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**RECONCILING THE ABJECT IN TWO AUSTRALIAN
FILMS: *LOOK BOTH WAYS* (SARAH WATT, 2005)
AND *KENNY* (CLAYTON JACOBSON, 2006)**

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Recent Australian films, *Look Both Ways* (Sarah Watt, 2005)¹ and *Kenny* (Clayton Jacobson, 2006),² were produced at a time when Australia's filmmakers were concerned that their country's 2005 Free Trade Agreement with the USA would give rise to an "invasion" of American runaway productions."³ Although such tensions are evident in my case studies, it is also evident that directors Watt and Jacobson stood at least a little apart from the industrial mainstream. Both films are derived from original Australian scripts, filmed locally on low budgets and set in the period of their production, yet they show sincere engagement with the Australian post-settler characters' personal struggles and triumphs. The use of slang, scatological humour and irreverence unequivocally celebrate Australian-ness in *Kenny* while also referencing the "ocker" comedies of the 1970s. *Look Both Ways* foregrounds Watt's own art, including her animated short films, Australian popular culture is evoked in the art of one protagonist, and the other, a war photographer, references the media's role in maintaining the pace of modern life. Focus on the local ensures that in both films difficulties associated with Australia's colonial past arise naturally, albeit symbolically, as part of contemporary challenges the protagonists must face.

In line with their times, the films' protagonists show a secure sense of belonging in Australia, but cracks in the construction of settler entitlement, a crucial factor in identity formation, are also evident. These cracks, long plastered over with the notion that Australia had been free for the taking, were publicly exposed with the Mabo Decision of 1992, which, after ten years of court action, denounced *terra nullius* as a myth. The decision strengthened calls

for an apology to the Stolen Generations, but the Howard Government of the day refused. Resistance lasted another decade and a half demonstrating not only the government's failure to promote reconciliation, but also that a strong, long standing "sanctioned ignorance"⁴ does not die quickly or easily. Before that can happen, those for whom the ignorance was bliss must face their sense of cultural loss.

The apology, finally delivered to the Stolen Generations in 2008, was followed only a year later (2009) with an apology to the Forgotten Generations of British children sent to Australia between 1920 and the end of the 1960s with Australian collusion.⁵ As with the children of the Stolen Generations, these removals were held to be for the children's own good. As if the end justified the means, British children, and no doubt Australians as well, were told their families were dead when that was not true. These revelations swelled a rising awareness⁶ and appreciation of the fact that many Australians killed in two World Wars went willingly because they believed they were fighting not just for Britain but also for home, family and democracy: the very values betrayed in respect of the "Stolen" and "Forgotten" children. A rising tide of commemoration and public participation in ANZAC services must exacerbate the post-settlers' discomfort on being confronted with the lack of integrity and respect the governments of Australia and Britain showed for their own democratic values. To expose these past hypocrisies is also to criticise indirectly the perpetuation of the myth of *terra nullius*, something for which contemporary post settlers, not their ancestors, must take responsibility. These complex issues present the strongest of challenges to the stability of post colonial white Australian-ness into the twenty-first century, as Australia's cultural production shows.

Catriona Elder (2007) writes that while most settler Australians feel they belong because the separation from Britain is complete, Australian stories show ongoing "repressed or denied knowledge that Australia is someone else's place."⁷ Ann McCulloch writes in 2008 that "Sovereignty, expressed in laws relating to land ... dispersed the sacred; ordained violence; and now offers a fretwork of references for" a "melancholic gaze" that signals "mourning of a lost love object."⁸ A cursory examination of recent Australian films reveals that many do, indeed, depict home as a contested and melancholy space. In *Beneath the Clouds* (dir. Ivan Sen, 2002) and *Samson and Delilah* (dir. Warwick Thornton, 2009), home is untenable or unavailable so all the more immediate; in *Romulus My Father* (dir. Richard Roxburgh, 2007) and *Beautiful Kate* (dir. Rachel

Ward, 2009) home continues to be dysfunctional, unhelpful, until the passing of the older patriarch removes the need for repression of the past. And in *Jindabyne* (dir. Ray Lawrence, 2006) even as a few characters feel their way towards greater racial understanding, a murderer who seems to target only young Indigenous women adds new layers of grief to rub divisively up against old hurts. His evil work weakens the group whose very longevity challenges the white settler's entitlement.

Look Both Ways and *Kenny* are strong in their own Australian-ness. Both directors are Australians making their first feature films using local talent, local stories and with local production and funding. Watt's film features well known Australian actor, William McInnes, and parts of the animation and art work come from her own acclaimed short films. The Adelaide Film Festival contributed significantly to the funding. Other films the Festival has funded or part funded include *Ten Canoes* (dir. Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr) and *Samson & Delilah*, suggesting that representation of various versions of Australian-ness is a prime consideration for that funding body. Clayton Jacobson's first version of *Kenny* (2006), a self-funded 50 minute film made locally with low cost methods, won a prize at the St Kilda festival. Jacobson was offered a private loan to make the conversion to feature length. The film stars Jacobson's family members, and friends and family pitched in to crew during filming, some of which took place at actual public events. Several are famous Australian occasions: the Melbourne hero parade, the Melbourne Cup, an air show and a flower show. The film is marked as Australian in the blokishness of its protagonist, in the use of accent and idiom, and with shots of well known postcolonial icons. For instance, as Kenny's plane leaves the tarmac, the Qantas logo stands out in a lingering shot.

Kenny took over \$7 million at the Australian Box Office in less than four months, making the film "the best performing Australian film on home soil" to be released in the three year period between 2006–2009.⁹ Although it did not make the kind of splash in Australia that *Kenny* did, *Look Both Ways* gained several awards and circulates as a text for study in Australia as well as screening in film festivals further afield. Local popularity is unusual for films written and produced in Australia, but it does line up with Brian McFarlane's argument that from about 2004 Australian films based on original Australian screenplays have done well.¹⁰ McFarlane cites *Look Both Ways* as an example and argues that a new kind of "cultural maturity" is evident in values that contrast with those of the "previous half decade" when adaptations were preferred (56).

Adaptations retain some of the literary status of the source text. Therefore, the “cultural maturity” McFarlane identifies relates partly to local films’ ability to stand alone as cultural artefact. Furthermore, a straight-to-film work will not need to encode contexts of a source work’s earlier production and, therefore, may be more immediately open to analysis as artefact of the society in which it was produced. This immediacy is evident in Watt and Jacobson’s first films: they are culturally mature and yet are tinged with the melancholia typical of Australian art. While it seems contradictory to find these features occurring together, I read their juxtaposition as sides of the same coin: recognition of the loss of important cultural myths on the one hand, and the cautious seeking of a better way forward on the other.

Cultural maturity is also evident in the films’ narrative shape that eschews heroes and grand heroic quests, thus avoiding an individualistic style that mimics the patterns of colonial conquest. *Look Both Ways* follows several stories with a different character central to each. The stories are linked by the obvious need in the characters for social and emotional maturation and the outcomes that demonstrate the value of caring human relationships. As is often the case with films where women are involved actively in the production there is a gender balance among the characters and the weighting of their roles.¹¹ Co-protagonists, Meryl and Nick, each face similar antagonists: grief and fear of death occasioned by loss. We meet Meryl first and Nick arrives later at the scene of a fatal railway accident. Meryl’s character arc is as strong as his, and it was my impression that Meryl is the protagonist, although William McInnes, who plays Nick, has top billing. Many reviews, however, assume that Nick is the protagonist and some scarcely mention Meryl. This is something we might debate since Meryl and Nick help each other on their separate journeys to acceptance. Neither is especially heroic and neither is marked as “helper” or “donor” in conventional Proppovian terms. Overall, the film is structured as a series of interlocking vignettes in both live action and animated sequences that represent Meryl and Nick’s inner eye where each experiences in their imagination the fruition of their worst fears. By the end of the film both grieve for their recently deceased fathers, and together they begin to live with Nick’s cancer and the treatment that may save his life.

In *Kenny*, the very Australian protagonist appears in every scene. Kenny’s antagonist is hypocrisy, but Kenny is heroic only in the determined consistency with which he demonstrates good, moral values in his role as a family member and in his working life at

Splashdown, a portaloos company. At the outset, Kenny is a separated father and an underrated son, brother and employee. By the end of the film, Kenny's father and his employer recognise his worth, but more to the point, so does Kenny. Like Meryl and Nick he cannot solve all of his problems, but he learns to look at his life in a wider context.

Both films are also confident in their take on genre. Sarah Watt calls her film a "seriocomic narrative," a romantic comedy that includes "the stuff of peoples' lives" and is thus closer to tragedy than to comedy (quoted in Simmons 8).¹² Simmons analyses the narrative as "structured as an anthology of melodramas that bleed into and complement each other" (2). The reference to blood is apt given that several of these melodramas are linked by Meryl's obsessive fear of bodily harm and Nick's fear of cancer. Melodrama and romantic comedy, however, are staples of Hollywood, and, as Ben Goldsmith (2010) explains, Hollywood genres have, until recently, been held up as unsuitable for local Australian stories.¹³

Kenny is less straightforward in its genre, mocumentary, which is opaque. While it is often thought to be anti-canonical because it parodies the documentary, as Dan Harries notes, parody can also be canonical.¹⁴ Jacobson's film chimes with Harries' argument that mocumentary "dislodges rather than underpins the documentary," helping to cement "the transformation" of mocumentary "into its own cannon" (3). Jacobson's script promotes this transformation. For instance, Kenny gives an etymological account of the word shit, which, he says, comes from an acronym for Ship High in Transit, and he references ancient Greek sanitation as if the film will give the kind of account of waste treatment such as we might expect of a National Geographic documentary. This treatment of genre suggests that *Kenny* parodies both mocumentary and documentary, a genre that has recently become popular in cinema.

The rising popularity of documentary suggests that many audiences want to know about people and events that occur in the world around them, or that appear to do so. *Kenny*'s realism taps into that contemporary desire as well as playing on the knowing viewer's knowledge of film as a complex mode of entertainment through representation. Kenny's voiceover and work stories are underpinned by the realism of his workplace, Splashdown, an actual Melbourne portaloos company. The use of local events as sets, and the relationship of the main actors to each other augment the verisimilitude. Kenny is played by Clayton Jacobson's brother, Shaun Jacobson, and Clayton Jacobson plays Kenny's brother.

Their father, played by Mr Jacobson Senior, the father of Clayton and Shaun, is, coincidentally, a recognisable Australian actor.

Both films show confidence in themselves as Australian texts through the inclusion of comedic elements. Making people laugh is a way of asserting authority because it requires a voice. Colonial societies were long thought to lack such a voice. In Watt's film the humour comes from the social ineptness of some of the characters, particularly the protagonists, and from Meryl's recurring and sustained visions of immanent peril. Jacobson's film is a full-blown comedy with jokes that will travel and Australian in-jokes. Kenny's clowning is wry or straight and very funny. Australian audiences will recognise that the film is set in Melbourne which, as Ian Craven explains, is frequently depicted as serious and moral in contrast to Sydney, which is commonly depicted as a more colourful but less moral city. Craven finds that in the imaginary space of at least one film Melbourne is "the domain of seriousness, artistic excellence, moral responsibility and personal integrity (a place where people care about 'people, causes, justice...')" (32).¹⁵ Thus local audiences read Kenny's seriousness and moral excellence as synonymous with his identity as a Melbourne-ite.

In *Kenny* and in *Look Both Ways*, melancholy shows in the personal nature of the protagonists' tasks. Intimacy is communicated partly through the juxtaposition of characterisation with representations of the abject: fear of death in *Look Both Ways*, and the threat of being confronted with bodily fluids and excreta in *Kenny*. Both films invoke the abject to achieve comedic moments that invite us to laugh both with and at the protagonists. While comedy tempts the reader to look away from the "intellectual complexity" of the clown that can "think" as well as "cry,"¹⁶ the intellectual clown is salient to these films because the inclusion of the abject aligns with the notion of grief suppressed, a kind of hypocritical denial of the detritus of the settler journey to postcolonialism. Those who cannot comprehend their own detritus are, logic suggests, not in a position to facilitate reconciliation because "Reconciliation ... is about acknowledging the cultural and physical damage done to Aborigines from early death, dispossession, and kidnapping" (Kellehear 395).¹⁷ Thus reconciliation requires understanding of and coming to terms with the abject.

Julia Kristeva¹⁸ writes of the abject as the line between containment and disorder. She places death and the corpse at the top of a pyramid of bodily wastes that symbolise maturation and, following Freud, the oedipal separation from the mother. I would

like to give this notion a postcolonial twist by suggesting that post-settler populations in Australasia, having abjected the mother-country, are troubled by the realisation that they have emulated traits that they despised in that mother. Now, they must abject a side of themselves that can no longer be denied. Clearly, this task is more immediate and more personal than the earlier separation from Britain which occurred not in the lifetime of the original colonists, but during the lives of their grandchildren and great grandchildren.

In *Kenny*, Splashdown's very *raison d'être* is containment, cleanliness, freedom from disease and keeping the sewers under the national monuments in operation. No one dies, but the many encounters with bodily wastes include an incident where Kenny, as he unblocks a portaloo, finds that while he is supplied with a one inch pipe, some people appear to have "two-inch arseholes." The problem first appears insurmountable. We recall this later, when Kenny's Dad goes to hospital. The doctors need a stool sample, which the old man refuses to give because, he says, the bed pan is ridiculously small: it would be like trying to force "a marshmallow into a piggy bank." After some fuss, Kenny resolves the situation by taking his father and a bed pan to the toilet. In this way he cuts the problem down to size, and he keeps the medical systems flowing and the abject contained.

In *Look Both Ways*, death is dealt with directly through the funeral and train accident witnessed by Meryl at the opening, and the depiction of news items about a larger train accident across town. When Nick (a press war-photographer) is back in his apartment looking over his photographs of the scene of the local accident, the camera is static as he rises from his chair and goes to the fridge. As he moves he is almost completely out of shot. The camera does not move to take account of his changing eyeline so that the shot is like a still, a photo where the subject moves. This static framing references the image on Nick's computer screen, showing the shock on the face of the dead man's girlfriend as she registers what has happened. She is captured and when the editor chooses Nick's photo over a feature article for the front page he points out the immediacy of the news: an accident today is more newsworthy than a trend over time; a picture is worth a thousand words, and takes up less space. The juxtaposition references the audience's own role in shaping the media, and television reporting of the larger train derailment with its larger number of fatalities and injuries could also be read as an indictment of the over reporting of crime and accidents that gives the impression that life is more dangerous than it really is. This surface reading, however, gives a

facile explanation for Meryl and Nick's obsessions that does not account for the way that, in modern life, the pressure of now obscures problems arising from the past.

The theme of decay and loss recurs in the flowers that arrive after the train accident and in the shots of the bereaved woman choosing flowers for her boyfriend's coffin. The audience is reminded of the film's opening shots of dying flowers at Meryl's parents' house, and of the transience of life. There are also shots of the x-ray of Nick's diseased lungs. Later, animated images representing cancer cells flood Nick's inner eye. Like Meryl's grief, Nick's cancer must be recognised and cut out, or treated and diminished. Fear, trauma and denial culminate then momentarily dissipate when Nick and Meryl have sex. Both imagine themselves being overcome by deadly forces: Meryl fears drowning and Nick fears the cancer. Signs of a possible way forward are heralded when for an instant, both float on a sea of what they fear most yet live to reflect on the experience. The action of the narrative from that moment is about how their growing relationship enables them to stop anticipating annihilation and to support each other in facing the very real fears they had previously tried to deny.

The real and imagined train and car accidents provide a metaphor for the momentum of the institutional machinery of colonisation,¹⁹ linking Meryl's fear of death to her denial of the need to abject a side of herself that is learned helplessness. Meryl specifically references the Stolen Generation in her imagination at a time of social vulnerability. The first vision is prompted by a guilt ridden memory of saying, at the site of a fatal train accident, that the victim might have been, or might have become, a bad man, that it may all have been "for the best." She immediately regrets what she has said and experiences a vision of herself telling Indigenous children that "perhaps it was for the best."

This is one of the many times Meryl dies a metaphorical death not of bodily harm, but of shame and embarrassment at her own inept behaviour. One strand of death in Watt's film, then, is not final. Meryl springs back like the immortal Sybil only to relive her fears and embarrassments with the next encounter. Towards the end of the film, Meryl falls on her face (literally) on the road in front of an approaching car. She reacts in shock to the near death experience and in this moment of vulnerability her grief and sense of loss overtake her. As she cries and laughs at the same time, the Indigenous children revisit her, laughing and pointing, repeating her own words back to her. This vision shows how much Meryl has learned about herself and how much she is actually aware of and

sorry about the Stolen Generations. As she and Nick reconcile they demonstrate the role of trust in the reconciliation process. Then, as the credits roll, Meryl and Nick work through the various treatments for his cancer, abjecting not only the disease but also the melancholy that had kept their gaze fixed on their own grief and fear.

Extreme individualism, then, is not practical. Lisa Milner (2009) takes *Kenny* as an example of the many ways in which the move from “we” to “I” of Coalition politics has fragmented Australian society and promoted containment at the individual level. What is lost, and what Kenny demonstrates, she argues, is a work-life balance that leaves no room for family, for caring about others. Citizens have been “steered away from arguing the big points, being more satisfied with trying to get the little things right in their own lives”.²⁰ Milner contrasts Kenny with Darryl, the protagonist of *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1997). Darryl has family to come home to, and he values that at least as much as he values his work. Kenny, on the other hand, “knows ... [work]’s the main element identifying him as a person” (6). His journey reveals the need to overcome the social isolation that this individualistic life style engenders.

Kenny learns that undiscerning containment can amount to insularity. In the film this lesson comes through positive rather than negative experiences: his observations of American society, his acts of friendship towards a Japanese businessman, and the formation of a romantic relationship. The resolution at the symbolic level, however, is delayed for the film’s ending. By this time Kenny has attended the Pumpers and Cleaner’s International Expo in Nashville, Tennessee, and has learned to think of himself as a health professional. At the conference, human waste disposal is not only a subject for serious discussion, it is also respectable. Its legitimacy is underpinned by the participants’ behaviours and by the many admirable feats of engineering on display. These items are designed with aesthetic, health and ecological considerations as well as practical considerations to do with waste disposal and human comfort. Word play in their model or brand names signals that a certain amount of scatological humour is also normal. The machinery’s links to science, engineering and the economy, however, are at least as evident as their links to comedy. Comedy arises from the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact approach of the other delegates with Kenny’s scatological humour and his low status at home in Australia. One implication is that the Australian humour is less mature than the American seriousness. Another is

that the Americans take themselves a little too seriously. The need for balance is clear.

Tension is built up throughout the film, but becomes a storyline in itself at the Melbourne Cup where events cause Kenny to make a stand. The day begins with Kenny's ex-wife delivering his son, Sam, to him for the day, insisting that she had arranged earlier for Kenny to have Sam. Kenny, who cannot leave his job, sets about organising Sam with a Splashdown shirt and a trolley so that he feels involved as part of the team and is motivated to stay with his Dad. Two women who are marked as well off by their fashionable clothing and bad manners take Kenny to task, accusing him of exploiting Sam and being a bad father. This leads Kenny to leave Sam in the office, but Sam wanders off. Thus, through the interference of these women who profess a motherly concern, Sam really is put in danger. In this the women provide a metaphor for the colonial mother-country that taught the young colony to base its view of itself on the myth of *terra nullius*.

When Kenny finds Sam, he is unharmed, waiting by the toilets. Later, as Kenny buckles Sam into the pump truck ready to make the trip to the treatment plant, the same women appear near their car, drunk. One of them pisses on the ground. This act recalls an earlier scene where Kenny washes graffiti from the toilet wall. The message, "Davo was here," he says, is a "thin claim to fame" and disrespectful to boot. Davo has left his mark in language; the woman with the hat leaves her mark in urine where Kenny cannot wash it away: like Davo she claims what is not rightly hers.

The pissing incident is surely a reference to the protagonist of the same name as the film in *Sweetie* (dir. Jane Campion, 1989), who also pisses by the family car. Terrie Waddell notes that in that film "the boundaries between inner/outer, waste/containment are blurred."²¹ But unlike *Sweetie*, the women in *Kenny* represent the urban elite who aspire to cleanliness and respectability. Their outburst at Kenny suggests they are willing to reinforce what they think proper in the behaviour of others but that the rules do not apply to them. In this they mirror the behaviour of the Australian and British authorities in respect of the Stolen and Forgotten Generations. The women demonstrate excessive individualistic behaviours, but are protected from criticism as classist because class is no longer one "of the permitted ways of imagining the nation."²² Thus, like those governments, the women are protected from censure by a "sanctioned ignorance" (Spivak 167). This escalation in hypocrisy sets Kenny up to show his moral breaking point when a little later a man driving a sports car and wearing a

suit parks him in and refuses to move. Sam is asleep in the truck, it is already after ten o'clock at night, and Kenny has missed his brother's birthday party, a transgression that will be noted. After being repeatedly waved away and told to "go with the flow" Kenny turns on the pump and allows sewage to flow into the sports car.

