail from an entry under the year 1190; 3) for Matthew, Hugh's body was discovered in Copin's domicile well, whereas all other accounts suggest alternative locations (Potter, 2017, p. 54, emphasis mine).

The dilemma is then constituted in the following way: there are in the internal constitution of this folktale two great forces disputing the upper hand one over the other. The first force is the **ideology** and it is strongly linked to the empirical origins of the story, its social setting, the prejudice around the Jews, the sexism around the women, the racism around the Semitic peoples, and other

evaluative opinions about society. On the other hand, the second force is the **non-ideology**, the mere work of fiction, the totally abstract work.

Once I have already proved that it is impossible to exist such a totally abstract work, in which no social feature resonates, it is not a difficult effort to prove the very opposite place: it is equally impossible to exist such a totally concrete work, in which there are only social features resonating just as they occur to be. This impossibility is what allows fiction to exist.

Thus, the very place of art cannot be but in between these two forces; one of them willing to turn art into a pamphlet conveying a certain ideology or group of ideologies; the other willing to turn art into the nonsense abstraction.

Brik (1971) gave a similar statement when he persecuted the place of art according to its musicality. He said:

> Verse is the result of the conflict between **non-sens** and **everyday semantics**, it is a particular semantics that exists independently and develops according to its own laws. We can turn each verse into a transrational verse if we change the meaningful words by sounds which express the phonic and rhythmic structure of these words. However, having deprived the verse of its semantics, we leave the dimension of poetic language and the further variations of this verse will be determined not by its linguistic constituents, but by the musical nature of the sounds which constitute its sonority (Brik, 1971, p. 138, translation mine, emphasis mine).

In a brief conclusion, we may extend Brik's statement and say: just like art is between the non-sens of *music* and the everyday semantics of *content*; it is also between the pamphlet of *ideology* and the pure fiction of *non-ideology*. And a wise commentary on the poetry must not dismiss the literary totality of the poem by means of the ideological totality. In other words, judgement of artistic features – although trespassed by ideology – must not dismiss art only by the means of ideology, once a literary work does not have only a dimension to be evaluated.

Conclusion

On a different path to the one that the diachronic approach to folktales seeks to run, the synchronic study of "Hugh of Lincoln" ballad was able to

demonstrate the fine literary quality of the constituent elements of poem, narrative, and music. The artistic features are clearly present when we persecute how the dramatic conflict within the story is established; in which ways the lexical choices sympathize or antipathize with other elements; by which means the stanzas, verses, metrical feet, and poetical syllables ionize the content; how the rhythm is possibly mirrored between the reading and the singing; how the figures of speech intensifies the motifs of death, murder and rebirth; and so on.

That being the case, it is impossible to discredit the literary qualities of the work, even though the antisemitic content behind the origins of this folktale is socially repugnant. Furthermore, by means of the ideological tension that is caused by reading such a work, we are led to realize the status of art as something in the midst of *ideology* and *non-ideology* – as the very place of restlessness.

Como citar este artigo?
SILVA, A. C. da. Antisemitism and art: a brief commentary on "Hugh of Lincoln" folktale. Mosaico, São José do Rio Preto, v. 22, n. 01, p. 270-292, 2023.

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