At this point Kenny realises that containment can go too far, that his acceptance of responsibility for other people's mess enables them to abdicate responsibility. For a moment or two Kenny moves away from the conservative keep-the-peace stance he has taken up to now and becomes a force for change. At the personal level and, because he is a likable character, Kenny and the audience achieve a kind of rough justice that, satisfying as it is, will not change systems of marginalisation. Kenny's recent experiences, however, have taught him to reposition himself as a health professional (the American term for portaloos maintenance). This repositioning will enable him to respond to insults with greater confidence and aplomb. Perhaps he will awaken some of those who mock him to their own hypocrisy.

By the close of Jacobson and Watt's films, although no one has been heroic or aimed to achieve superhuman feats, most are better equipped to face the future because each character has improved their behaviour as a friend, a family member and/or as a partner, and this has improved their behaviour as citizens. In this way both films imply that social reconciliation at the local level does not require heroics, but it does require self knowledge and that is inhibited by denial. This social and emotional process is a positive step because the engagement is of post-settler Australians with other Australians. If a cultural cringe remains it concerns inequalities within Australia rather than Australia's position as marginal to a colonial centre. As Rochelle Siemienowicz predicted in 1999, "Creating, maintaining and protecting home values, without becoming isolationist or xenophobic is perhaps the greatest and most important struggle facing Australians into the twenty-first century" (49).²³ That is not to belittle or underestimate the complexities of Indigenous or immigrant identities within Australia: I merely point out that my case studies afford readings suggesting that insecurity among the dominant group is a stumbling block to reconciliation.

Although many people must have been aware that *terra nullius* was fiction, once the myth was publicly discredited by the outcome of the Mabo case, feelings of insecurity, including regarding entitlement to "someone else's place" (Elder 17), unsettled many settlers. The later realisation that Britain had imposed exile on its

own innocent children in much the way that Australia had done revealed firstly that Britain continued to regard settler society as suitable to absorb outcasts, a clear twentieth-century version of deportation. Secondly, the collusion of the Australian government in the British project along with their own treatment of Indigenous Australians revealed ongoing colonialist attitudes at the highest level at home. At almost the same time, the loss of a founding myth that to that date had been alive and well both institutionally and in the popular imagination, placed the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of contemporary post-settler groups while also undermining their feelings of entitlement, an important identity marker, thus impeding their ability to act by throwing their attention back on their own situation.

That modern citizens have perpetuated the injustices of colonialism in very specific and now very visible ways is a bitter pill, but analysis of my post-2005 case studies, arising as they do from strongly Australian contexts, give hope that through processes that are uniquely Australian a better future is possible. Furthermore, while Watt and Jacobson's films were not made within the mainstream of the Australian film industry and did not depend on international funding, both show that films with subtle discussions or critique of Australia's journey to post colonialism can travel. Both directors achieved ongoing careers following these first popular and innovative films and will, therefore, influence, or have influenced, both Australian audiences and films that reflect their society. Clearly they are worthy of study as culturally mature products of their time, and for their future influence. It remains to acknowledge with great regret that Sarah Watt passed away in late 2011 shortly after completing her second film. One tragic outcome is that we will never know how the maturity evident in *Look Both Ways* would have developed as, inevitably, she repositioned herself more centrally within the industry.

NOTES

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- ¹ Sarah Watt, et al. *Look Both Ways*. Perf. William McInnes, Justine Clarke, Anthony Hayes, Lisa Flanagan, Andrew S. Gilbert, Daniella Farinacci. videorecording. Madman Entertainment: The AV Channel [distributor], [Collingwood, Vic.], 2006.
 - ² Clayton Jacobson, et al. *Kenny*. Perf. Shane Jacobson, Eve Von Bibra, Ronald Jacobson, Ian Dryden, Chris Davis, Jesse Jacobson, Morihoko Haserbe. videorecording. Madman Entertainment [distributor], [Collingwood, Vic.], 2007.

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- ³ Ramon Lobata, "Crime Films," in *Directory of World Cinema, Volume III: Australia and New Zealand*, ed. Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand (Bristol UK, Chicago USA: Intellect, 2010), 116.
- ⁴ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, c1988), 167.
- ⁵ The number given varies but it is generally agreed that around 150,000 British children were sent overseas and that these children were illegitimate or from poor (but not necessarily inadequate) homes, in some cases broken up by war. Bonnie Malkin, "Australian PM Kevin Rudd issues apology to British child migrants," <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/6577850/Australian-PM-Kevin-Rudd-issues-apology-to-British-child-migrants.html> (1:04AM GMT 16 Nov 2009 *The Telegraph* online, last accessed 18 July 2011)
- ⁶ In "War Cinema" Daniel Reynaud establishes that anti-British sentiment appeared in Australian film of the 1970s and 1980s. See *Directory of World Cinema, Volume III: Australia and New Zealand*, ed. Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand (Bristol UK, Chicago USA: Intellect, 2010), 105.
- ⁷ Catriona Elder, *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 17.
- ⁸ Ann McCulloch, "Melancholic Wonderlands: Australians Painting Spaces of Terror and Half-Truths," *Art and Lies: Double Dialogues II* (issue 9, Autumn 2008) http://www.doubledialogues.com/archive/issue_nine/mcculloch_melancholic.html (last accessed 19 July 2011). McCulloch also writes that "The gaze when embodied in art may become fixated and pathological, but on the other hand, it gives expression to what otherwise might become repressed."
- ⁹ Site Administrator, QPIX website, "The Brothers, the Tradies and the Splashdown Angel" (posted 31 March 2009) <http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/film/dbase/2007/kenny3.html> (last accessed 19 July 2011). QPIX is a member of Screen Development Australia (SDA).
- ¹⁰ Brian McFarlane, *Words and Images: Australian Novels into Film* (Richmond, Vic.: Heinemann in association with Cinema Papers, 1983), 56.
- ¹¹ Stacy L. Smith and Marc Choueiti, "Gender Inequality in Cinematic Content? A Look at Females On Screen & Behind-the-Camera in Top-Grossing 2008 Films,"

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- http://annenbergh.usc.edu/News%20and%20Events/News/~medi a/PDFs/smith_rpt_apr11.ashx (pdf undated, last accessed 5 July 2011).
- ¹² Gary Simmons, *Look Both Ways, Daylight Reverie: ACMI Study Guide* (Melbourne: Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 2007).
 - ¹³ Ben Goldsmith, "Introduction," in *Directory of World Cinema, Volume III: Australian and New Zealand*, ed. Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand (Bristol UK, Chicago USA: Intellect, 2010), 18–19.
 - ¹⁴ Dan Harries and British Film Institute, *Film Parody* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 3.
 - ¹⁵ Ian Craven, "Historicizing Transition in Australian Cinema: the Moment of *Emerald City*," *Studies in Australasian Cinema* vol. 1 no. 1 (2007),
http://www.atyponlink.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/INT/doi/pdf/10.1386/sac.1.1.29_1?cookieSet=1 (last accessed 10 July 2011)
 - ¹⁶ Gerald Mast, *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*. 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), ix–x.
 - ¹⁷ Allan Kellehear, "Death," in *Sociology: Place, Time and Division*, ed. Peter Beilharz and Trevor Hogan (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 395.
 - ¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
 - ¹⁹ David Carlin, "The Cultural 'Traumascape': *Look Both Ways*, Railways Accidents and Trauma," *Senses of Cinema* 45 (October–December 2007) <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2007/45/look-both-ways/> (last accessed 15 July 2011)
 - ²⁰ Lisa Milner, "Kenny and Australian Cinema in the Howard Era," *Remapping History. XIVth Biennial Conference of the Film and History Association of Australia and New Zealand*. Conference Proceedings V 2: Select Refereed Papers. (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2009) 171–81.
 - ²¹ Terrie Waddell, "Scrubbers: The 'great unwashed' of Australian Cinema," in *Womenvision: Women and the Moving Image in Australia*, ed. Lisa French (St Kilda, Victoria: Australian Catalogue Company Ltd, 2003), 183–96.
 - ²² Greenfield and Williams (2003: 288) quoted in Milner 5.
 - ²³ Rochelle Siemienowicz, "Globalisation and Home Values in New Australian Cinema," [Journal of Australian Studies](#) (December 1999), xxx.

**MAD OLD JAPANESE WOMAN WRITES BACK
FROM AN ATTIC OF HER OWN**

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Vanishing Old Women

There are some impressive elderly women figures in even the earliest Japanese literature. The oldest existing collection of myths, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712), for example, depicts a woman named Hikitate no Akaiko, who has followed the command of Emperor Yūryaku not to marry but to wait for him. After waiting for eighty years, she decides to tell him, “unless I reveal the faithfulness with which I waited, I will be unable to overcome my melancholy.”¹ The emperor, “who had completely forgotten what he had previously commanded her,” acknowledges her faithfulness and gives her two songs/poems, which include these lines: “When she was young/ Would that I had slept with her—/ But now she is old” (Philippi 354).² Akaiko cries and gives him two poems in return, the last lines of which read: “Flowering lotuses:/ Ah those in their prime—/ How I envy them!” (Philippi 355). The emperor sends her home with rich gifts. Here we seem to have one prototype of an old woman—neglected, wasted, pitiful, and no longer either reproductive or sexually attractive. At the

same time, this frail and aged commoner woman manages to impress one of the most powerful—and, in some episodes, violent—ancient heroes with her articulate and accurate explanation of this past event (including the correct month and year of their first encounter, which he had completely forgotten), as well as through the act of waiting, which paradoxically ruined her youth and beauty. It is doubtful that she was able to overcome her “melancholy,” but at least she told her story and expressed her feelings. In other words, Akaiko is one of the early examples of an old woman with her own voice (and poetry) that has the ambivalence of power(lessness).

There are a number of other elderly women who are given cameo or even lead roles. In the traditional noh (*nō*) theatre there is a sub category of the “woman plays” (*onna mono*) known as *rōjo mono* (“old woman” repertoire), which includes three prestigious plays—*Higaki* (The Cypress Fence), *Obasute* (The Woman Abandoned in the Hills), and *Sekidera Komachi* (Komachi at Sekidera, or Komachi at the Gateway Temple). The deeply moving qualities of these plays—and the difficulties they pose for the performers—have been widely recognised. In *Sekidera Komachi*, for example, there is hardly any movement for the first hour of the drama. Only the most accomplished performers are allowed to perform this demanding repertoire. We may also note that as in many other traditional genres, for centuries women were not permitted to take part.³ *Sekidera Komachi* is believed to have been written by the celebrated noh playwright and actor, Zeami (c.1363–c.1443). In the first part of this play, the ninety-nine year old Ono no Komachi (c.825–c.900?), who in her youth was renowned for her beauty as well as her poetry, discusses poetry with a Buddhist abbot; in the

second part, inspired by the dance of a child in celebration of the star festival (on the seventh night of the seventh month), she dances, as the Chorus sings: “Oh touching sight! Oh touching sight! The old tree bough blossoms.”⁴ Yet in closing, she bids farewell, with these words: “a hundred-year-old crone/ is she called now,/ the ruin of Komachi” (Tyler 117). Kurata Yōko notes that the old woman repertoire tends to focus on “loneliness, attachment, and lamentation of ruin.”⁵ Mizuno Yumiko, on the other hand, emphasises the ethereal, godly beauty of these plays.⁶

Representations of old age are gendered. According to Hattori Sanae, “While in ancient eras there were some deities that were believed to take the form of old women, from mediaeval times gods took the form of ‘old men’ ‘children’ and ‘[younger] women’; ‘old women’ were excluded.”⁷ Furthermore, “while old men never become demons (*oni*), old women are often represented as demons” (Kurata 26, citing Hattori 58) and “unlike old men who appear as the head of their clan, there is no tale that depicts an old woman as a chief (Kurata 26; Hattori 63). The most well-known example of an old woman as an *oni* is the figure of *yamauba* (also *yamanba*, *yamamba*; the mountain crone, the mountain witch). In some legends *yamauba* is not old; she can be old and ugly or young and beautiful (as in Utamaro’s celebrated *ukeiyoe* of Yamanba as the mother of Kintarō) though wild. Some devour human beings and animals, while others are harmless or even helpful to villagers and travellers. Ethnologists and folklorists have various theories about the *yamauba*—a fallen form of the mountain goddess; a shaman serving the mountain deity, who nurses the god at first and then becomes his wife; a fairy of the mountains and fields; and a female deity in charge of birth, growth and death.”⁸

Reminiscent of the legends of *Obasute* and *Yamauba*, old women have also been banished, silenced or marginalised in modern Japanese literature.⁹ Until recently they hardly existed—at least discursively. Discussions of literary representations of old age have tended to focus on the ageing male protagonists in canonical texts written by male authors. In such novels it is usually not the wives of the old men who play an important role, but the daughters-in-law (e.g. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *Fūten rōjin nikki* [*Diary of a Mad Old Man*, 1961], Kawabata Yasunari's *Yama no oto* [1949–54, trans. *The Sound of the Mountain*, 1970]), the granddaughters (Tsutsui Yasutaka's *Watashi no guranpa* [My Grandpa, 1999]), or young women who have been put to sleep for the indulgence of old, sexually impotent male clients (Kawabata's novella “Nemureru bijo” [1961, *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, 1969]).¹⁰

When an old woman attracts attention within a text, a typical image is of her abject body that imposes a sheer burden on the rest of the family. This is clear in Tayama Katai's depiction of the old mother of the male protagonist in *Sei* (Life, 1908), a canonical Naturalist text based on the author's own experience. The senile grandmother in Niwa Fumio's *Iyagarase no nenrei* (The Hateful Age, 1947) is an immediate post-war example of an abject old woman who is treated by everyone in the family as a helpless, slovenly rice-eating monster. Another recurrent image is the bullying matriarch, representing, in fact, the patriarchy and Confucian code of filial piety. This is apparent in the old mother in Katai's novel. The figure of an old mother, mother-in-law, or grandmother as a self-centred monstrous bully also appears frequently in fiction written by women, including Hagiwara Yōko's autobiographical novels such as *Irakusa no ie* (The House of Nettles, 1976). Whether

depicted as powerful or powerless, these old women were regarded as representative of, or at least complicit with, the patriarchal family system that formed the basis of the pre-war national polity that had the emperor at its pinnacle. Revelation of the old woman as an abject being, therefore, has often been hailed as a critique of the repressive family and national institutions. In the process, the old woman's point of view has been ignored.

There are also some positive or idealised old women in modern fiction. They are beautiful, hard-working paragons of the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) in old age. Fukazawa Shichirō's *Narayamabushi kō* (The Ballad of Narayama, 1957), which is a retelling of the *Obasute* legend, emphasises that although its old woman protagonist, Orin, is not suffering from physical or mental deterioration she is willing to be abandoned in the mountains in accordance with the village custom, but more importantly, as a result of her own moral and aesthetic judgement. Sumii Sue's *Hashi no nai kawa* (River with No Bridge, 1961-92) is a novel that contains a clear message against discrimination against the social outcasts, the *burakumin*. Although its protagonists are young *burakumin* boys, their grandmother plays a very positive and important role not only in domestic situations but as a strong advocate of peace and equality; she is determined to survive the Meiji emperor in whose name her son was sent to the Russo-Japanese War and killed. This example, however, is exceptional. Idealised old women die—ideally beautifully, and relatively soon, without causing any problems or inconvenience to anyone. In Ariyoshi Sawako's *Kōkotsu no hito* (Twilight Years, 1972), a pioneering novel dealing with the issue of aged care, the wise, hardworking mother-in-law dies at the beginning of the novel, leaving her tyrannically selfish and

demented husband in the care of her daughter-in-law, who is the novel's heroine.

A number of women writers did depict the neglect, betrayal, and repression of aged and ageing women. Enchi Fumiko's *Onnazaka* (trans. *The Waiting Years*, 1949-57) and "Himajii tsukihi" (Starving Days, 1953) are good examples. Just as the "Madwoman" and Medusa have been used as significant figures in feminist critical theories in the west, the *yamamba* has inspired and triggered a number of important creative and critical works among feminist writers and scholars in Japan.¹¹ Meera Viswanathan argues that their main focus is on the resistance of the woman labelled as an abject being rather than on her pleasure:

[...] in contrast to Cixous's feminist prescription for the future in the form of *jouissance*, an orgasmic vitality and delight in those pleasures proscribed by society, as a mode of authentic being, we find in the *yamamba* a description of the constraints of the past, in which progressively through the centuries, the figure of the *yamamba* becomes more and more vitiated, eager to be reclaimed and domesticated. (Viswanathan 258)

Aged/Ageless Girls: Alternative "Old Woman" Narratives

There are, however, a number of women writers, including Mori Mari (1903–1987), Tanabe Seiko (b.1928), and Kanai Mieko (b. 1947), who have sought to go beyond such a "description of the constraints" and explore alternative voices of elderly women. Though diverse in socio-economic and historical backgrounds and many other respects, their elderly protagonists and narrators share some common traits. Each, for example, is notable for her

heightened subjectivity that can, at times, turn to aggression. While it is possible to link this aggression to the *yamauba* and/or madwoman, the important difference is that these protagonists are not repressed. Their subjectivity is often combined with a humour that can be wry and cutting. They are never afraid to ridicule authoritarian figures—including contemporary writers and critics. They have no compunction about indulging in their favourite things, including recounting old memories, which can be repetitious and unreliable but still charming and entertaining. Their creative memory, their uncompromising aestheticism, and their individuality all appeal to and inspire generations of younger readers, especially women.

While the mature women writers and protagonists I discuss do become annoyed, and express this annoyance, quite frequently, “angry” or “grumpy” is far too narrow a description of their mentality, attitudes, tendencies and rhetoric. Their humour and the representations of mature and elderly women in general are quite different from those in the popular BBC show *Grumpy Old Women* (2004–). The most significant difference is that the old women I am concerned with behave, think and write very much like *shōjo* (girls, young women), as we will see below. They are aged physically yet in many respects almost ageless.

These “girls” are also different from the “golden girls” of the eponymous American sitcom although there are some common elements. Women sharing food, drink and conversation do appear frequently in the texts I discuss below. Some of them have favourite phrases or mannerisms as depicted in the comedy show. Nostalgia, narcissism, egotism, verbosity, and conversational meanderings are quite common. Humour based on loss of memory

is also frequently used, while at the same time vivid (or vague) memories from their early childhood and youth tend to play a very important role in their narratives. These may be a common element in many narratives and texts that deal with old women across cultures and genres (e.g. the Australian TV classic *Mother and Son*). Nevertheless the aged/ageless women's narratives created by Mori, Tanabe and Kanai present innovative and radical alternatives to the stereotypical literary and media representations (or the omission and neglect) of old women and their styles and preferences.

We may also note that another widely circulated term *kawaii* (cute, sweet) cannot adequately and appropriately describe these “aged/ageless girls.” As Yomota Inuhiko discusses in his critical study of *kawaii*, the notion of cute/sweet is used in media discourses as an ideal that elderly women should aspire to.¹² While traces of both *kawaii* and *yamanba* are evident in the texts discussed here, many aged/ageless girl narrators and protagonists reject and criticise these discursive frameworks.¹³ While there is no room here to go into detail about the definitions of the culturally loaded term, *shōjo*, it is essential for my discussion to understand Takahara Eiri's notion of the “consciousness of the girl” and the two key words “freedom” and “arrogance.” Takahara explains:

[...] the desire for freedom and arrogance, unique to modern times, is most effectively depicted in the person of the girl. I introduce the notions of freedom and arrogance because these concepts represent the two extremes of desire of the modern subject.¹⁴

Emphasising that both “freedom” and “arrogance” here refer to the textual rather than the social sense, Takahara further notes that he uses “the word ‘arrogance’ to indicate clearly the self-satisfaction associated with intense narcissism.” (192). As Aoyama and Hartley note,

Takahara argues that this “girl consciousness” is not the sole province of the chronological girl but something that older women and even men can possess. “Girl consciousness,” he declares, is characterized by freedom and arrogance, the key attributes needed for the girl to function as an active self resisting hegemonic norms.¹⁵

All three authors I discuss in this paper have made a significant contribution to the literary representations of the *shōjo* with their fiction, criticism, essays, interviews, and biographies. Mori Mari, for example, wrote male homosexual love stories in the early 1960s that are regarded today as the origin of *yaoi* and BL (Boys’ Love).¹⁶ She also created the “ultimate” *shōjo*, Moira, who is loved and admired excessively by her father, in her novel *Amai mitsu no beya* (Sweet Honey Room, 1975).¹⁷ Nearly half a century Mori Mari’s junior, Kanai Mieko was still quite young when she wrote her early stories such as “Usagi” (Rabbits, 1976)¹⁸ that have girl protagonists as unforgettable as Mori Mari’s Moira. Kanai has also been an insightful critic and commentator on the girl in literature, film and art, and has written affectionate parodies of girls’ fiction.¹⁹ Tanabe Seiko has made a range of contributions to girl culture and literature in genres such as popular (or “middle-brow”) novels and juvenile fiction, essays on the appreciation of classical and modern

literature, and most particularly, biographies of the founding sister of modern girls' fiction Yoshiya Nobuko and other women writers. Referring to Tanabe's work as editor of the reproduction of the girls' magazine *Himawari* (Sunflower), Kawasaki Kenko recognises Tanabe and Honda Masuko as key figures in the 1980s re-discovery and re-examination of girls' culture from an adult (middle-aged and older) perspective.²⁰ In her essay entitled "'Onnade' no hangyakusha: Tanabe Seiko" (The Rebel with the Woman's Hand: Tanabe Seiko) Kan Satoko outlines the vital importance of the girl's view in Tanabe, from her earlier days as "literary girl" and "militarist girl" to the present.²¹

The texts examined here include not only fiction but also essays and reviews. Even when discussing the latter genres, my interest is not in the biological and historical authors themselves but in their personas as "old women." Given that the average life expectancy of women in Japan is over eighty-six, sixty is not at all old. However, Kanai Mieko (b.1947) uses the persona of an "old woman" in her essays—in stark contrast to what Kurahashi Yumiko (1935–2005) once wrote:

On the tenth of October 1965 I became thirty. Why begin this essay with my age? Because this means that I am no longer a "woman"; since my thirtieth birthday I am an "old person" *rōjin* (and not an "old crone" *rōba*), which is something to celebrate in a number of respects. If at age twenty I had been able to leap from *shōjo* to *rōjin*, how wonderful it would have been.²²

Instead of using ageing as an erasure of gender, Kanai, Mori and Tanabe emphatically and strategically use the old *woman's* persona and voice. Their writings are by no means similar to each other; and yet, the various voices of aged/ageless girls in their work share certain characteristics that can be linked to Takahara's "freedom and arrogance." One of the most prominent characteristics of these aged/ageless girls is their advanced literacy. They can speak and write plainly or elaborately (with elegant native Japanese *wago* or bookish Sino-Japanese *kango*). This, on one hand, is in line with the long and well-established women's literary tradition particularly noted for the works of the Heian poets and court ladies such as Ono no Komachi, Murasaki Shikibu, Sei Shōnagon and Izumi Shikibu. However, their subjects are neither loss of youth and beauty nor the evanescence of this world; and their mode is comic rather than tragic. They have their own aesthetic and moral principles, and they are both stubborn and articulate. They have the "freedom" and "arrogance" to read and write as they wish.

Most of their narrators and protagonists live on their own. They never complain about loneliness; on the contrary, they enjoy life in a room of their own—be it a luxurious apartment or an untidy small room, or something in between. The first-person narrator-protagonist Utako-san of Tanabe Seiko's comic *uba* series²³ is a well-to-do retired businesswoman who lives alone in a nice flat in Kobe that overlooks the sea and the mountains. She is annoyed when people, including her sons, friends and the neighbourhood policeman, all assume that she must be lonely. Financially she is more than comfortable, thanks to careful and shrewd management. However, when her daughters-in-law remark how lucky she is, she is infuriated: "Money is like superannuation for all my hard work.

They say I'm carefree but wherever I look, there's nothing but unpleasant, irritating things. When will I be able to sit back and relax, without saying anything?" (Tanabe, *Ubazakari* 15). Financial and emotional independence, careful planning, an active life—Utako-san has them all, decades before the feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko wrote the best-selling "how-to" book, *Obitorisama no rōgo* (Single in Old Age, 2007).²⁴

Every volume, story and chapter in the Utako-san series bears a title that includes the word *uba* (old woman) combined with another component in an unusual way. Words such as "prime," "height," "maiden," "star," "cotton rose" and "frolic" are not usually associated with old women. The incongruity creates laughter but also subverts various assumptions and stereotypes. The only title that does not contain *uba* is "Jijisute no tsuki" (Abandoning an Old Man under the Moon, in *Ubazakari*), which is a gender-reversed take-off of *Obasute* (or *Ubasute*). Utako-san is seventy-six years old in this first volume of the series. She visits a zoo with a nice seventy-four year-old gentleman and enjoys their conversation, but when he invites her to go to a "love hotel," she "abandons" him in the street in disgust: "What a pity! Why can't we, at seventy-four and seventy-six, just cherish our subtle platonic attraction?" (Tanabe, *Ubazakari* 57). Thus, Utako-san subverts not only the *ubasute* legend but the assumption that old women are powerless, lonely and sexually unattractive and frustrated.

Since Utako-san and other aged/ageless girls have their own aesthetic and ethical conviction, they freely pass judgement. They may sound arrogant and egotistical, which creates another kind of humour and irony. For example, they hate authoritarianism but do not care if they themselves sound authoritarian at times. They

cannot stand inanity, misogyny, rigidity, opportunism or hypocrisy. We can link this to the idea of “freedom and arrogance” again, and more specifically, reading girls’ tradition: “a strong desire for and commitment to fairness, especially for those who are neglected and marginalized.”²⁵ Revolt against neglect and prejudice is an important element of *shōjo* culture. Tanabe’s enormous corpus includes not only popular fiction but also essays on, and re-tellings of, classical literature, as well as a number of biographies. Much in these works is based on or motivated by indignation about the unfair treatment of women writers and the culture of women and children.

The indignant yet comic mode of the aged/ageless girl is ubiquitous in Mori Mari’s *Dokkiri channeru* (Candid Channel, TV reviews/essays, named after a Japanese version of *Candid Camera*), which was serialised in the weekly magazine *Shūkan Shinchō* between 1979 and 1985, when the author was in her mid-seventies to early eighties. In these essays she does not hesitate to name names. The first instalment of the series, entitled “Kan ni sawaru hitobito” (Irritating People),²⁶ for example, criticises popular media commentators Tawara Moeko, Takemura Ken’ichi and Katayama Ryūji for rudely stopping young women from speaking or censoring their talk. In the same instalment, actor Kayama Yūzō’s awkward swordsmanship in samurai action dramas, another actor Tanaka Ken’s lack of acting skills, evident in his “boring big eyes,” and TV personality Tokumitsu Kazuo’s plain face and unsophisticated gestures are given as “irritating” examples. Tokumitsu’s face reminds the writer of the “same type of face” as writer Maruya Saichi, who, according to Mori, is determined to neglect her writing.

In a dialogue with Yoshiyuki Junnosuke, when Yoshiyuki said something favourable about my writing, Maruya Saiichi responded with silence. When asked for a third time, he said “If I must, I must say I ignore it [her writing].” I have seen a blurb for one of his books that acclaims him as ‘a first-class reader.’ Since this is the judgement of such a person, I would have no regrets if I dropped dead at any moment. (MMZ, v. 6, 9)²⁷

However “candid” and subjective these comments may be, they maintain a comic-ironic stance. The mixing of serious and frivolous issues is one of the strategies used here. Similar kinds of strategies are also found in Kanai Mieko’s essays, including the ongoing series *Hibi no arekore* (Mejiro Miscellanies), which often mock, attack and poke fun at the follies, inanities, prejudices, and particularly misogyny of celebrated writers, critics, soccer players, and many others.²⁸ It must also be noted that these aged/ageless girls are enthusiastic in their praise and admiration. The objects of their passionate love and admiration may be cats, *The Tale of Genji*, *senryū* (comic/satirical/parodic haiku), 1950s fashion, Arthur Ransom, Manchester United, films (Ford, Renoir, Goddard), Snoopy, TV shows, food, girls’ manga, Takarazuka, or kabuki. They may sound intensely narcissistic or egotistical but they can also laugh at themselves. A rhetorical technique often used by Mori Mari to enhance the comic effect is to use honorific (rather than normative humble) language when referring to herself.

Comic rhetoric is also used by Kanai’s aged/ageless protagonist Akiko-san in *Kaiteki seikatsu kenkyū* (A Study of Comfortable Life,

2006).²⁹ This woman in her early sixties is one of the most comical and innovative creations in modern Japanese fiction. Akiko writes long meandering letters in which the recipient, Mariko, who is supposedly Akiko's "best friend," is constantly reminded of her painful and serious domestic problems, such as her husband's Alzheimer's disease and her son's heavy debts, as well as the domestic violence of her first husband which led to their divorce. While poor Mariko is hospitalised later in the novel for a subarachnoid haemorrhage, Akiko keeps writing happily in the comfort of her flat, between many glasses of various alcoholic drinks. Her egotism and eccentricity are clear not only from her own writing but also from the viewpoints of other characters. However, when it comes to other people's smugness, bad taste and selfishness, Akiko-san is acutely observant. Thus, what would normally be regarded as serious problems are used as material for this comic satirical novel. It is funny because it is wicked, and at the centre of this subversive humour is the egotistic, forgetful, alcoholic Akiko-san.

Conclusion

While the subject of the *shōjo* may have finally attracted attention in literary, socio-cultural and anthropological studies in recent decades, old women have remained more or less outside the realm, or at best at the very periphery, of modern Japanese literary and cultural interest—except in regard to the theme of *yamanba*. However, as exemplified in the literature I have described above, there are many other themes as well as narrative devices and strategies that celebrate the subjectivity of old women. Mori Mari, Tanabe Seiko and Kanai Mieko all use the viewpoints and voices of

what I call here aged/ageless girls, combining the *shōjō*'s "freedom and arrogance" with humour. Old women in their texts are no longer banished to attics and the mountains, but choose to live and write in their own space, about their own subjects, and with their own highly accomplished stylistic and rhetorical skills. They are not totally separated from the outside world; they observe and communicate as they wish. When they encounter things and people that irritate them, they articulate their annoyance. However, even their rage is generally cheerful and amusing. Their humour and playfulness make the subversion much more effective than simple grumbling or complaining would be. Mori, Tanabe and Kanai demonstrate comic, satirical and artistic possibilities for literature in an ageing society in which old women can laugh and make others laugh - not in a misogynist or ageist way but at the misogyny, ageism and many other prejudices and forms of discriminations, as well as for sheer comic pleasure, which does not necessarily imply sexual *jouissance*.

NOTES

- ¹ Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 353. In Philippi's translation the name is given as Aka-wi-ko of the Pikēta-be. I use standard Hepburn romanisation here.
- ² As Philippi notes, there is no subject expressed in the original and hence the "she" could be "I." "When the song is divorced from the narrative, 'I' may be preferable" (Philippi 354, note 5). The emperor's age or sexual potency is not mentioned in the *Kojiki* episode or in the notes. Emperor Yūryaku's dates are given as 418–79, making it impossible for him to woo a young woman and keep her waiting for eighty years.

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- ³ The Kanze School permitted women performers for the first time in 1948. In 2004 twenty-two women were permitted to enter the Japan Noh Society for the first time. See Miyanishi Naoko, “Josei nōgakushi to futatsu no kabe” (A Study of Two Barriers against Female Noh Professionals), *Nihon daigaku daigakuin sōgō shakai jōhō kenkyūka kijō* 6 (2005): 86–97.
- ⁴ Royall Tyler, *A Cycle of No Plays* (Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1978, vol. 1 “Pining Wind”), 116.
- ⁵ Kurata Yōko, *Kataru rōjo katarareru rōjo: Nihon kingendai bungaku ni miru onna no oi* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 2010), 27.
- ⁶ Mizuno Yumiko, “Oi no bi: Zeami o chūshin ni,” *Nihon no bigaku*, 22 (1994): 133.
- ⁷ Kurata 26, quoting Hattori Sanae, *Heianchō ni oi o manabu* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001), 84.
- ⁸ See Yamada Itsuko’s entry on *yamauba* in *Nihon joseishi daijiten*, ed. Kaneko Sachiko et al. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbundō, 2008), 743–44.
- ⁹ Of the twenty-six works discussed in the issue of *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 54(4) (1989) that deals with representations of old age in modern Japanese literature, only six are written by women (Okamoto Kanoko, Hayashi Fumiko, two by Enchi Fumiko, Ariyoshi Sawako, and Uno Chiyo). The roundtable discussion that is placed at the beginning of this issue has no woman on the panel. Of the four articles on old age in poetry in another section of the same issue, only one deals with a woman poet (Yosano Akiko).
- ¹⁰ These novels have been adapted into films (including non-Japanese ones), plays, radio plays, and some other genres.
- ¹¹ To name but a few, Ōba Minako, “Yamanba no bishō” (trans. “The Smile of the Mountain Witch,” in *Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction*, ed. Noriko Lippit and Kyoko Iriye Selden

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- (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 194–206; Ōba Minako and Mizuta Noriko, <Yamamba> no iru fūkei (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1995); Meera Viswanathan, “In Pursuit of Yamamba: The Question of Female Resistance,” in *The Woman’s Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women’s Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford University Press, 1996), 239–61; *Yamamba-tachi no monogatari: Josei no genkei to katarinaoshi*, ed. Mizuta Noriko and Kitada Sachie (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 2002).
- ¹² Yomota Inuhiko, *Kawaiiron* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, Chikuma Shinsho, 2006), 144–48. See also Miyasako Chizuru’s *Utsukushii nima no yō ni oiru* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2001), 148–57, for interesting musings about *kawaii* reading glasses.
- ¹³ For example, as Kan Satoko points out, Tanabe Seiko’s elderly heroine rejects the notion of the “cute old lady.” See Kan’s chapter in *Oi no yuraku: “rōjin bungaku” no miryoku*, ed. Ogata Akiko and Hasegawa Kei (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2008), 28.
- ¹⁴ Takahara Eiri, “The Consciousness of the Girl: Freedom and Arrogance,” translated from the introductory chapter of Takahara’s book, *Shōjo ryōiki* (The Territory of the Girl, Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1999) by Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley, in *Woman Critiqued*, ed. Rebecca Copeland (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 192.
- ¹⁵ *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), editors’ “Introduction,” 7.
- ¹⁶ *Yaoi* and *BL* are the terms used for male homoerotic graphic and prose fiction, including parody, usually created by women mainly for a female audience. See Tomoko Aoyama, “Male Homosexuality as Treated by Japanese Women Writers,” in *The Japanese Trajectory:*

Modernization and Beyond, ed. Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 186–204 and Kazumi Nagaike, “‘L’homme fatal’ and (Dis)empowered Women in Mori Mari’s Male Homosexual Trilogy,” *Japanese Language and Literature*, 41(2007): 37–59.

- ¹⁷ The text is included in *Mori Mari zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1993, hereafter MMZ), vol. 4. No English translation is available. For a discussion of this work see Tomoko Aoyama, “A Room Sweet as Honey: Father-Daughter Love in Mori Mari,” in *The Father-Daughter Plot*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 1679–3. See also Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase’s article “*Shōjo* and *Yamanba*: Mori Mari’s Literature,” *PAJLS* 5 (2004): 109–23.
- ¹⁸ This short story has been translated into English by Phyllis Birnbaum, in *Rabbits, Crabs, Etc.: Stories by Japanese Women* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1982), 1–23.
- ¹⁹ Kanai Mieko, *Indian samā* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, Kawade Bunko, 1999).
- ²⁰ Kawasaki Kenko, “Tanabe Seiko to Takarazuka Kagekidan,” in *Tanabe Seiko: Sengo bungaku e no shinshikaku*, (*Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, Bessatsu, ed. Kan Satoko (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2006), 215.
- ²¹ In Tanabe Seiko, *Tanabe Seiko zenshū*, Bekkan, vol.1 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2006), 357–420.
- ²² Kurahashi Yumiko, “Dokuyaku to shite no bungaku” (Literature as Poison, first published in 1966), in Kurahashi Yumiko, *Dokuyaku to shite no bungaku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, Bungei Bunko, 1999), 68.
- ²³ Tanabe Seiko, *Ubazakari*, *Uba tokimeki*, *Uba ukare*, *Ubagatte* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1993 respectively; texts used here are the Shinchō Bunko edition, 1984, 1987, 1990 and 1996 respectively).

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- ²⁴ Ueno Chizuko, *Obitorisama no rōgo* (Tokyo: Hōken, 2007). Notwithstanding the popularity of the books, both the fictional Utako-san and Ueno have been criticised for their privileged positions.
- ²⁵ Tomoko Aoyama, “Genealogy of the ‘Girl’ Critic Reading Girl,” in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, 40.
- ²⁶ MMZ vol. 6, 6–9.
- ²⁷ The writings by Mori that are referred to in the dialogue between the two male writers are a collection of essays entitled *Maria no kimaguregaki* (Capricious Writings of Maria). Mori commented that even though Maruya is said to be an intelligent novelist, Yoshiyuki sounded more intelligent (MMZ vol. 5, 148–49). Therefore there seems to be good reason for Maruya’s reluctance to comment on her work.
- ²⁸ Kanai Mieko, *Hibi no arekore* (Mejiro Miscellany, serialised in *Issatsu no bon* since 2002, published in 4 vols so far; Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2011).
- ²⁹ Kanai, *Kaiteki seikatsu kenkyū* (A Study of Comfortable Life, Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2006). For a discussion of the parodic satirical devices in this work, see Tomoko Aoyama, “Writing along with and against the Smugness of Writing: Kanai Mieko’s *A Study of Comfortable Life*,” *PAJLS (Proceedings of Association for Japanese Literary Studies)* 10 (2009): 244–61.

**THE QUESTION OF GERMAN GUILT:
THE PALMNICKEN MASSACRE IN
ARNO SURMINSKI'S *WINTER FÜNFUNDVIERZIG
ODER DIE FRAUEN VON
PALMNICKEN***

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The liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army on 27 January 1945 is generally seen as the end of the Holocaust, although of course victims continued to perish until the end of the war and beyond. But, just days after this date, during the night of 31 January 1945, there occurred what was probably the last large-scale Holocaust massacre of some 3,000 Jewish female concentration camp inmates at Palmnicken on the East Prussian coast. For a number of reasons this massacre was never well known and was not recognised or commemorated by the authorities in what, following the war, had become the town of Yantarny in the Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia. This remained unchanged until 31 January 2010, the sixty-fifth anniversary of this massacre, when a memorial to the victims was unveiled.¹

It is not the purpose of this paper to depict in detail the historical background of this massacre, and why it was ignored for so long, but a few details are necessary: after the beginning of the Soviet offensive in early January 1945, the East Prussian subsidiary labour camps of the Stutthof Concentration Camp were evacuated, and some 5,000 prisoners were marched via Königsberg to the coastal town of Palmnicken, famous for its amber mines. While it seems that the initial intention was to return the prisoners to the main Stutthof camp (near Danzig), the 3,000 surviving prisoners who actually reached Palmnicken on this death march were then planned to be entombed in an amber mine. When this plan was blocked by the courageous action of the director of the amber mine, the Waffen SS subsequently herded the victims into the ice-covered Baltic, where they were machine-gunned on the ice and on

the beach. When the Red Army eventually occupied Palmnicken, they forced the remaining German population to gather the dead, who were partially buried in the sand, and put them in mass graves. There are thought to be only some fifteen survivors.²

It is to Arno Surminski's credit that he has now devoted himself to depicting in fictional form this little-known massacre in his latest novel *Winter Forty-Five or The Women of Palmnicken* (2010).³ Arno Surminki is best known as an author of "Vertreibungsliteratur" ("refugee literature"), devoting himself to loving depictions of his lost "Heimat" or home province of East Prussia, and the suffering of the German civilian population subject to the grim fate of flight and expulsion.⁴ While the emphasis of the earlier works is well and truly on the Germans as victims, it must be mentioned that from the very beginning Surminski balanced this with empathic depictions of the harsh fates of Polish and Russian prisoners of war, as well as the inhumane treatment of the Jews. So while Surminski did treat in his earlier works the fates of German soldiers or SS men, who had become complicit in greater or lesser degree in the war and the atrocities associated with it, this was for the most part secondary to the main theme of German refugees. In a later novel *Fatherland without Fathers*⁵ Surminski moves away from the refugee theme, and describes the horrors of war on the Russian Front through the eyes of three "ordinary" German soldiers, who all eventually perish, being seen as perpetrators and victims at the same time. A "turning point," perhaps, in Surminski's exploration of the German past was his novella *The Bird Life of Auschwitz*,⁶ where he deals with a German SS guard in Auschwitz concentration camp, exploring the question of German guilt. While this particular guard (based on a historical figure) was able to escape the "normality" of guard duties in Auschwitz by being delegated to make a scientific study of the bird life of the Auschwitz environs, he remains an obedient servant of the Nazi ideology, being prepared to participate in atrocities if ordered to do so.

In an interesting precursor to the topic of his current novel, in his novel *Summer Forty-Four*⁷, which appeared in 1997 and still dealt largely with the refugee theme, Surminski had already inserted a brief episode where the main character, the German soldier Hermann Kallweit, is being interrogated as a prisoner of war by an American Major of German-Jewish extraction (also from Königsberg) as to whether or not he was involved in the massacre of Palmnicken. The German is able to answer truthfully that he was

not involved, but adds ominously that he too would have fired if he had been there and if he had been ordered to do so.

It is obvious that the Palmnicken massacre has engaged Surminski at least since the late nineties, and as more and more evidence of this massacre emerged, in particular the accounts and subsequent research of the then sixteen-year-old eye-witness Martin Bergau,⁸ that Surminski moved from the brief speculative and hypothetical treatment of this issue in 1997 to a full-length novel study in his latest novel *Winter Forty-Five or The Women of Palmnicken*. It is no longer a hypothetical question of what one would have done if one had been there, but it shows the terrible truth of what actually did occur.

The text is narrated in two distinct ways: it begins with the first-person narration of Max Broders in 1998, who is attempting to come to terms with the past of his father, who, it turns out, was involved in the massacre at Palmnicken. Most of this strand is set in present-day Kaliningrad and Yantarny, with some of it set in the narrator's home town of Lübeck. This strand, interwoven among the other strands, occupies about one-third of the novel. The largest part of the novel, however, is narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator situated outside or above the events. This narrator narrates the story of four young Jewish women from Lodz, and their experiences as concentration camp prisoners, of whom only one survives these events. The omniscient narrator also narrates the stories of a number of the German townspeople, who come into contact one way or another with the prisoners. Their stories as refugees from the Memel area, and later as refugees from East Prussia, are interwoven into the main story, but occupy only a small part of the total. The narrator also gives us a few limited insights into the attitudes and actions of the SS guards and of their commandant, as well as the thoughts of the amber mine manager, who refuses to let the Jewish prisoners be entombed in the mine, and who in fact also provides food and shelter for the prisoners while they are in Palmnicken. This strand takes up approximately two-thirds of the novel. There is also a third, minor strand, consisting of short, mainly one or two page comments printed in italics by the omniscient narrator, these short passages totalling about a dozen pages are of a general and reflective, almost philosophical nature.⁹

The authorially-narrated largest part of the novel commences in August 1944, and is set in the Lodz Ghetto, where we are introduced to the four young Jewish women, whose fate the novel follows. Celina, Dorota, Gesa and Sarah live in the Ghetto and

work in a textile factory, until the Lodz Ghetto is evacuated, and they are transported to Auschwitz, where Dorota is selected for the gas chambers. The other three are then transported to Stutthof camp near Danzig, where Sarah remained, with the other two sent to the “Außenarbeitslager” (labour camp) Schippenbeil in East Prussia. In January 1945 these subsidiary camps are dissolved, and the prisoners force-marched to Königsberg. The sad irony was that the Germans did not know what to do with them, as the tide of war was turning against them, and East Prussia had become almost encircled by the Red Army, with only the seaway, and the narrow strip of the “Nehrung” still open. As Königsberg is to become a “Festung” (fortress), the Jewish prisoners have to leave, and as most of the routes to the West are already cut or designated for higher priority uses such as the refugee treks, it was decided to send a large part of the prisoners to Palmnicken in the midst of the East Prussian winter. An estimated 2,000 perished on the death march from Königsberg to Palmnicken: “The road to Palmnicken became an avenue of death, as more and more prisoners laid down to rest in the snow.” (163).

At Palmnicken there was an almost unbelievable reprieve of four days, as the commandant of the local Volkssturm (home guard), a World War I Major called Friedenstein in the novel,¹⁰ protected the Jews, and fed and housed them as well as possible in a disused large shed of the amber mine. This courageous action was ultimately thwarted by having him and his troops ordered to the nearby front on a pretext (with Friedenstein subsequently committing suicide), and during the night of 31 January 1945 the 3,000 prisoners were brutally massacred. As Martin Bergau put it in his historical account:

It was in the night of 31 January to 1 February 1945 with temperatures at about minus twenty degrees that an SS murder commando drove 3000 Jews onto the ice of the amber coast near Palmnicken, and shot or beat them to death, or let them drown or freeze to death. These 3000 were the survivors of a brutal march from Königsberg on 26 January, involving 5000 Jews, of whom 2000 already perished on the way. (Bergau 5)

In the novel, Celina ends up being one of the few survivors, and is given shelter by a German peasant family. In an ironic twist, Celina later ends up being taken for a German, and shares the fate of being raped by Russian troops before also being deported to a labour camp in Russia. Celina in the end manages to convince the

Russians of her true identity, and is eventually released, returning to Lodz before ultimately emigrating to Palestine/Israel, where she married and had four children.

Surminski also narrates the stories of two German women, who also become refugees, and whose lives briefly intersect with the Jewish victims of Palmnicken. The East Prussian peasant woman from Palmnicken manages to flee to the west with her children, but the refugee from the Memel area, Levine Gedeitis, perishes in a Russian labour camp, with her fourteen-year-old daughter Olga also a victim of the Russian mass rapes, while her son, who had witnessed the massacre as a ten-year-old, grows up in now Russian Yantarni as a homeless orphan, called variously Iwan or Fritz, and becomes a link with the present, when the first-person narrator meets him and seeks information about the past.

We do not get much insight into the minds of the SS guards,¹¹ they are viewed almost entirely externally. There is certainly no discernible figure amongst the SS guards, who might resemble the then twenty-year-old Hans Broders, father of the first-person narrator of the other strand of the novel.¹² In Königsberg, the prisoners are just considered to be a nuisance: “Königsberg is going to become a fortress, and we have no use for prisoners there (142).” And when the SS-Obersturmführer Wassel¹³ gets to Palmnicken he says to his opponent Friedenstien: “And now they [the Jews] are here, and I don’t know what to do with them (205).” In the novel, Wassel makes a quick trip to the nearby port of Pillau to see whether there is any chance that his prisoners can be shipped away, and when he is told that this is impossible, but that his small group of men can be evacuated, he comments laconically: “In three days we will be evacuated to Hela. Before that we have a difficult job to do (222).”¹⁴

As mentioned, the strand of the novel set in the “present” (1998) comprises about one-third of the novel, and is narrated in the first-person by the now fifty-year-old Max Broders, who is trying to find out about the past of his father, and his possible involvement in the Palmnicken massacre. This narrative begins with the funeral of Max’s father near Lübeck, and there he meets a somewhat sinister stranger (“der Fremde”), who says somewhat ominously: “Your father was not guilty, he was too young, much too young (12).”¹⁵ The birth year of Hans Broders is given as 1924, and he is referred to as being a twenty-year-old during the events of January 1945 in Palmnicken. Until then, Max Broders, an only child born in 1948, whose mother had died three years previously, had thought that his father had been an “ordinary” soldier, but now discovers that he

was a member of the Waffen SS, who had served in France as well as Russia, and was involved in the defence of East Prussia in the last months of the war. The narrator then gets a letter from “der Fremde”, who gives him scant details of a massacre at Palmnicken, again adding the words: “No guilt is attached to your father (9).” He now recalls that his father had made a journey to Kaliningrad only a year or two previously, and that this had deeply affected him:

He had come back a changed man from his winter trip to Kaliningrad, he was even more silent and closed. I had attributed his silence to his being alone and to him missing my mother, but now I realized the true reason: Father had visited Yantarny in January, his Palmnicken. That had taken away his speech. (52)

It probably does not need much analysis to see that the father is harbouring some kind of trauma, which is coming more to the surface after he was widowed, and with approaching old age.

Max now follows in the footsteps of his father, and most of this strand of the novel is set in Kaliningrad and Yantarni in 1998. Unlike many Surminski heroes, who go back to visit their old “Heimat” (home land), or that of their parents or grandparents, neither Max nor his father had any connection with the former German East, except of course for the events at Palmnicken in January 1945.

While both the Russian authorities in Kaliningrad and “der Fremde,” who appears now in Yantarni, at first try to deny that a massacre even took place, or to play down its significance, it gradually becomes clear to Max that a massacre had taken place, and that his father had in all probability taken part in it in some form or another. At first “der Fremde,” who had been a somewhat older comrade of Hans, once more tries to use the youth of Hans as an excuse: “He was much too young to become guilty... It weighed on him, believe me, he was only just twenty-one years old (184f).”

The stranger claims that the guards and their commander were in a dilemma (“Zwangslage”), as the land way to Stutthof had been cut off by the rapid Russian advance, and they were forbidden to let them fall into the hands of the Russians. Therefore, according to this grim logic, they had no choice but to shoot them. Max is told that the actual killings were in all probability done not directly by the German SS, but by auxiliary troops: “That was done by the foreign troops; our Latvian and Ukrainian auxiliaries liked killing

(191)." Max is relieved at this: "Thank God that he did not have to shoot, they had the auxiliaries for that task (191)." The narrator now comes to the conclusion: "The massacre did occur, but the traces of it have disappeared in the sea. I will never find out exactly how my father was involved, and that is good (192)."

The most that the narrator can establish is that his father was involved, both as a guard in the death march from Königsberg to Palmnicken, and in the actual massacre itself, probably as a munitions carrier ("I thought of my father who had hauled ammunition boxes to the meteorological station and had done nothing else." (273)), but he may not personally have killed anyone himself, because they had the "Hiwis" or auxiliary troops for that. Having investigated the past at Palmnicken as far as he could, and his father's role in it, the narrator now comes to the conclusion that he cannot condemn his father:

What am I to do with my father? I cannot condemn him, because then I would also lose myself. Distancing myself will also not work, then I would no longer be I. Accuse him? How can I presume to accuse my father of something he had done at the age of twenty-one? Therefore I decided to take him home. (281)

When the narrator returns from his journey to the former East Prussia, he goes back to the grave of his father on the Bay of Lübeck, and goes even further in his attempt to exculpate his father:

How close to me he was. I did not despise him, did not accuse him. No, you were not a murderer, you only carried munition boxes, that's all. The others did the murdering, the auxiliaries, as the stranger called them, and the masters who gave the orders. (318)

As is apparent from the above quotes, Surminski's treatment of the SS guards (or at least of one of these guards) who eventually massacre these prisoners while on a death march through East Prussia, is problematic. The first person narrator of the novel, who uncovers his father's probable role in the massacre, is unable to consider his father guilty because of the latter's then young age. Blamed are both the circumstances ("Zwangslage"), and orders from high up. But is this enough to avoid personal guilt? While it might be understandable for family members such as Max Broders to wish to exonerate their relatives from guilt, this should not lead

to a general exoneration. I think extenuating circumstances may be pleaded, including the youth of the person concerned, the “Zwangslage” of having to obey orders, only indirect participation, and so on, but ultimately some degree of personal, moral guilt must remain.¹⁶

While this novel is primarily about the Palmnicken massacre, both from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator, and from the viewpoint of the first-person narrator tracking down the past from the present (1998), the omniscient narrator who narrates the brief, italicised pages of commentary, which are interspersed throughout the novel, also talks about the “Ostsee” or Baltic Sea in general, and the other war events that took place near it and in it. In particular, Surminski repeatedly refers to the sinking of the “Wilhelm Gustloff,” culminating in a two-page description in an italicized part of the novel (224f.), which happened virtually simultaneously with the horrific events in and around Palmnicken. Another historical event which Surminski brings into the novel is the sinking of the “Cap Arkona” and “Thielbeck,” containing nearly 8,000 prisoners from the concentration camp Neuengamme in the Bay of Lübeck on 3 May 1945, just days before the end of the war. This leads “der Fremde” to the relativising and comparing of these disasters or war crimes: “We have on our conscience the women of Palmnicken, the Russians have the women and children of the “Gustloff”, while the English have the dead of the Bay of Lübeck.” (322)

While this “Gleichsetzung” or relativising of catastrophes or war crimes is not quite shared by the narrator Max, he too at the end embraces a rather fuzzy position, where the Baltic is seen as a huge mass grave of the different victims from all sides without differentiation:

Our Baltic Sea is a common cemetery in which Russian prisoners of war and German soldiers lie buried next to each other, the women and children of the “Gustloff” next to the women of Palmnicken, concentration camp prisoners and wounded, captains and ordinary sailors, crashed aeroplane pilots and the many refugees whom the ice did not support. Half a century after the events we should commemorate these victims together. (327f.)

While Surminski’s aim here is not to be revanchist, or to mitigate or relativise German guilt as did “der Fremde,” and he aims to depict a requiem for all victims of the war with the Mare Balticum as a

mass grave and memorial, it is doubtful whether such a global view ultimately does justice to the deliberate crimes of the Nazis.

NOTES

- ¹ “Wider das Vergessen: Das Massaker von Palmnicken”, Russland-Aktuell, <http://kaliningrad.aktuell.ru>, 1.2.2010.
- ² There are different numbers in the various accounts. For example, the number of survivors is variously listed as 13, 15 and 21. See Martin Bergau, *Todesmarsch zur Bernsteinküste. Das Massaker an Juden im ostpreussischen Palmnicken im Januar 1945. Zeitzeugen erinnern sich* (Winter: Heidelberg 2006); Martin Gilbert, *Endlösung. Die Vertreibung und Vernichtung der Juden. Ein Atlas*, trans. Nikolaus Hansen (Rowohlt: Reinbek 1982), (original: *Atlas of the Holocaust* 1982); Benedikt Erenz, “Apokalypse in Ostpreußen,” *Zeit Online*, 1.3.2007; Michael Wines, “Yantarny Journal; Russians Awaken to a Forgotten SS Atrocity,” *New York Times*, 31.1.2000.
- ³ Arno Surminski, *Winter Fünfundvierzig oder Die Frauen von Palmnicken* (Ellert & Richter: Hamburg 2010).
- ⁴ For a detailed examination of Surminski’s earlier works (up to 1997) see especially: Herman Ernst Beyersdorf, *Erinnerte Heimat, Ostpreußen im literarischen Werk von Arno Surminski* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 1999). His first, very autobiographical novel, *Jokehnen oder Wie lange fährt man von Ostpreußen nach Deutschland?* (Stuttgart 1974), is perhaps exemplary of Surminski’s preoccupation with the refugee theme.
- ⁵ Arno Surminski, *Vaterland ohne Väter* (Ullstein: Berlin 2004).
- ⁶ Arno Surminski, *Die Vogelwelt von Auschwitz* (Langen Müller: München 2008). For a discussion of this novella, see Herman Beyersdorf, “The Banality of Evil?: Arno Surminski’s *Die Vogelwelt von Auschwitz*”, *AUMLA*, Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, Special Issue, Refereed Proceedings of the 2009 AULLA Conference, December 2009.
- ⁷ Arno Surminski, *Sommer vierundvierzig oder Wie lange fährt man von Deutschland nach Ostpreußen?* (Ullstein: Berlin 1997).
- ⁸ See Note 2 above.
- ⁹ The novel consists of 320 pages (plus several maps and a one-page glossary of what happened to the various characters, as well as a glossary of perhaps unfamiliar terminology of the Nazi era). The omniscient narration totals some 211 pages, the first-person narration 101 pages, with the italicised general commentaries making up the remainder.
- ¹⁰ In the fictional figure of Friedenstien, Surminski conflates the Director of the Palmnicken amber mine and the Manager of the farm estates, who was also commander of the local Volkssturm, Paul Feyerabend. The latter did indeed protect, shelter and feed the prisoners until he was ordered to the nearby front on a pretext.

When he realised he had been tricked, and the Jews were no longer safe, he committed suicide, although some reports claim that he was murdered by the SD, because of his deeds.

- ¹¹ According to Bergau (21), there were about 20 German SS troops, and about a hundred and twenty troops of other nationalities, Ukrainian, Latvian but also Flemish volunteers, many of whom had been commandeered from the Organisation Todt, the Nazi labour force.
- ¹² There is, however, one small linking detail: when the SS commander Wassel travels to Pillau, he is accompanied by a young SS soldier who is reading the book “Mein Weg nach Scapa Flow,” which is the same book as Max’s father had brought home from the war (15). The reference is to the autobiography of the U-Boat hero Günther Prien, *Mein Weg nach Scapa Flow*, Deutscher Verlag, Berlin 1940.
- ¹³ Wassel is based on SS-Oberscharführer Fritz Weber. When the “Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen in Ludwigsburg” started investigating the Palmnicken occurrences, Weber was arrested, and committed suicide shortly after his arrest in January 1965. (Martin Bergau, 7)
- ¹⁴ While a lot of Surminski’s novel follows the historical detail, especially as described by Martin Bergau, I have not been able to find any historical background of this attempt by the SS commander to save the prisoners.
- ¹⁵ See in this context Günter Grass’s plaintive comment about his membership of the Waffen SS: “Ich war doch ein Kind nur, nur ein Kind...”, (“I was only a child, just a child...”) Günter Grass, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (Steidl: Göttingen 2006), 37. However, it must be noted that Grass was only seventeen when he was in the Waffen SS, not twenty-one.
- ¹⁶ See here Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (Fordham University Press: New York 2000). Jaspers had argued that there were various types of guilt, including “moral guilt,” which is the guilt an individual feels or should feel in their own conscience regardless of any legal guilt.

**THE AUDIENCE WILL EXPECT ME
TO LEAVE THE STAGE: LITERARY BIOGRAPHY
IN RECENT BRITISH DRAMA.**

CAROLYN BURNS
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Donald: ...my part of the story being over, the audience will expect me to leave the stage, but I don't because...

Author: Because being the author of a literary biography of Auden, and ten years or so after that a biography of Benjamin Britten, you are in a unique position to give a commentary on their lives. You have become ... the storyteller.

Donald: Mr Know-all. I just feel I irritate. I'm in the way.

Fitz: That's because you are.

Alan Bennett, *The Habit of Art*.¹

Several British plays written around the turn of the twenty-first century feature imagined accounts of the lives of literary figures. These works engage with postmodern literary theory by suggesting that the events of artists' lives can be considered as framing narratives for their literary output, while reveling in the dramatic irony created when events on stage diverge from accepted biographical accounts of the artist's life. This paper will specifically discuss four plays that employ this narrative strategy: Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974) and *Arcadia* (1992), and Alan Bennett's *Kafka's Dick* (1986) and *The Habit of Art* (2009). In these plays the lives of artists (James Joyce and Tristan Tzara; Lord Byron; Franz Kafka and Max Brod; W. H. Auden and Benjamin Britten) are imaginatively interpreted, transplanted to surreal or entirely imagined settings that act as backdrops for the playful exploration of the nature of time and knowledge.

In order to negotiate the many (occasionally contradictory) ways that postmodernism is used to interpret recent drama, here I will

refer to the work of Linda Hutcheon, who, from her early work on the self-reflexive impulse of postmodern fiction in *Narcissistic Narrative* (1980), has extensively explored the aesthetic and political significance of common stylistic features of twentieth century fiction. Specifically, I will discuss these plays with reference to Hutcheon's concept of "historiographic metafiction," defined in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), which refers to a categorisation of texts that use fiction as a device to interrogate historical narratives and thereby question conventional interpretations of past events.

While historiographic metafiction is a categorization most frequently applied to late twentieth-century novels (such as John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, John Berger's *G.*, and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*²), since the 1970s, drama that interrogates historical events and the lives of historical figures has also not been uncommon on the British stage, from Caryl Churchill's experimental feminist plays *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Cloud 9* (1979) and *Top Girls* (1982) to more recent biographical plays such as Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* (1998) and Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon* (2006). While these plays employ varying degrees of dramatic license in their description of past events, none exploit historical accounts with quite the comedic abandon of Stoppard and Bennett, who both manipulate dramatic conventions in order to explore difficulties associated with interpretation and representation, while questioning the validity of investigating the artistic process.

While considering this approach to fiction as the "ironic rethinking of history"(5), as Linda Hutcheon does in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, may seem to suggest that postmodern fiction can be ideologically disengaged, the use of irony can allow for more nuanced exploration of social and philosophical concerns than is possible in overtly didactic texts. Indeed, according to Hutcheon, this approach to presenting historical events in fiction has profound ideological consequences:

Historiographic metafiction [...] refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, by both questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim of truth from that identity. (*A Poetics*, 93)

By establishing historical contexts and then subverting common

perceptions of those contexts, an opening is made for the plays to acknowledge those groups marginalized by conventional accounts of history, and create new fictional voices for the socially disadvantaged.

Here I follow several critics who have previously examined Tom Stoppard's plays in light of Linda Hutcheon's analysis of postmodernism. Christopher Innes, for instance, takes *Arcadia* and *Travesties* as examples of how the creation of intertextual irony is representative of the postmodern mode for contradiction.³ Similarly, Ted Underwood examines the recurrence of parallel lives narratives in postmodern fiction, identifying the radical ideological consequences of historiographical metafiction's "playful decentering of positivist epistemology,"⁴ drawing parallels between *Arcadia* and A. S. Byatt's 1990 novel *Possession*: "The audience sees contemporary characters misled by gaps in the written record and wonders whether they will ever discover the full truth about their predecessors ... The real source of suspense lies in a struggle to remember and re-create a past threatened by oblivion" (3).

When specifically examining dramatic texts, the epistemological consequences of historiographic metafiction are further complicated by theatre's unique representational framework. As Benjamin Bennet identifies in *Theater as Problem*, discussions of theatrical postmodernism are made more difficult when the self referentiality of theatrical performance is taken into account; the audience of a play is aware that they are witnessing only one possible interpretation of a text that exists separately (and in evaluating this performance are made aware of their own interpretation of the text), whereas audiences of film and readers of prose fiction typically understand themselves to be experiencing the work directly.⁵

Travesties, *Kafka's Dick*, *Arcadia* and *The Habit of Art* all share significant structural features and, when viewed together, reveal that Stoppard and Bennett share a playful and parodic approach to the representation of historical events that resonates with Hutcheon's observations about postmodern fiction. Beyond structural similarities, by centering plot events on the bystander, all four of these plays provide a relatable point of comparison to the lives of the famous figures explored. However, consideration of these plays uncovers the two playwrights' very different epistemological stances: where truth is either understood as entirely inaccessible or as a limit towards which, with consideration of multiple perspectives, human understanding approaches.

I

Travesties concerns a series of imagined meetings between James Joyce, Tristan Tzara and Lenin, as recalled by foppish consular employee Henry Carr, a real-life cast member of a 1917 Swiss production of *The Importance of Being Ernest*, who later became involved in a court dispute with Joyce (the theatre company's business manager) over a pair of costume trousers. Stoppard's fictionalized Carr proves to be an unreliable raconteur who confuses events in his failing memory with the plot of Oscar Wilde's play. Not only is his memory faulty, but, given his documented disputes with Joyce, Carr is understandably hostile to Joyce's work and also art in general: "Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what is strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else."⁶ Carr's curmudgeonly attitude so established at the opening of the play provides a suitable starting point for the irreverent exploration of aesthetic themes that follows. The mischievous depiction of various authors and the pastiche of famous texts in *Travesties* allows for an lighthearted discussion of the role of the artist from various ideological perspectives typical of debates about twentieth century aesthetics, establishing a complex web of literary references that mixes known facts about historical figures with literary references to Tzara and Lenin's writings as well as Joyce's *Ulysses* and direct quotations from Shakespeare's sonnets, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing* while borrowing the structure, tone and corrupting the witticisms of *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

At the beginning of the play each artist voices opinions characteristic of their known political standpoint and perspective on aesthetic theory: Dadaist Tristan Tzara calls on the artist to "jeer and howl and belch" (37) at the possibility of committed art and Lenin condemns non-partisan literature in quotation of his *Collected Writings* (85). As the play progresses, these points of view become confused in Carr's addled memory and the characters start to spout each other's manifestos: Lenin starts to parrot dialogue spoken earlier by Tzara and Joyce; Cecily (ripped straight from Wilde, but with little reference to her plot in *The Importance of Being Ernest*) performs a striptease while lecturing Carr on Marxist politics (78); and Tzara suddenly becomes unusually partisan: "Artists and intellectuals will be the conscience of the revolution" (83).

The manipulation of accepted facts is used here to highlight intellectual possibilities rather than expose misunderstandings in dominant historical narratives (the more common approach for texts classified as historiographic metafiction). The dramatic

success of the work lies in the intellectual conflict that results from unlikely encounters between characters, as known historical events are corrupted by collision. This deliberate confusion produces in the play what is described by Ira Nadel as the “rice-pudding effect,”⁷⁷ after Thomasina’s derivation of the heat death of the universe from the impossibility of stirring the jam back out of her pudding in Stoppard’s later play *Arcadia*: the events of the play are deliberately confused and the audience’s expectation that they will eventually be untangled is ultimately thwarted or only superficially fulfilled.

While *Travesties* clearly takes both farce and the memory play as structural models, the features of these forms are used to unusual effect in this exuberantly ahistorical display of postmodern acrobatics. According to Brian Richardson, *Travesties* is not “a memory play so much as an ingenious intertextual collage that travesties the memory play, as the consciousness purported to contain the thoughts is revealed at every scene to be instead a playful fabrication.”⁷⁸ True to farce form, the tensions of the play are arbitrarily wrapped-up in the final moments of the second act in a similarly superficial way to the conclusion of *The Importance of Being Ernest*, the slapdash resolution implying that the threads of representation will never be satisfactorily untangled.

II

Less purposefully shambolic than *Travesties*, Bennett’s *Kafka’s Dick* removes Franz Kafka from his historical context and throws him, along with his friend and will executor Max Brod, into the present day. In doing so, the play explores the dramatic potential of a character based on the established personality traits of a famous literary figure and exploits the associations carried by Kafka’s iconic literary work. Bennett however appears to have different motivations to Stoppard in experimenting with literary biography, using the manipulation of time to express skepticism about the value of posthumous psychological analysis of authors, ridiculing Kafka’s implied Freudian anxiety about the size of his penis.

Like *Travesties*, *Kafka’s Dick* widely sidesteps realism, but along with its time spanning narrative structure—typically for historiographic metafiction, it operates in three historical periods all traversed by Kafka: 1920, the present day (or 1984 for the premiere production), and a timeless afterworld—the play uses fantasy as a metaphor for subjectivity in the interpretation of the author and his work. After an opening scene in which Franz Kafka and Max Brod discuss Kafka’s will in 1920, Brod arrives on the doorstep of the

modern day home of Sydney and Linda, presenting them with a tortoise soaked in urine. Linda washes the tortoise and accidentally becomes Kafka's fairytale prince: "I'd swilled it under the tap and put it on the draining board. Just then it popped its little head out. I don't know what made me do it... I gave it a kiss."⁹

A central concern of the play is the way the relationship between the life of the artist and the value of his work is interpreted, but rather than throw light on discrepancies between Kafka's life and the content of his work, as the postmodern revaluation of canonical literature frequently does, the incidental characters are more interested in the trivial details of Kafka's biography, an interest mocked when Brod laments "Blood and sand, why does everybody round here think they're an authority on Kafka? He thinks he knows about Kafka. Kafka thinks he knows about Kafka. I'm the only one that really knows" (15). However, while this temptation is criticized it is also indulged by the way the play delights in these details; irony is again employed in having a playwright be critical of literary biography in a play superficially about one of the twentieth century's most famous authors. Bennett also uses the time spanning structural techniques of historiographic metafiction to lampoon literature's supposed prophetic function, as Max Brod is granted a flawless knowledge of future events that Kafka lacks: "We're in 1920 now, right? You're going to die soon... give a year, take a year, say 1924 at the outside. Well, less than ten years later we get the Nazis, right? And, as prefigured in some of your as yet unrecognized masterpieces (which I'm going to burn, I know, I know), the Nazis seize power and put into operation the full apparatus of totalitarian bureaucracy" (3).

Joseph O'Mealy considers *Kafka's Dick* (along with *An Englishman Abroad*, *The Insurance Man* and *A Question of Attribution*) typical of Bennett's "evident fascination with the performance of identity and its burdens."¹⁰ Bennett clearly has a strong interest in Kafka, returning to use his biography as the subject matter of his 1991 teleplay *102 Boulevard Hausmann*, but in *Kafka's Dick* Kafka is used as an emblem for authorship rather than as a stable historical identity. This function of Kafka in the play is reflected in the character's own despair at the way his work has been incorporated into the literary institution:

Kafka: ... Kafka is a vast building; a ramshackle institution in every room and department of which, in every corridor, attic and cellar, students and scholars pave over my text and worry over my

work. That isn't me. That is Kafka. Communicate with that. Preferably in triplicate. (24)

Kafka's reluctance to be the subject of examination here corresponds with Bennett's own reticence to communicate with the press,¹¹ and supports O'Mealy's assessment that "Bennett's Kafka is not everyone's Kafka, that is certain... [and] ...may say more about Bennett himself than it says about the historical Kafka" (70).

While the play itself delivers mixed messages about the historical position of authorship and the value of literature, in the play's epilogue a stronger hint is dropped as to the author's epistemological standpoint, with the introduction of an irreverent God who describes himself as "[...] all sorts of things. The BBC, Harrods, The *Oxford English Dictionary*, The Queen, The Ordinance Survey Map. Anything with a bit of authority really" (51), a strong endorsement of the view that truth is ultimately a social construct.

III

Fiction that uses historical investigation as a narrative device will inevitably bring to mind epistemological questions, and these questions are seriously addressed in Stoppard's *Arcadia*. This play, unlike *Travesties* and *Kafka's Dick*, presents a believable historical narrative, with the audience placed in a privileged position to assess the truth of historical statements through the structural device of scene-to-scene flashbacks between the present day and 1809, all set in the same room of Sidley Park, an English manor house.

The main characters introduced in the modern scenes of the play are academics, two literary historians and one mathematician, investigating the influence of Romanticism on landscape, the life of Lord Byron, and Chaos theory respectively. These characters squabble about what facts should be considered historically and culturally significant and have different opinions about the relevance of the identity of the person who discovers these facts. Valentine, PhD student in mathematics and son of the household, argues for a pragmatic approach: "The questions you're asking don't matter, you see. It's like arguing who got there first with the calculus. The English say Newton, the Germans say Leibnitz. But it doesn't *matter*. Personalities. What matters is the calculus. Scientific progress. Knowledge,"¹² a view to which the more egotistical Bernard takes strong objection:

Bernard: Oh, you're going to zap me with penicillin and pesticides. Spare me that and I'll spare you the

bomb and aerosols. But don't confuse progress with perfectibility. A great poet is always timely. A great philosopher is an urgent need. There's no rush for Isaac Newton. We were quite happy with Aristotle's cosmos. Personally, I preferred it. (81)

Hannah, the third academic, is fresh from the publication of a best-selling account of the life and works of Caroline Lamb, her work dismissively praised by Bernard: "I expect someone will be bringing out Caroline Lamb's oeuvre now? [...] Bravo! Simply as a document shedding reflected light on the character of Lord Byron, it's bound to be..." (27). Hannah is the one who eventually discovers that Bernard's fanciful theory about Byron fighting a duel at Sidley Park before fleeing the country is demonstrably untrue, and with this validation of her measured approach to history, the play illustrates the potential of historiographic metafiction to re-centre historical narratives around the conventionally overlooked.

These modern-day characters each represent a different approach to culture and history, and each has something different to gain from the discoveries they hope to make about the past. The present day cast of characters in *Arcadia* is considered by Underwood to be particularly characteristic of historiographic metafiction as defined by Hutcheon:

... the contemporary layers of parallel-lives plots frustrate the expected resurrection [of historical characters] and draw out the underlying conflict, which now reveals itself more explicitly as a threat to the prestige of culture. To begin with, the contemporary protagonists tend to be critics, biographers, or artists who restore old paintings, instead of primary producers of culture; they feel themselves epigones, and that fact already suggests some interruption of their predecessor's legacy. (4)

With the use of flashback sequences the audience is given the satisfaction of identifying the mistakes made by these contemporary protagonists. This has comedic effect, indicating toward Stoppard's own skepticism about the role of academia in cultural production, but more significantly, through identifying these errors implies that it is at some level possible to determine the truth about historical events. This epistemological standpoint is confirmed by Stoppard, who when interviewed early in his career stated: "I'm the kind of person who embarks on an endless leapfrog down the great moral

issues. I put a position, rebut it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation. Forever. Endlessly ... I want to believe in absolute truth: that there's always a ceiling view of a situation."¹³ While the plot of the play is clearly speculative fiction, Stoppard presents a more restrained take on historiographical metafiction in *Arcadia* than he does in *Travesties*, exploring a story from two different time periods that when viewed together suggest a coherent narrative. Here Stoppard makes a significant historical claim; that the unveiling of the truth (or specifically in this case, intellectual progress) is ultimately inevitable.

IV

Alan Bennett's *The Habit of Art* displays many of the features of historiographic metafiction previously discussed: imagined encounters between historical figures, accounts of events that span multiple distinct time periods, metafictional commentary, and the prominent use of irony. The play concerns the rehearsal of fictional metaplay *Caliban's Day* in the rehearsal rooms of London's National Theatre, the play-within-a-play structure allowing Bennett to satirise theatrical luvvies while providing a space for the exploration of questions of historical representation.

Caliban's Day concerns an imagined reunion between W. H. Auden and Benjamin Britten in 1973, narrated by Humphrey Carpenter (the author of major biographies on each of the artists) at an unspecified later date. While W. H. Auden and Benjamin Britten were both in Oxford in 1972, there is no record of them spending any time together at that time. The two had been well acquainted as young men and later worked together at the GPO Film Unit and on Britten's choral opera *Paul Bunyan*, but as they grew older their friendship soured. In imagining a reunion between historical figures that never occurred, both the motivation behind examining the lives of artists and the techniques of representation are brought into question.

The Habit of Art opens with Donald, an actor, rehearsing his monologue as Humphrey Carpenter: "I want to hear about the shortcomings of great men, their fears and their failings. I've had enough of their vision, how they altered the landscape. We stand on their shoulders to survey our lives ... So let's talk about the vanity" (3). Here we see a return to a dominant theme of Bennett's earlier work: the impulse to investigate the trivial details of the biographies of great literary figures. The return to this theme is no coincidence; these initial lines of *The Habit of Art* were originally written for his earlier play *Kafka's Dick*.¹⁴ Here, however, the

sentiment is deliberately altered, as directly after Donald's speech it is revealed by the Assistant Stage Manager that these lines have been cut from *Caliban's Day* also, and it becomes clear that the rehearsal framework allows the narrative status of any line in the play to be brought into question.

This semantic uncertainty is increased as conflict develops between the actors and the self-important (unnamed) author:

Fitz: *(to Author)* People will know, author, this is 1972?
 Author: If they have any intelligence.
 Fitz: Because you couldn't be arrested for having a
 partner in 1972.
 Author: Auden is being ironic. He means it and he doesn't
 mean it.
 Fitz: Yes, I know what irony means. (9)

While displaying the self-referential humour typical of this type of recent drama, this exchange simultaneously reminds the audience of the historical context of the internal play. Moreover, it particularly resonates with the fundamentally ironic tone of postmodernism emphasized in very similar terms by Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism*: "In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said."¹⁵

Irony is the dominant tone of *The Habit of Art*. While Auden and Britten are not subject to quite the same amount of ridicule as Kafka in *Kafka's Dick*, jokes are frequently made at the expense of the author of *Caliban's Day*, as when pieces of Auden's furniture discuss their owner in inane verse:

Bed: A creature of habit, he sleeps on his right,
 The one time he doesn't he dies in the night.
 But mine are not the sheets of that distinction.
 Here is not the place of his extinction
 Auden: *(off)* Come up.
 Door: He comes, he comes, we've had our lease.
 This inanimate colloquy must now cease.
 Clock: Not yet, you fools with your fatuous rhyme,
 I rule here. I am the time. (16)

These lines are deliberately ridiculous, their absurdity underlined by the fact that the actors playing these anthropomorphized furnishings are absent, "Both in the Chekhov matinee" (4), and the

lines must be recited by the amusingly enthusiastic stage management team.

In circumstances where the sincerity of the author is brought into question, interpretation of literary texts becomes increasingly problematic. The highlighting of this instability is typical of historiographic metafiction, and discussed within the metaplay itself by Carpenter in an aside to the audience: "Writers in particular perceive biography as a threat, something I had still to learn. Poets are particularly vulnerable to biography because readers naturally assume they are sincere, that their verses are dispatches from the heart, the self at its most honest" (24). In his review of the play, Joshua Abrams interprets the nesting doll structure of *The Habit of Art* as a device used to isolate and compare sociological issues over time: "These larger-than-life artists help us to recall that even when the country is a mess, even though England isn't cozy, art allows us to draw neat lines around the key political, moral, economic, and structural issues of the day and to interrogate past, present, and future."¹⁶ However, viewed here in the context of earlier postmodern parallel lives narratives, *The Habit of Art* seems to rather question our ability to draw neat lines around anything, especially political and moral issues.

V

Considered in light of historiographic metafiction, plays with absurd or otherwise unstable narratives can question the purpose and possibility of artistic representation. Bennett and Stoppard both experiment widely with dramatic structure, the representation of time, and narrative irony in order to explore the epistemological consequences of unlikely historical meetings and occurrences. While these stories are ostensibly about the lives of great literary figures, by manipulating dramatic narrative conventions these texts draw attention to the contributions of the socially marginalised and reveal the constructive possibilities of postmodern narrative experimentation.

NOTES

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- ¹ Alan Bennett, *The Habit of Art*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 38.
 - ² Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 1996 [1988]), 5.
 - ³ C. D. Innes, "Allegories from the Past: Stoppard's Uses of History", *Modern Drama*, 49 (2006): 225.
 - ⁴ Ted Underwood, "Stories of Parallel Lives and the Status Anxieties

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- of Contemporary Historicism”, in *Representations*, 85 (2004): 1.
- ⁵ Benjamin Bennet, *Theater as Problem: Modern Drama and its Place in Literature*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 66.
- ⁶ Tom Stoppard, *Travesties*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 46.
- ⁷ Ira B. Nadel, “Travesties: Tom Stoppard’s Joyce and Other Dadaist Fantasies, or History in a Hat”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 45 (2008): 483.
- ⁸ Brian Richardson, “Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama”, *New Literary History*, 32 (2001): 683.
- ⁹ Ian Bennett, *Kafka’s Dick: A Comedy*, (London: Samuel French, 1986), 11.
- ¹⁰ Joseph H. O’Mealy, *Alan Bennett: A Critical Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 55.
- ¹¹ Sarah Lyall, “Alan Bennett, author of ‘The History Boys’, Speaks About, of All Things, Himself,” *The New York Times*, 16 April, 2006, accessed: 6 December, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/16/theater/16lyal.html?ref=alan_bennett
- See also Charles Spencer, “Alan Bennett: shy and spiky, but ‘one of us’,” *The Telegraph*, 19 November, 2009, accessed: 6 December, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/6603572/Alan-Bennett-shy-and-spiky-but-one-of-us.html>
- ¹² Tom Stoppard, *Armadia*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2000 [1993]), 80.
- ¹³ Mel Gussow, *Conversations with Stoppard*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1995), 3.
- ¹⁴ Alan Bennett, Forward to *The Habit of Art*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), xii.
- ¹⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 2000 [1989]), 1.
- ¹⁶ Joshua Abrams, “State of the Nation New British Theatre” in *PAJ* 95, 30 (2) (2010): 16.

**“CHANGE ALL THE NAMES”:
REVISION AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE
IN SAMUEL BECKETT’S *WATT***

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Samuel Beckett’s novel *Watt*, composed between 1941 and 1945 and published in 1953, holds a singular place in his literary output.¹ It straddles Beckett’s two primary languages of composition—English and French—and marks a shift from the Joycean language and narrative games of his early work to the linguistic and philosophical austerity for which his subsequent works are famous. The novel presents the reader with a number of narrative problems and challenges, several of which fall under the umbrella of modernist literary experimentation. Yet other distinctive features of the narrative are peculiar to Beckett’s composition practices and personal circumstances, as well as his particular aesthetic orientation at this point in his career. These specific narrative challenges bear basic implications for a reading of the text, and their cumulative significance has yet to receive adequate critical recognition with respect to Beckett’s subsequent reputation and influence. Beckett’s artistic vision, as manifested specifically in this text, engages deeply with its mode of composition: it represents a profound rethinking of narrative, discarding any sense of compositional *telos* from drafts to finished, published work. Instead, a reticulated series of narrative episodes trace paths across the surface of the published text, and deep into the archive.²

Beckett's Distended Narrative

Although the reticulated processes of manuscript revision demand close critical (and editorial) attention, the distended shape of Beckett's published narrative is the primary literary and structural effect to meet the reader. At first sight, the published text is replete with the sorts of experimental gimmicks one might expect of an avant-garde novel of the 1940s, or indeed of such precursors as *Tristram Shandy* or *Don Quixote*. Whilst much of the text appears either as an uninterrupted block³ or else as dialogue between characters, a number of items break up this uniformity: footnotes are interspersed throughout (the first appearing on the second page of Part I); songs, letters, lists, and musical scores appear sporadically (including a careful scoring of a frog chorus at 137–38); and gaps in the narrator's information are indicated by question marks (32) that may occasionally occupy their own representative space on the page (85). Perhaps the most interesting type of feature, narratologically speaking, occurs towards the end of the narrative, where the story breaks down and an erstwhile invisible editorial hand indicates “(Hiatus in MS)” (238) or “(MS illegible)” (241).

This nod to the artifice of literary narrative—both the artifice of the story but also of its telling—culminates in the Addenda that follow the narrative proper. This section comprises seven pages of various narrative fragments, citations, singular phrases, musical scores, and other items, and is framed by a footnote that reads: “The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation” (247). The reader is left to ponder just how to read these items. Beyond the evident irony of the footnote, and the metatextual gesture of including Addenda items in the first place, several of these items do in fact gel with episodes in the narrative. They could be considered credible addenda, even if their use value is somewhat clouded. Other items bear tangential relations to specific themes, episodes or character studies, but include details (such as names) that do not correspond in any coherent way. Still other items seem to embody instructions for the author or narrator, such as the directive to “change all the names” (253) or the note “*Watt learned to accept* etc. Use to explain poverty of Part III” (248).

The ostensible story of the main narrative is the tale of Watt, a downtrodden “university man” (23): he travels by tram, train and foot to the place of his future employment, the house of Knott

(Part I); he enters his first year of service and discovers his deep ignorance of the people and events in the house (Part II); he falls into an even greater cloud of unknowing during his second year of employment, punctuated by memories of events and tales recounted at great length (Part III); and returns from the house to the railway, and then to “the end of the line” (Part IV). This final place is, apparently, the institutional setting that frames Part III, and is where Watt tells his tale to the scribe Sam. This schema is complicated by the narrator’s claim at the opening of Part IV: “As Watt told the beginning of his story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third, now he told its end” (215). The four parts actually follow a rough chronological order,⁴ but the narrator, at first entirely transparent but then revealed to be Sam in Part III, is given the tale in this chiasmic order. The meeting between Sam and Watt that frames Part III is last chronologically, whilst its nested tale keeps the larger linearity intact. The presence of a narrator within the framing action of Part III now places the world of Watt’s tale within a diaphanous and intransigent past tense, a change from its formerly conventional narrative past.

Beckett’s text provides a good number of obstacles before any attempt to read the novel smoothly. Sam’s description, at the beginning of Part III, of Watt’s progressively distended delivery, provides the structural centrepiece to this byzantine narrative conundrum. If one is to assume the challenge and take the text at its word, then one must decide just how far to follow the narrator’s directives. Should one read Part II first, followed by Part I, then IV, and finally III, the order we are told Sam narrates to his scribe Sam? Wouldn’t this recreate the actual experience of first person narration? An account of such a reading strategy has yet to be written, but it is perfectly feasible and might perhaps be critically illuminating. But a far more profound challenge is laid down before the reader: one that is, if not impossible, then almost unimaginable, and very likely to be futile. Sam tells of the mode of Watt’s narrative methods as he recounts the second year of his employment in the house of Knott. At first, Watt narrates back to front:

Day of most, night of part, Knott with now. Now till up, little seen so oh. Night till morning from. Heard I this, saw I this then what. Things quiet, dim. Ears, eyes, failing now also. Hush in, mist in, moved I so. (164)

Even at this early stage Sam admits to perhaps missing crucial elements of the story, or indeed its gist generally, but he does provide a rationale for his transcription:

From this it will perhaps be suspected:
 that the inversion affected, not the order of the sentences,
 but that of the words only;
 that the inversion was imperfect;
 that ellipse was frequent;
 that euphony was a preoccupation;
 that spontaneity was perhaps not absent;
 that there was perhaps more than a reversal of discourse;
 that the thought was perhaps inverted. (164)

Watt goes on to invert not the words in the phrase but the letters in the word:

Ot bro, lap rulb, krad klub. Ot murd, wol fup, wol fup. Ot niks, sorg sam, sorg sam. Ot lems, lats lems, lats lems. Ot gnut, trat stews, trat stews. (165)

Even this we may decipher should we care enough—and it is worth noting the process of inversion puts forth the name of Watt’s auditor ““sorg sam,” as well as some opportune bad language in French, “Ot murd.” A transposition of this passage might read:

To orb [ie. the eye], pall blur, dark bulk. To drum [ie. ear], low puff, low puff. To skin, gross mass, gross mass. To smell, stale smell, stale smell. To tongue, tart sweats, tart sweats.

Watt goes on to speak in several forms of inversion: of sentences in the paragraph; of words in the sentence and letters in the word; of words in the sentence and sentences in the paragraph; of letters in the word and sentences in the paragraph; and finally, of letters in the word and words in the sentence and sentences in the paragraph. Sam scribes this stage of linguistic funambulism as:

Dis yb dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap. Skin, skin, skin. Od su did ned taw? On. Taw ot klat tonk? On. Tonk ot klat taw? On. Tonk ta kool taw? On. Taw ta kool tonk? Nilb, mun, mud. Tin fo trap, yad la. Nem owt, dis yb dis. (168)

The diminishing returns of decipherment should be obvious by this point, but a curious presence of regular English words emerges in these inversions: skin, tin, taw, tonk, cool. The reader is left to ponder the significance (if any) of such an effect: skin and cool produce a happy sensorial combination, and tin, taw, and tonk all allude to percussive effects, recalling the catalogue of perceptive effects in the letter-inversion above. In the interests of completing the experiment (or gesturing in that direction), the above quotation might be rendered as the following:

Side by side, two men. All day, part of night. Dumb, numb, blind. Knott look at Watt? No. Watt look at Knott? No. Watt talk to Knott? No. Knott talk to Watt? No. What then did us do? Nix, nix, nix. Part of night, all day. Two men, side by side.

As he reports immediately following this compound inversion of speech, Sam is far from confident of having understood anything, let alone having transcribed it correctly: “Nodrap, nodrap geb, said Watt, nodrap geb” (168). Sam’s dubious faculty of hearing finally fails altogether, presumably bringing his transcription of Watt’s narration to a close.

No doubt the evident absurdity of this situation is Beckett’s joke on the reader: the veracity of the entire narrative is put into radical doubt, raising the stakes of unreliable narration to breaking point. Further, the reader cannot know precisely when Watt turns from one mode of narration to the next, nor how much of it Sam gets right and how much he fills in consciously or otherwise. Even if one wanted to undertake the Sisyphean task of organising the narrative into these shapes, there exists insufficient information to do so. And if it were possible, could it be read in any meaningful sense of the word? Would it actually mean anything but to require a complete reversal back into the form we have before us? In a novel so replete with extended, pointless digression, the utility of such an exercise of ordering and reordering reduces into an empty exercise. The thread joining reader and storyteller could hardly be more tenuous. Such conceptual games might be the sort of experimental mischief to expect of an avant-garde author. But might there be other reasons for Beckett to have taken the concept of narrative opacity to such logical extremes?

Narrative Composition of *Watt*

Sam's experience of scribing Watt's contorted language subtly reflects the profoundly estranged mode of the novel's composition. Beckett composed his text during the Second World War in heavily compromised circumstances: he had to flee Paris in 1941 once his Resistance cell (codenamed Gloria SMH) was infiltrated, and he continued composition of *Watt* in the south of France for the duration of the war. The six floridly illustrated notebooks that form the very substantial manuscript of his text contain large tracts of material that appear almost verbatim in the published narrative; other sections are clearly reworked and sedimented into shorter episodes or references; and there exists an abundance of material that bears little overt relation to the published narrative. The concluding "Addenda" fragments comprise a number of sentences or phrases with no obvious context in relation to the narrative or to other fragments. Every one of these items functions, however, as a kind of key to sometimes much larger narrative episodes in the manuscript notebooks, and therefore they do not function merely as revisions or reductions. They comprise a kind of coded shorthand by which the author is able to register and preserve, at the level of concept or image, large portions of his manuscript narrative, contained within physical documents that survived the war but, like their author, were by no means guaranteed to do so. This history is represented and preserved in the published text's complex, uneven surface structure, replete with apparent non sequiturs, cryptic allusions, and references freighted with rhetorical significance but which seem to have lost their semantic anchors.

An example will demonstrate the complex narrative weave between archive and text: namely the Addenda directive to "change all the names." As it turns out, the relationship between the two characters Hackett and Watt is a most lucid illustration of the complexities at work in the manuscript, an indication of its reticulated rather than teleological structure. The first-person narrator of the first three notebooks is transformed into the character Watt in the later notebooks and in the published text. But this earlier figure is not discarded from the later evolution of the narrative: he becomes the elderly Hackett. This character only appears in the opening scene of the published text, but occupies a critically important place, allowing us to see exactly how the Addenda functions in relation to manuscript change.

The opening scene of the novel has Mr Nixon unable to reconcile his uncanny associations of Hackett and Watt: when the latter appears at the tram stop, Nixon is at a loss to account for his

familiarity: firstly he reports to Hackett that “I cannot say I really know him [Watt],” and then “I seem to have known him all my life, but there must have been a period when I did not” (18). The punch line comes with the confession: “The curious thing is, my dear fellow, I tell you quite frankly, that when I see him, or think of him, I think of you, and that when I see you, or think of you, I think of him. I have no idea why this is so” (19). With the aid of the manuscript, the attentive reader knows precisely why Nixon finds himself in this uncanny predicament. It is because Hackett and Watt are different stages of the same fictional character, appearing together in the same place, contrary to all rules of naturalistic representation. Hackett is an archival revenant of the novel’s anti-hero, visibly dessicating before Nixon, as physically fragile as the manuscript pages from which he emerges and to which his presence subtly refers.

The co-presence of Hackett and Watt illustrates just one of very many examples of the imbrications of manuscript and published text. Another illustration provides a telescopic frame of reference for the presence of manuscripts both within the narrative layers of the published text, as well as in actuality, in the archives. Part III of the novel contains the story of Ernest Louit’s dissertation, *The Mathematical Intuition of the Visicelts*, and his defence of the expenses defrayed in the course of his (fabulated) research. It transpires that the manuscript containing months of fieldwork was left “in the gentlemen’s cloakroom of Ennis railway station,” but that Louit “was now exerting himself to the utmost, and indeed he feared greatly beyond his strength, with a view to recuperating his MS, which, qua MS, could not be of the smallest value to any person other than himself and, eventually, humanity” (173). The mention of this “MS” does not produce any spatial interruption to the text (partly because the manuscript itself never existed for Louit), but it anticipates the “MS” of Sam’s transcription mentioned in Part IV. The narrative layering of this episode is extensive: Louit reports to a university committee; he later narrates the tale to his friend Arthur, who tells Watt one day in the garden of Knott’s house; Watt reports this tale to his scribe Sam, who leaves a manuscript for a fictional editor to establish and print; these layers are all recorded in Beckett’s manuscript and transcribed into the typescript (the tale is altered from Watt’s telling to Arthur’s in the process); this is reproduced in a fair typescript for the French printer employed by the Olympia Press, the publisher who produces a faulty text upon which the American Grove and British Calder editions are based. The introduction of a manuscript in such

a nested episode has the effect of cutting across all narrative and textual orders, binding them in the same issues of textual contingency.

The substantial archive material and published narrative do not function in a teleological fashion, from draft to finished work, but are more like twin bodies exerting gravitational attraction upon each other. Their relationship cannot be fully described even by means of a genetic text model. A narrative model sensitive to the specific conditions of this text's journey into print, and to its eccentric, decentred form, should describe the relationship between narrative iterations in manuscript and in print in the fullest possible detail. This task of narrative modelling is basic to the business of interpretation, a business singularly fallow in the case of *Watt*, perhaps by virtue of this very difficulty. The textual eccentricity at issue here requires renewed thinking about text status, especially reconsideration of the desirability of a "final" text, and, conversely, the virtues of thinking about this network of material as a contingent literary event or process. It has an endpoint or series of endpoints in the historical fact of publication, bearing a certain status as bibliographical fact, but the manuscript material is not merely the classic *paralipomena* (or heterogeneous preliminary material) in relation to the published text, but instead may be better understood to constitute a kind of *Handschriftenedition*, the "sui generis edition of working drafts and manuscripts"⁵ focussed more upon the full elucidation of varied drafts than the establishment of a single (or even multiply) authoritative text.

Conclusion

Beckett's novel presents the reader with a profound challenge to conventional narrative form, and to the unity of the aesthetic object. The surface of his published narrative displays its ruptures and eccentricities, and by doing so performs a kind of quotation of the archive and its process of coming into being. Of course, large sections of that archive are implied throughout the narrative found in the published editions of *Watt*. But that implicit archive is not accessible without recourse to the real one, just as Watt's narrative is forever beyond reach, mediated through the changing membrane of Watt's own linguistic distortions, and the profoundly imperfect ear of his scribe. Here is a lesson of the value of listening, attending, should something significant otherwise pass by.

NOTES

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- ¹ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (1953; New York: Grove, 1959). All subsequent references and quotations from the text are from this edition.
- ² The *Watt* manuscript comprises six notebooks and a partial typescript, housed in the Samuel Beckett Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin.
- ³ Of the many examples to which one might turn for illustration of this demented permutative logic, set out in a monolithic block of text, Knott's movement around his room serves as well as any, noting that all thirty-six possible permutations of to-ing and fro-ing between any two of the room's objects (door, window, fire, bed) are recorded:
- Here he stood. He here sat. Here he knelt. Here he lay. Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed; from the door to the fire, from the fire to the door; from the fire to the door, from the door to the fire; from the window to the bed, from the bed to the window; from the bed to the window, from the window to the bed; [...] from the fire to the door, from the door to the bed. (204)
- ⁴ The inside cover of the third manuscript notebook reveals the scheme of events for the first time: "1 The Coming / 2 Downstairs / 3 Upstairs / 4 The Going." This scheme exists residually in the text: "Yes, nothing changed, in Mr Knott's establishment, because nothing remained, and nothing came or went, because all was a coming and a going" (131-132). The fourth notebook has in large decorated lettering, "Watt tells 4 before 3" (MS 4:138).
- ⁵ Hans Walter Gabler, "Introduction," in *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein and Gillian Borland Pierce (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 4.

**STORYTELLING AND FEMALE EATING HABITS
AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
ITALO CALVINO'S "ZIO LUPO" AND
NEERA'S "UNO SCANDALO"**

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In *Figura di vespa e leggerezza di farfalla. Le donne e il cibo nell'Italia borghese di fine Ottocento* (2003),¹ Anna Colella suggests that for a late-nineteenth century middle-class woman one of the social requirements to conform to the female identity of the time was to choose light food and be lacking in appetite (182). Furthermore, in his analysis on the evolution of the Italian ideal feminine beauty from the unification of the country to the present day, Stephen Gundle refers to Queen Margherita of Savoy (1851–1926) as the role model of the time: not only was she the embodiment of the right mixture of “beauty, elegance, morality and [...] hygiene,” but she also revealed her self-restraint by abstaining from food during public appearances,² exactly as the social rules of the period prescribed women to act.

At the end of the nineteenth century, current ideology had established a significant relationship between middle-class women's diet and their genetic nature: medical science regarded women as fragile and “emotionally unbalanced” human beings, suggesting that a controlled regimen would have reinforced their natural delicate disposition and improve their unsteady behaviour (Colella 23). A significant dichotomy emerges, however, with regards to bourgeois women and their relationship with food and domestic duties. While late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century women were encouraged to restrain their appetites in order to control their “dangerous” feminine nature, at the same time they were required to fulfill their natural role of mothers and nourish their families (Colella 142–43). As Joan Jacobs Brumberg notes in a discussion on Victorian bourgeoisie, female eating habits and the rise of

anorexia nervosa, on the one hand middle-class women spent many hours a day dealing with household and meals' management, but on the other hand, they were required to limit their food intake.³ This reflects the Italian cultural expectations of the same period described by Colella. In particular, meat was considered a masculine nourishment (Brumberg 176–78), while light, sweet and “pure” food was associated with women (Colella 23 and 182). For a late nineteenth century middle-class lady, eating was not only a matter of nutrition but also a social display of politeness, graciousness and self-restraint, as well as her social status.⁴ More importantly, in Brumberg's words, “[a]ppetite [...] was a barometer of a woman's moral state” (182).

In Western culture, the fascinating relationship between women and food goes as far back as the biblical episode of Eve and the apple. In this first meeting between a woman and food we can already identify its metaphorical meaning, as indeed Eve did not eat the apple to satisfy a primary need but because she was tempted. Many scholars in several disciplines have explored this theme and the consequences of Eve's gesture.⁵ In *Donne e cibo: una relazione nella storia* (2003), Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli and Fiorezza Tarozzi start their analysis with a discussion of the tale narrated in *Genesis*.⁶ As they point out in the introduction, gluttony has been regarded as the first sin from which every other wickedness arose, recalling the Catholic relationship between eating “abstinentia” and sexual “continentia” (Muzzarelli and Tarozzi VIII). In this sense, gluttony is not only the act of self-indulgence, but it also symbolises an excessive desire of something else; for example, as I shall argue in this article, it can be linked excessive hedonism. As a result, Catholic ideology, supported by patriarchal society, has perceived women as potential “gluttonous sinners” for a long time and it has influenced female eating habits by suggesting what they should eat and what they should not in order to conform to the ideal femininity of any given time. As Muzzarelli and Lucia Re suggest, women have been associated with not eating and with restraint for centuries. Remarkably, at the same time they have been put in charge of the kitchen.⁷ For instance, Tarozzi suggests that cooking is a duty for women, whilst food preparation for men is a matter of art. Indeed, women have been perceived as the essential cooks for the family but not as chefs, a title often reserved only to men (Muzzarelli and Tarozzi 134). The relationship between women and food gains such importance that as a result we could state that “la donna è cibo [woman is food]” (Muzzarelli and Re 13).

As we have seen, at the turn of the twentieth century Italian women's eating habits were influenced by different social factors which we could summarise mainly in the following three points: the new values adopted by the bourgeoisie, who tried to differentiate their lifestyle from the lower class; the pressure to conform to "correct" feminine behaviour, imposed by Catholic and patriarchal ideologies; and the medical discourse on women's unbalanced nature. The bourgeoisie played a fundamental role in the development of the aforementioned factors by identifying women as weak human beings. However, by classifying women as potential "gluttonous sinners" Catholic ideology does not distinguish them by social class and attributes gender-specific eating habits to every strata of society. As my research suggests, in the narrative discourse of early twentieth century, women who lacked self-restraint in eating were perceived and portrayed as individuals who should be corrected in both middle- and lower-class environments. Given this premise, I would like to recall the delicate bourgeois protagonists of *Teresa* (1886) and *L'indomani* (1889) by Neera (1846–1918),⁸ the instable "mad woman in the attic"⁹ *Fosca* (1869) by Iginio Ugo Tarchetti (1839–1869),¹⁰ and Pina, the "famished" protagonist of the *novella* "La lupa" (1880) by Giovanni Verga (1840–1922).¹¹ On the one hand, alternative female shapes were idealized as perfect in the collective imaginary that related to different social classes, but on the other hand the discourse on the imperfect nature of women developed by Catholic ideology and patriarchal society which was also supported by the medical sciences affected every woman regardless of her social status, as narrative fiction of the same time suggests.¹²

My analysis focuses on the exemplary stories of two young sinners who are punished for their lack of self-restraint in both popular and bourgeois contexts: "Zio Lupo [Uncle Wolf],"¹³ a folktale adapted by Italo Calvino (1923–1985) in 1956, and "Uno scandalo [A Scandal]" (1912),¹⁴ a *novella* by Neera. In particular, my analysis focus on the influence of fictional discourse in the construction of female eating habits at the turn of the twentieth century and in exploring how traditional storytelling of the same period advised women on how to behave. I also aim to discuss how late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction encouraged women to adopt "healthy" eating habits by narrating episodes of gluttony, sexuality and punishment.

"Zio Lupo" was translated from the dialect of Romagna into Italian and retold by Calvino in 1956. A written version of the folktale, which Calvino used as a primary text, had already been

published in the mid-1920s by Paolo Toschi. However, Calvino reveals that different oral versions were widespread throughout North and Central Italy.¹⁵ Most of the tales used by Calvino as primary texts to create his book of *Fiabe Italiane* [Italian Folktales] are from the second half of the nineteenth century, although the original oral versions of the tales could have been even older. My research is not interested in rewriting the history of the tale and its folkloristic development but in the moral messages such stories tried to convey at the beginning of the twentieth century, the time when they were most widespread.

“Zio Lupo” narrates the story of a “greedy little child” who is unable and unwilling to knit (152). While her teacher and classmates are working on their knitting, she falls asleep. When she wakes up, her friends have already eaten all the pancakes the teacher had promised them upon completion of their work. The child walks back from school very sad and her mother decides to cook her some pancakes to make her happy. However, the family is very poor and do not even own a pan to fry the pancakes in. They borrow the pan from their “Zio Lupo” who in return wants “[...] pancakes, together with a round loaf of bread and a bottle of wine” (153). After having made the pancakes, the child was sent back to “Zio Lupo” with the presents, but during the journey she cannot control herself and she eats everything, exactly as a present-day compulsive eater would do: “Oh, what a wonderful smell! I think I’ll try just one” (153). She carries on eating and eats up all the pancakes and the bread accompanied by the wine. After having realized what she has done, the young girl decides to put some “donkey manure” in the pan, some “dirty water” in the bottle and to replace the bread with some stonemason’s lime. As soon as the wolf tastes the food, he swears revenge, and that night he goes to the child’s house and eats her. The story ends with an explicit moral message: “So Uncle Wolf always eats greedy little girls” (154).

I would like to highlight that the girl is not only punished for her lack of self-restraint but also for her lack of ideal feminine attitudes. At the turn of the twentieth century, knitting was still considered a female occupation *par excellence*, but, as we have seen, at school the child is unable to complete her work. For the immoral lack of self-control and feminine characteristics the exemplary punishment suggests to the little gluttons who will hear the tale a clear explanation of the behaviour they should adopt to avoid the same penalty; indeed, the story gives advice both on ideal feminine occupations and eating habits.¹⁶ Like a young Eve, the “greedy little child” does not resist the temptation and eats all the food and wine

set aside for the wolf. Eve was sent away from Eden while the young glutton is devoured by the wolf. Furthermore, as we have seen “Zio Lupo” comes from the popular tradition, therefore the pedagogic message spread by the folktale acquires further importance for my analysis; as it suggests that even outside the middle-class context gluttony is something women are particularly and dangerously susceptible to, from their childhood onwards.

Moving from a traditional popular context to a bourgeois one, the *novella* “Uno scandalo” offers a similar moral message. It is the story of a young girl who falls in love with a man she sees portrayed in an image. Dreaming of being his girlfriend, Emma Varisco writes him a letter, but her classmates see it and tell their teacher who decides to discuss the episode with the principal. The principal, in turn, considers the teenager’s behaviour unacceptable. Full of shame, Emma is unable to explain that her love is platonic and imaginary rather than real. However, the priest, Don Celso, recognises in the image a Polish war hero and unravels the mystery for the teaching staff: Emma does not have any secret love tryst, she just fell in love with an image won in a game; then, liking what she saw, pretended to be the girlfriend of the young man pictured in it. Despite the misunderstanding, the principal decides to punish the girl in any case: eight days of only water and bread should be enough to stop her making the same mistake again.

In this short story a strong relationship is established between food and sexuality. Indeed, the punishment to teach the girl the correct behaviour she should follow involves (and in fact takes away) food. The right food, bread and water, is used to purify the soul of someone who has committed a sin of love and excessive desire. The relationship between sexual desire and desire for food is perfectly exemplified in this simple version of the subject. Over the centuries, fasting became a widely used method to purify sins, particularly in medieval times. In fact, it is still accepted in Catholic practice to refuse some food as a sign of penitence. Similar to this is also the classic tradition of the so called “fioretto”: children, teenagers and even adults promise God not to eat a particular “gluttonous” food for some time in order to obtain a grace in return. As we have seen, in the late nineteenth century delicate food was believed to regulate women’s behaviour: by only having bread and water for one week, Emma ought to be able to understand the gravity of the committed sin, mitigate her desire and purify herself. The influence of Catholic ideology on women’s habits occupies a prominent place in the story. As soon as the principal finds out about “the scandal,” she says:

Oh che direbbero mai le «Orsoline»! [...] Se lo sapessero! Esse che accusano il mio educando di mancanza di religione! Sarebbe un discredito senza esempi. (115)

[Oh what would the nuns say! [...] If they only knew it! They accuse my school of lacking religion! It would be a disgrace, without a doubt.]¹⁷

The principal is very worried about what the nuns could think about her school, and she is concerned that they might see it as an immoral place. In another scene, Don Celso notes also Emma's lack of female attitudes: "lo capisci anche tu, nevvvero, di aver fatto cosa contraria alla modestia, alla verecondia, che sono le più belle doti di una fanciulla? [You understand that you have acted without modesty and restraint, which are the most beautiful characteristics of a young woman, don't you?]" (119).¹⁸ As we have seen in "Zio Lupo", the lack of feminine attitudes and the lack of self-restraint are brought together to show young women how not to behave. The story does not communicate a pedagogic message as direct as the one we have seen in Calvino's folktale, but the punishment is exemplary. The sin is not committed but even the thought of a possible love story at a very young age is considered scandalous. In this narrative context, the message of the *novella* warns teenagers of the dangers of sexual desire, encouraging a path of self-restraint and self-control in order to become perfect bourgeois women.

In "Zio Lupo" and "Uno scandalo," storytelling is not only the act of portraying the social landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century in Italy, but it is also a way of controlling it. While the young protagonist of "Zio Lupo" is the prototype of the "gluttonous sinner" criticized by the Catholic ideology and the patriarchal society of the time, Emma Varisco, who is unable to moderate her sexual desire, conforms to the stereotype of the late nineteenth-century woman as an "unstable human being" interpreted by the medical discourse. By presenting erring models of femininity as examples which should not be imitated in order to become perfect ladies in both popular and bourgeois contexts, the two stories seek to persuade women to adopt ideal feminine behaviours. The micro storytelling of popular tales and more sophisticated literary fiction illustrates the pressure on Italian women to conform to strict notions of how they might express their appetite, both physical and emotional, at the turn of the twentieth century.

NOTES

- ¹ Anna Colella, *Figura di vespa e leggerezza di farfalle. Le donne e il cibo nell'Italia Borghese di fine Ottocento* (Florence: Giunti, 2003).
- ² Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima. Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 39.
- ³ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls. The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 178–79.
- ⁴ According to Brumberg, “Bourgeois society generated anxieties about food and eating—especially among women. Where food was plentiful and domesticity venerated, eating became a highly charged emotional and social undertaking. Displays of appetite were particularly difficult for young women who understood appetite to be both a sign of sexuality and an indication of lack of self-restraint. Eating was important because food was an analogue of the self” (178). Brumberg points out that eating disorders flourished in the nineteenth century and the Victorian social context contributed in their development by giving to female eating habits a variety of metaphorical meanings. In this article I have chosen to focus only on narrative images of food as moral advice in the construction of Italian female identity at the turn of the twentieth century, but the discussion could lead to further research on the relationship between restricted female eating habits and eating disorder in the narrative discourses of other European countries. For a view of the relationship between women and food and the fictional portrayal of eating disorder in English and French literature, see Anna Krugovoy Silver’s *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (2002) and Patricia McEachern’s *Deprivation and Power: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (1998). They investigate the theme of anorexia, women’s troubled relationship with food and body in well-known novels such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853) and *Shirley* (1849) and Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856). See also Anna Krugovoy Silver *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Patricia McEachern, *Deprivation and Power: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa in Nineteenth Century French Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998).
- ⁵ See for example *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing* (2003), edited by Tamara Heller and Patricia Moran, who discuss the relationship between women and food from the suffragettes’ protest to present-day fictions such as *Como agua para chocolate: novela de entregas mensuales, con recetas, amores y remedios caseros* (1989) by Laura Esquivel. They start their analysis with Hélène Cixous’s interpretation of Eve and the apple in “Extreme Fidelity” (1988): “The first fable of our first book

is a fable in which what is at stake is the relationship to the law. There are two principal elements, two main puppets: the word of the Law or the discourse of God and the Apple. [...] God says if you taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge, you will die. [...] And what we are told is that knowledge might begin with the mouth, with the discovery of the taste of something: knowledge and taste together. [...] This story tells us that the genesis of woman goes through the mouth, through a certain oral pleasure, and through a non-fear of the inside". *Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing*, ed. Tamara Heller e Patricia Moran (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1-4. Susan Sellers, "Extreme Fidelity", in *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (with a preface by Hélène Cixous and foreword by Jacques Derrida), ed. Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994), 133. See also McEachern, who reads Eve's gesture as an act of "self-empowerment" which the author metaphorically compares to the protagonists of the nineteenth century French Literature: "Eve ate and thereby original sin committed. The first woman was the original and the quintessential disorderly eater [...]" (McEachern 1). On the same subject, Helena Michie suggests that "it is probably not a coincidence that most of the examples of 'unsafe' behavior which lead to this domesticated version of the Fall revolve around fruit." See Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figure and Women's Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1987), 19.

⁶ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli and Fiorenza Tarozzi, *Donne e cibo: una relazione nella storia* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), 1-9.

⁷ *Il cibo e le donne nella cultura e nella storia. Prospettive interdisciplinari*, ed. Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli and Lucia Re (Bologna: Clueb, 2005), 11-12.

⁸ As I note in my on-going PhD thesis, in *Teresa* and *L'indomani* for the young protagonists of Neera's narrative production, food is synonymous of something else: by eating or starving they discharge their deepest emotions, reject the repressive social role they inhabit and purify their sins in a complex social background that promoted a fragile ideal femininity. Neera, *Teresa* (Lecco: Periplo Edizioni, 1995); *L'indomani* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 1981).

⁹ I use the expression made famous by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁰ Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, *Fosca* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971).

¹¹ Giovanni Verga, ed. Francesco Spera with an introduction by Vincenzo Consolo, "La lupa," in *Novelle* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002), 152-55.

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- ¹² On the relationship between body shape and self-control, McEachern points out that *Nana* (1880), the eponymous protagonist of Émile Zola's novel, with her curvaceous body reminds us of her job as a prostitute; she is the opposite of the delicate *Madame Gervaisais* (1869) by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt (McEachern 81–82). The dark features of Pina as well as the description of her lips and breast are opposite to the innocent model of Victorian “angel of the house.” The female body shape communicates the sexual behaviour of the protagonists labeling the fat Nana and the “famished” Pina as “impure women.”
- ¹³ Italo Calvino, “Zio Lupo,” in *Fiabe Italiane, raccolte dalla tradizione popolare durante gli ultimi cento anni e trascritte in lingua dai vari dialetti da Italo Calvino* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1956), 209–11. In this article I will use the English translation by George Martin. See Italo Calvino (translated by George Martin), “Uncle Wolf,” in *Italian Folktales, Selected and Retold by Italo Calvino* (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 152–54.
- ¹⁴ Neera, “Uno scandalo,” in *La sottana del diavolo* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1912), 110–21. Digitalized version of the text on the website of the Biblioteca Nazionale Brainese, project Di.Re <http://www.braidense.it/dire/sottana/sottana.html> (10/01/2011).
- ¹⁵ Calvino (translated by George Martin), “Notes,” in *Italian Folktales*, 715–57 (725–26).
- ¹⁶ Analysing children's literature in the Victorian context, Silver suggests that “[t]he Victorian culture of anorexia is already apparent in children's literature that associates eating, especially for girls, with traits such as greed, lust, and aggression. In story after story, girls are taught that they must control their appetites and, by implication, their desires and bodies in order to be “good”. [...] Usually, girls who eat a lot, and particularly girls who eat in secret, are punished for their crime. [...] Children's stories and poems frequently have a laugh at the expense of the boy who steals a plum tart, or who eats like a glutton” (Silver 54–56).
- ¹⁷ My translation.
- ¹⁸ My translation.

**STORY-TELLING AND MEMORY
IN THE VIOLENCE OF TIME:
MARTÍN VILLAR'S PERSONAL ATONEMENT
AND COLLECTIVE POLITICAL ACT**

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In 1991, Miguel Gutiérrez, a Peruvian writer whose reputation was only known within the academic circle of Peru, published *The Violence of Time*.¹ This epic novel, which extends over 1,000 pages to narrate the five-generation saga of the Villar clan, instantly placed Gutiérrez among the top Peruvian novelists, along with internationally recognized writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa and Alfredo Bryce Echenique.²

The main plot of the novel revolves around the saga of the Villar clan, whose founder—Miguel Francisco Villar, soldier and deserter of the Royal Spanish Army, owner and master of the indigenous woman, Sacramento Chira—gives birth to the Villar family, a lineage of mixed or *mestizo* blood. The last descendant of this bloodline and also the main protagonist, Martín Villar, plays the role of a writer and storyteller who, out of necessity, was compelled to give an account of the saga of the clan through the written word. Consequently, the process and praxis of writing itself is dramatized, so the novel becomes the literary artifact that Martín Villar produces.³

What I propose to show in this essay is how *The Violence of Time* dramatizes the way in which memory is transmitted through several generations: the novel articulates a segment of Peruvian history that has been forgotten or suppressed. As such, the matter of *mestizaje* (blood mixing) as a historical phenomenon is depicted as a violent intrusion from the past, a sort of belated traumatic memory.

Significantly, the act of remembering and storytelling through writing is, for the young protagonist, a personal project as well as a collective one filled with political implications.

It would be helpful to make a short digression at this point in order to clarify the notion of *mestizaje*. Throughout Peruvian history since the days of the Conquest, the interlacing between the European blood and the indigenous did not produce a harmonious mix; rather, the phenomenon of *mestizaje*—due to the particular social dynamics of the colonial system—gave way to the marginalisation of the *mestizo* as well as the indigenous and blacks. Early in the twentieth century, the phenomenon of *mestizaje* invariably unravelled a highly controversial dialogue in Peru's cultural debate. There are two lines of thought when it comes to providing an interpretation of *mestizaje*: on the one hand, there is the romantic and conservative discourse from one of Peru's foremost historian, José de la Riva Agüero, whose vision of *mestizaje* is grounded on the harmonious marriage between the two cultures, out of which all the contradictions between the blood of the white conquistador and that of the indigenous people are resolved.⁴ The *mestizo*, therefore, becomes the symbol for Peruvian society. On the other hand, the opposing line of thought could be summed up in Luis Varcárcel's book, *Storm in the Andes*. Varcárcel believes that the *mestizo* did not inherit the ancestral virtues of his/her predecessors; instead, the *mestizo* is depicted as an inferior and inefficient being who is responsible for bringing backwardness, thus impeding the modernisation of Latin American society.⁵ In any case, both Riva de Agüero and Varcárcel's perception of *mestizaje* are crucial elements necessary to the understanding of Peru's social and cultural landscape.

Returning to *The Violence of Time*, the recreation of Martín's long familial history becomes a daunting task for the young writer since evidence to compose such history is either fragmented or scarce. In order to tell his story, Martín resorts to the written tradition as well as the oral. His story is mainly comprised of memories from his childhood, of the tales of the blind Orejuela, of anecdotes from the mason don Manuel Farfán, of the spoken tales of don Juan Evangelista Chanduví, and of the manuscript that he inherited from his father. Thus, the material with which he reconstructs his ancestor's history provides an exploration into the notion of memory, which is one of the central themes in *The Violence of Time*. Interestingly enough, there is an interplay between the written language and the spoken one present in Gutiérrez's text. Walter Ong, one of the foremost theorists of oral language, affirms that

the spoken language is the predecessor of the written one since the latter cannot exist without the former. According to Ong, there is a primary oral language and a secondary one. The primary orality is the kind of communication that is found in societies that lack written language completely. Secondary orality, on the other hand, is the kind of communication that takes place in cultures that know and depend on written language for its communication. In Gutiérrez's novel, these two types of orality are present: The tales of the blind Orejuela provide evidence that they come from a source of primary orality; while the tales of don Juan Evangelista Chanduví—known also as the guardian of the Book of the Community—point towards a secondary orality since the Book is based on primary orality.⁶

What is memory? And how is memory conceived in Gutiérrez's text? In Milan Kundera's novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Mirek, the main protagonist, says the following words: "... the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."⁷ This phrase suggests that the struggle for the survival of memory is, after all, a political contest; it is a fight against those who are in control of historical interpretation through the manipulation of collective memory and also against those who determine the collective identity of a nation. Likewise, one can say that if a literary work is to survive the struggle against the impositions and the manipulations of hegemonic power, it is necessary to take into account the notion that the written word cannot take the place of memory, in the same way that memory cannot recreate the past exactly as it happened. In other words, the political struggle for the survival of memory should not be conceived as a contention for the accuracy and truthfulness of its events, but rather for the function that it carries and the importance it has on the present and future. In the words of Paul de Man: "The power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation or a feeling that actually existed, but it is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented towards the future of its elaboration."⁸

For Martín Villar, however, neither the oral tradition nor the written one is sufficient for him to gain access into the past. There is another aspect or kind of memory in *The Violence of Time* that takes the reader into the reality of the fantastic. To access such memory, Martín seeks don Asunción Juarez, who in his cabin offers Martín the potion of San Pedro, a drink extracted from a cactus plant that possesses magical properties. After consuming the magical potion, Martín sees the following scene:

Insidious and reaffirming images appeared before my eyes: Miguel Francisco Villar deserting the royalist troops just before the Battle of Ayacucho, José Ignacio sinking his spur into his black stallion and with a blood-soaked sable prepared to give chase to the retreating Chilean troops, my grandfather Cruz Villar hung and being whipped by a Chilean officer in the plaza of Congará.⁹

Under an altered state of consciousness induced by the magical concoction, Martín is able to enter into a different plane of reality and thus have access to certain images and lost memories, all of which were buried by the passage of time and not preserved either in written or oral form. It is worthwhile to quote a short phrase spoken by Martín, "... effectively, the magical potion of San Pedro showed me the truthfulness of the dreadful rumors of the people" (Gutiérrez, *LVT* I 298). From these words, it is possible to infer that these memories were not altered either by the written word or by speech. It is even possible to conjecture further: to a certain extent, these memories seem to remain in physical space; they are preserved in objects and in the land itself. Thus, the magical potion of the San Pedro cactus can be seen as a vehicle by which Martín can access his ancestral wisdom.

The Violence of Time clearly suggests that memory can be evoked or resuscitated by means of an involuntary act, a feature that can be traced to Marcel Proust's text *In Search of Lost Time* or *Remembrance of Things Past*. In a well-known passage of the French writer's novel, a series of spontaneous memories triggered by the madeleine are depicted.¹⁰ This particular scene in the French text illustrates an instance of involuntary recall, which brings forth a contrast between involuntary and voluntary memory. The latter defines memory as those remembrances evoked by means of a conscious effort to recall certain events, people, or places. The narrator of *In Search of Lost Time* suggests that involuntary memories can only offer us a limited vision of what has happened since they cannot apprehend the essence of the past. In Proust's text, the function of involuntary memory can be interpreted as a path by which one can gain access to another dimension of the past that is not possible by way of the conscious and rational mind. This explains the importance that Gutiérrez gives to the role of don Asunción Juarez. The magical potion of San Pedro is precisely the path by which the novel as well as its main protagonist explores the different dimensions of memory.

The insistence on the theme of memory—above all the restitution of an ancestral past through fragmented memories—gives the novel a highly visual dimension. This also explains the preponderance of and emphasis given to images of photographic character. But even more important, the visual images suggests that memory can be transmitted from one generation to another without requiring one to be an eye-witness nor having have lived the experience of a certain past event.

All of the visions seen by Martín under the influence of the magical potion reveal that memory has many different dimensions. For one, it's defined in Gutiérrez's text as the recording or imprinting of a painful past in the individual and collective mind. Memory, as such, acquires then an almost tangible and even visible reality, being that it operates as physical evidence of the atrocities of the past that an individual or community can experience.

It is evident that the recuperation of ancestral memory that is presented in *The Violence of Time* suggests that human beings are subjected to the memory imprints of experiences from previous generations. From a psychoanalytic perspective, one can argue that memory has a collective and transgenerational dimension; that is, memory does not belong to a single individual. Rather, it crosses generational boundaries, which allows an individual to connect with his or her past. The latter can be reinforced by the following quotation:

I began to understand the lesson that the San Pedro potion had endeavored to teach me: that one is never oneself, nor has the age that one is: I was (I am) Miguel Villar, I am still my great-grandfather Cruz Villar, I, like Inocencio Villar, will continue forever tied to the vichayo tree listening to the hermetic language of the golden cactus, I was the relentless, the enigmatic Santos Villar, and I was the forlorn outlaw Isidoro Villar and all of the Villar brothers who ran away from the plague and those who afterwards went in search for Primorosa Villar and ended up working as peons in Guayaquil and the dreadful Panama (Gutiérrez, *LVTI* 415).

The transgenerational dimension of memory depicted in *The Violence of Time* is not only limited to having access to the memories and experiences of the past by an individual, but it also articulates an internal language that is unique to memory among its characters. As we can see from the previous quote, individual memory intersects with a collective memory of a group of people and of a culture; hence, Martín Villar carries with him the symbolic burden

of forgotten or suppressed history of his people. All of this suggests that memory resides outside or independently of any individual consciousness; it is a sort of intra-psychic tomb, which in turn suggests—in psychoanalytic term—the return of the repressed. According to Freud, complex mental images, ideas, feelings, beliefs, and memories oftentimes are unconscious to the extent that they are not present in the mind; however, these can be brought to the surface by means of certain procedures such as hypnosis. Interestingly, it turns out that at times it is not possible to activate these images or memories in the conscious mind, as there is a kind of resistance present. In such case, one can assume that there is an active force in the mind that impedes the activation of these memories, thus making them repressed.¹¹ All in all, memory is not so much a thing that an individual possess; it is rather that which possesses and haunts the individual. Hence, Congará—Martín's birthplace, to which he returns in order to undertake the writing of the saga of the Villar clan—becomes a kind of archeological site for the young story-teller to find the necessary remains out of which he needs to reconstruct his world and his story.¹²

The way in which *The Violence of Time* portrays the collective and transgenerational dimension of memory is not just merely an incursion into the literary realm of the fantastic or that of magical-realism. More essential still, its function is to depict the manner in which the past still weights upon the present. In relation to this theme, Cathy Caruth in her book, *Unclaimed Experience*, has made an important and valuable contribution to the dialogue concerning traumatic experiences and memory. Caruth develops her concept of memory based on a model in which the modern human subject and history are tied together by a relation of complicity. In Caruth's own words: "... history, like trauma, is never simply one's own [...] history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma."¹³ Furthermore, she believes that the human subject in relation to its historical crisis is defined by complex ties to a past that was not necessarily experienced directly nor internalized completely. As such, the human subject is always a being in constant becoming, an incomplete being always projecting itself towards the future.¹⁴

The saga of the Villar clan, however, is not only an extended metaphor for a fragmented and rebellious Peru,¹⁵ but it is also the story of the trials and tribulations and the existential quest of the young protagonist Martín Villar. It is precisely the latter that the story acquires its autobiographical trait; after all, it is a dramatic

episode in Martín's formative years. The young protagonist confesses: "... shortly after my grandfather's death, I went to another town to live, far away from this world. Then it began in me a process of moral deprivation that led me to repudiate my paternal lineage" (Gutiérrez, *LVT* II 424). Martín's words clearly deal with a rite of passage as well as a decisive event within the saga of the Villar clan: the death of Martín's paternal grandfather, Santos Villar, brings about an awareness of his so called 'moral deprivation'. What we have here equates to a loss of innocence and the negation of his bloodline; the latter points towards a mechanism of repudiation that has its roots in shame and disgrace. In any case, Martín's loss of innocence and his need to purge his aggrieved lineage take on an essential role in his personal story: both of them join together in order to formalize Martín's rite of passage; it is as such that *The Violence of Time* possesses characteristics of the Bildungsroman or the coming of age novel. It is worthwhile to point out that at the core of Peruvian fiction there has always been both a desire and a necessity to depict the complex relationship between the human subject and the society in which it lives. This explains why the Bildungsroman—which explores the human being's necessity to find its place in a society plagued by conflicts—is the novelistic genre towards which the Peruvian novels tend to gravitate. So it is not by mere chance that the Bildungsroman is found within the aesthetic composition of *The Violence of Time*.

The inherited sin of the Villar family is not passed down to only one generation; rather, as we have seen already, it is transgenerational in nature. As the last descendant of the Villar clan, Martín inherits Sisyphus' stone. In the protagonist's own words: "I understood that the offences and wounds received by the founders of my bloodline would remain open and like a hemorrhage, it would bleed me to death while I lived" (Gutiérrez, *LVT* I 417). Also, it is worth pointing out that the moment Martín negates his paternal lineage, rancor and hatred sets in motion a mechanism whereby he will question his identity, thus creating in him a sense of existential abandonment and anguish. In the words of the omniscience narrator: [...] facing a world that was no longer his, he felt like a stranger while that distant feeling of orphan hood was gnawing on him, that same bitter and abysmal orphan hood that had taken him to visit the primordial home (Gutiérrez, *LVT* I 272).

For Martín to transform his existential crisis into a meaningful experience, it will be imperative for him to establish a nexus with his paternal bloodline through a purgative process. Interestingly, his

identification and his integration into his *mestizo* lineage and the indigenous community involve the art of writing and storytelling. It is through it that the protagonist could restore his fractured identity, and thus reintegrate with his people so that his life would be meaningful. What we are dealing with here is a kind of personal redemption through art as well as a purging of a sinful past that still weight upon the present. A crucial claim in the culture of redemption holds that subjecting oneself to certain types of artistic experience can cure or repair traumatic experiences. Leo Bersani in his book *The Culture of Redemption* says the following:

The catastrophes of history matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art, and art itself gets reduced to a kind of superior patching function, is enslaved to those very materials to which it presumably imparts value [...] The redemptive aesthetic asks us to consider art as a correction of life.¹⁶

It is not coincidental that Martín, being the last descendant of the Villar family, is responsible to put an end to the bloodline. Nevertheless, could Martín Villar become the founder of a new bloodline or even a new future? The answer is negative. Since Martín decides not to have children with his lover—Zaira Chira, what he does in effect is to break the generational continuity. However, the discontinuation does not point towards a rejection of his family bloodline and neither does it indicate that his labour is in vain.¹⁷ On the contrary, Martín's work becomes a necessary individual task performed for his own good as well as a politically collective act: the former has to do with a the forging of a personal identity and the atonement of an aggrieved family lineage to which he belongs, and the latter has more to do with a collective political act. What Martín does in telling the story of his family is essentially to uncover the hegemonic interpretation or the official history of *mestizaje* as well as the popular or subaltern version of it. In doing so, Martín reclaims an alternative history—revisionist in nature—for the popular mass.

Both projects then—the personal and the collective—are intrinsically connected: Martín's existential atonement will allow him to insert himself into his paternal lineage with its own historical memory, hence, his yearning to integrate and to live within a shared community, because it is the only way in which he can forge his own personal identity. But more important, it is Martín's vision and the awareness of his political act that clearly points towards a moral

and ethical stance, which allows him to project himself into the future. In the words of the omniscience narrator:

But it was the radical test of his brief experience of life that allowed him to understand and to accept that more important than the passions and the secret fantasies of man, was his relationship and attitude towards the communal and his participation in political conflicts, out of which history is woven (Gutiérrez, *LVTI* 71).

That the young *mestizo* displays this sort of political commitment is very revealing, precisely because it accentuates the political and ideological dimension of the text. The previous quote reveals an emphatic moral and ethical conduct: that all human beings are responsible for the betterment and the creation of a just society through action; hence, the constant emphasis on violence, revolution and social change found in the novel. As a matter of fact, the notion of revolution becomes extremely important in Gutiérrez's text, insofar as "... the individual is conscious of his participation in the making of history."¹⁸ What is displayed here is a vision of modern historical consciousness that could not have manifested had it not been for the separation of Church and State (or faith and political praxis) as pointed out by Hanna Arendt in her book *Between Past and Future*: "The separation of religion and politics meant that no matter what an individual might believe as a member of a church, as a citizen he acted and behaved on the assumption of human mortality."¹⁹ This is precisely what Gutiérrez attempts to accentuate in his novel: what gives merit and meaning to human action—despite the religious beliefs of the individual, which is relegated to the purely private and personal sphere—is precisely the acute awareness of human mortality, of the individual's limited and precarious existence on earth. Hence, history, social and political reality is constructed solely through human action and intervention.

The other aspect of Martín's action as collective and political refers to the historical contextualization of the Villar saga, which Martín recounts through his narrative. The story that is presented in the novel is not, by any means, a representation of Peru's hegemonic or romanticized version of *mestizaje*—that harmonious mix of European blood with the indigenous. Rather, it is the shameful story of the plebian class that historiography has covered. As such, it is necessary to point out the polemical vision that *The Violence of Time* presents: the founding of the Villar lineage by

Miguel Francisco Villar, subverts and displaces the romantic allegory of *mestizaje* thus giving way to a dissident voice. Hence, Gutiérrez's novel was written with the intent to inscribe in the Peruvian cultural landscape a polemical version of *mestizaje*. "It was not merely a literary matter; it was not about telling a story that was more or less cruel and uncanny; rather, it was about the claim and the recovery of a past, about bringing to the forefront the offence, the wound, and the disgrace that constituted the emblem, the indelible honour of the Villar family" (Gutiérrez, *LVT* II 345). The story that Martín writes about his lineage becomes an artefact of historical revision, which in turn could be read as an act that is collective in nature and also as an act of resistance to the impositions of cultural hegemony.²⁰ In any case, it is important to point out that the novel does not deal with the theme of illegitimacy as an individual or isolated case—the social stigma that Cruz Villar or Santos Villar carries as *mestizo* or illegitimate offspring—but rather as an ontological condition.

Perhaps we should ask now: has the protagonist crossed the threshold? Was he able to overcome the suffering and the trauma of his aggrieved paternal lineage and the fracture of his cultural identity? Has he been able to reconcile the past so as to gain access to a new phase in which communication and shared existence is possible? Towards the end of the novel, the message seems to be rather vague and disconcerting, given that the ending could be read as Martín's failed attempt in finding his place in the world. In the protagonist's own words: "I am not so foolish as to believe that I am fully integrated into this community, but I have been accepted as a being not alien to their customs and daily lives" (Gutiérrez, *LVT* II 433). From this quote we can conclude that the *mestizo* condition is far from being a harmonious one. In effect, the *mestizo* will always be the 'other'.

However, the last section of the novel, which is an epilogue, is also a kind of digression that is based on one of the novel's character's book, entitled *Physical Geography of the Region of Piura*. In the epilogue of *The Violence of Time*, the world that is depicted is not only one that is devoid of the preoccupations of the modern world, but also the physical presence of Martín Villar is completely displaced. His existence in the epilogue is limited only by the narrator's commentary of him. In addition, the narrative style of this last section configures, in its own way, the young writer's state of mind: the existential anguish that Martín experienced previously does not necessarily leads to a state of plenitude and lucidity; but rather, to a reconciliation with oneself characterized by a stoic

acceptance in the discovery of his true vocation as a writer, as a storyteller. In the words of the omniscience narrator: “And at last, after learning to respect so much the imperatives of life as well as those of art—to the wounds and to the verbal excitement—the river had forged its course” (Gutiérrez, *LVT* I 503). Thus, the novel has to be read as Martín Villar’s trial and tribulations. Although *The Violence of Time* does not propose a solution to the dilemma of *mestizaje*, in the text, however, there is definitely a claim or demand to narrate an alternative story or history: “He (Martín) has succeeded to tell the story of a wound that affects us all and a story of a primitive vindication and the inextinguishable rancor, together with the itinerary of lives that the violence and madness of history carries” (Gutiérrez, *LVT* I 433).

NOTES

- ¹ Translated from the original Spanish title, *La violencia del tiempo*, as *The Violence of Time* (and abbreviated from here on as *LVT*). All quotes and textual references are my own translation from the 2nd edition of the Spanish source text published in two volumes.
- ² Although Gutiérrez had already published two novels (*El viejo Saurio se retira*, 1968; *Hombres de camino*, 1988) prior to *The Violence of Time*, his literary career did not take off until the publication of the latter text. By the year of its publication (1991), *The Violence of Time* clearly belongs to the period known as the Post-Boom, in which some of the most prolific writers of the Boom, such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Alfredo Bryce Echenique continued to produce important works such as the ones they had produced during the decade of the 70s. Interestingly, *The Violence of Time* could well be considered as a work belonging to the Boom due, above all, to its encompassing and totalising vision of the world, to its multiple narrative voices and points of view, to its multiple story lines, and a deep concern with historical and political matters—all of which are commonly found in many of the fictional texts of the Boom period.
- ³ Given the multiple story lines contained in the novel, one can ask what kind of novel is it? When Gutiérrez was asked in an interview how many novels does *The Violence of Time* contain, the author replied that there are at least the following: 1) a family saga of a mestizo clan; 2) a coming of age novel, whose protagonist is Martín Villar; 3) an adventure novel about the trial and tribulations of doctor González, padre Azcárate, Bauman de Metz, and Francois Boulanger; 4) a historical novel, since the saga of the Villar clan is closely tied to certain historical events in Peru. Miguel Gutiérrez, *La inversión*

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- novelesca* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Universidad de Ciencias y Humanidades, 2008) 173.
- ⁴ José de la Riva Agüero, *Obras completas II* (Lima: Universidad Católica, 1962).
 - ⁵ Luis Varcárcel, *Tempestad en los Andes* (Lima: Editorial Minerva, 1927).
 - ⁶ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge University Press, 1988).
 - ⁷ Milan Kundera, trans. Michael Heim, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 3.
 - ⁸ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd revised edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 92.
 - ⁹ Miguel Gutiérrez, *La violencia del tiempo I* (Lima: Milla Batres, 1991), 410–11.
 - ¹⁰ “And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me ... immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents... and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square where I used to be sent before lunch, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country roads we took when it was fine ...” Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, trans. C. K. Scott and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1980), 51.
 - ¹¹ The concept of repression and the Freudian unconscious have its roots in the study of certain studies such as hysteria. The cure for pathological behaviours could be a kind of Aristotelian concept of “catharsis,” through which feelings could be cleansed and purified. See Freud’s essay on “Repression” in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol 11 (London: Penguin, 1985).
 - ¹² The influence of Juan Rulfo—the great Mexican short story writer—is clearly present, as Congará shares some affinities with the Rulfian town of Comala. In Martín Villar’s own words: “Congará was a spectral and punished town ... while I walk the streets and got closer to the plaza, I realised that I was before the ruins of a town that once possessed greatness” (*LVT* I 176). The intertextual reference with Juan Rulfo’s novella, *Pedro Páramo*, is undeniable: the Rulfian town of Comala was a vibrant place before the chieftain, Pedro Páramo, destroyed it out of rancor.
 - ¹³ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 24.
 - ¹⁴ For an insightful reading on Cathy Caruth’s work, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge University Press, 2008).

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- ¹⁵ Regarding *The Violence of Time* as an extended metaphor for a fragmented Peru, it would be timely and appropriate to consider Fredric Jameson, whose article entitled “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88, interprets Latin American literature in light of the continent’s colonial and imperialist experience. From that point of view, Jameson concludes that all literature from Latin America is by necessity a national allegory. In the case of Gutiérrez’s novel, the existential condition of the *mestizo* in Peruvian society is dramatised. It should be pointed out also that Jameson’s article has created a heated debate. Neil Lazarus in his article “Fredric Jameson in ‘Third-World Literature’: A Qualified Defense,” points out precisely this controversy. To clarify the debate, Lazarus brings Aijaz Ahmad—one of the critics who have forcefully objected to Jameson’s argument—to the forefront. See *Fredric Jameson, a Critical Reader*, ed. Douglas Kellner and Sean Homer (London: Palgrave, 2004).
- ¹⁶ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 2.
- ¹⁷ Peter Elmore, the Peruvian critic and novelist, points out in his article that Martín Villar’s decision to write the saga of the clan is in line with his own conscious choice not to engender a descendant. As such, the role of authorship clearly displaces that of paternity: the literary artefact replaces the unwanted child. See Peter Elmore, “La sangre y la letra: Los modos de la filiación en *La violencia del tiempo* de Miguel Gutiérrez,” *Revista Iberoamericana* 73, 220 (2007): 631–47.
- ¹⁸ *La invención novelesca*, 157.
- ¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press), 73.
- ²⁰ Regarding the historical-revisionist aspect of *The Violence of Time*, it is important to point out that one of the novelistic genres that is often used by Latin American writers is the historical novel. The popularity of this particular genre speaks in and of itself that Latin America’s historical past still weighs upon its present: in the retrospective vision of the contemporary Latin American historical novel, there is clearly an obsessive act in revisiting crucial historical periods, above all, the colonial era. In historical novels such as *Explosion in the Cathedral* (1962), *I, the Supreme* (1974), *The War of the End of the World* (1981), *News from the Empire* (1987), *The General in his Labyrinth* (1989), the process of recreating the past, as well as the perspectives from which the past is recreated, are depicted in the novels. Thus, all of the novels just mentioned contain some sort revisionist element.

**HOT EARTH; COLD NEIGHBOURS:
THE LINK BETWEEN GLOBAL WARMING
AND THE DISSOLUTION OF COMMUNITY**

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My first job was at our local music store, Turtle's, where my co-workers were wholly dedicated to music. Turtle's employees did not have university degrees, but they were well schooled in rock and roll, rhythm and blues, classical and country music. Julie and Jane played in a band. Phil had a collection of over 3,000 CDs and a brain like a computer—he could list song titles, albums, release dates and upcoming concert information for customers on demand. In short, Turtle's was a community of people who shared a passion. One month after I was hired, we were bought out by Blockbuster; then the global media company, Viacom bought Blockbuster and everything changed. The store grew in size, but we were no longer allowed to order our own music. We had to wear uniforms, the same navy blue top and khaki trousers as every other Blockbuster employee in the country. Nose rings came out; tattoos were covered up and we were told to be on constant guard for secret shoppers, who posed as customers and later sent scathing rating reports and threatened to close down our store. Even our conversation was scripted: "Hello, thank you for calling Blockbuster, formerly known as Turtle's. My name is Sarah, how may I help you?" I do not know if it was the angry Gods of Music or the effects of global warming, but that summer it rained for 28 days in a row. And when the rain finally abated and Phil altered his script one Tuesday in July, "Thank you for calling Blockbuster on this beautiful sunny day," the man on the other end of the phone asked to speak to our manager. It was someone from corporate. In our next staff meeting we were all reprimanded for Phil's phone

digression. Within the year everyone quit; some had worked at Turtle's for nearly a decade. Our manager got fired for stealing money from the store. The people hired to replace Jane, Julie, Phil and our wayward manager did not have any knowledge of music. The one positive aspect of Blockbuster Music (which has since gone under) was that the CDs were slightly cheaper.

This is what sociologists call anecdotal evidence, but it is also an illustration of the results of globalization as defined by David Held and Anthony McGrew:

A process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions—assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact—generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power.¹

In other words, more goods are being transferred faster and from further away than ever before. Our market is no longer local; it is international. Power—the power to choose the music you sell and manage your own store—is decentralized. Industry on one side of the globe affects economies on the other side. Anthony Giddens explains that, “The increasing prosperity of an urban area in Singapore might be causally related, via a complicated network of global economic ties, to the impoverishment of a neighbourhood in Pittsburgh whose local products are uncompetitive in world markets” (60). Connections have become so *stretched* that we have virtually no relationship with the factory worker in Guang Zhou, thousands of miles away, who made the shirt on our back.

As we acquire more and cheaper goods from further afield, as our stores and houses grow larger—“the average new house [in America] has doubled in size since 1970”—our sense of community is shrinking.² According to Bill McKibben, “three quarters of Americans confess they don't know their next-door neighbors” (117). As our stores and houses increase in scale, local communities like the one at Turtle's disintegrate. And it is not only our general well being that is affected; the environment is paying a high price for this dramatic shift in scale. Weather patterns are becoming more erratic. Glaciers are melting. The waters are rising. What are we going to do?

These two trends, disintegrating community and an increasingly damaged planet, are showing themselves in contemporary American fiction. Social scientists and writers are feeling the heat;

the former are attempting to explain the phenomenon with statistics and theories, while novelists offer up possible resolutions through the age-old act of storytelling. In this paper I will examine the links between community and the environment as they occur in just two contemporary best-selling and critically acclaimed novels (although there are many others, the limited word count will not permit further discussion). *Aloft*, by Chang Rae Lee and *Animal Dreams*, by Barbara Kingsolver both focus on a rejection of consumerism and individualism and suggest resolution in the reunification of family and community and a new profound respect for the earth.

I will use the aforementioned definition of globalization along with the language of deep ecologist, Michael E. Zimmerman, and environmentalist, Bill McKibben, to examine these texts. Zimmerman explains that deep ecologists, “call for a shift away from anthropocentric humanism toward an ecocentrism guided by the norm of self-realization for all beings.”³ Zimmerman and McKibben argue that in order to live in harmony with nature we cannot assume a hierarchy in which humans are more important than animals. Plant and animal life have a value in themselves and this is what deep ecologists call “intrinsic value.”

Bill McKibben, as the title of his book, *Deep Economy*, suggests, builds on ideas of deep ecology. His accessible and optimistic book shares many of the same concerns raised in Zimmerman’s *Contesting the Earth’s Future*, but McKibben writes for a wider audience. He explains the links between community and the environment and offers concrete solutions. He tells us that the bind we find ourselves in is a result of hyper-individualism. He highlights the dangers of our current economy, a market based solely on profit and efficiency; these ideas are dramatized in the novel, *Aloft*, while theories of deep ecology play out in *Animal Dreams*. Zimmerman writes, “Hoping to free humankind from material deprivation by controlling nature, modern societies tend to overlook the fact that humans, too, are part of nature” (2). Humans are animals he tells us and this is the loudest theme in *Animal Dreams*. Unfortunately, the deep ecologists offer complex, sometimes conflicting, often shifting ideas but few concrete solutions. Although the themes in deep ecology relate directly to Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams*, it is the fiction that offers hope and resolution and not the theory.

II

Aloft is a novel about isolation in contemporary upper-middle-class America narrated by Jerry Battle, a sixty-year-old widower, recently

broken up from his long-term girlfriend and alienated from his children and grandchildren. It opens appropriately with Jerry flying his plane. Surveying the land below, he sets the scene for the novel: globalized American suburbia. "From up here," he says, "a half mile above the Earth, everything looks perfect to me."⁴ Jerry has a desire for perfection, an urge to overcome every flaw, even mortality. Because of the chaos below, the traffic, the trash, the noise, the pollution, he is forced to take to the sky. As the novel progresses, Jerry begins to examine his reasons for flight. Self-described as "dangerously unmoored," Jerry is the definition of detached and so are the members of his family (Lee 8). His father is in a nursing home; his daughter is proselytizing post-modern literary theory; and Jerry's son is quietly destroying the family landscaping business, while his wife shops and their children are plunked in front of a wide-screen television. Materially, these characters want for nothing and yet they are all disconnected and dissatisfied.

Anthony Giddens tells us that, "Modernity is inherently globalizing" and this is apparent in every aspect of Chang Rae Lee's novel (Zimmerman 60). One essential feature of globalization that the narrator complains of is speed. Globalists, Held and McGrew write about "a *speeding up* of global interactions and processes" (Held, McGrew 67). Jerry outlines the nature of this speed and its negative effects on the individual in the following passage:

And it occurred to me that in this new millennial life of instant and ubiquitous connection, you don't in fact communicate so much as leave messages for one another, these odd improvisational performances, often sorry bits and samplings of ourselves that can't help but seem out of context. And then when you do finally reach someone, everyone's so out of practice or too hopeful or else embittered that you wonder if it would be better not to attempt contact at all. (Lee 8)

This new *speeding up* of communication, Jerry implies, is disjointed, abridged and contributes to a feeling of detachment.

The characters in *Aloft* eat "seared foie gras with caramelized-shallot-and-Calvados-glaze, or wild salmon tartare on home-made wasabi Ry-crisps" (215). Jerry's son and daughter-in-law live in a McMansion. "Luxury means privacy," Jerry tells us, "even in your own home" (185). Luxury also means isolation. These extravagances—the fancy foreign food, the huge house—fail to fill the void of loneliness and dissatisfaction. Bill McKibben writes

about the correlation between rising rates of American consumerism and falling levels of happiness and gives the statistics to match the narrative: “In 1991 the average American family owned twice as many cars, drove two and a half times as far, used twenty-one times as much plastic, and traveled twenty-five times farther by air than did the average family in 1951” (Mickibben 34). During this same forty-year period, the National Opinion Research Council found the “proportion of respondents saying they were very happy peaked sometime in the 1950s and has slid slowly but steadily in the years since” (35). Of course, happiness is harder to measure than plastic, but research in the relatively new field of hedonics suggests again and again that the richest countries in the world have declining rates of happiness. We have more stuff; we are less satisfied.

These luxuries, affordable to the upper-middle-class characters in *Aloft* have other costs as well. Deep ecologists and environmentalists talk of *external costs*, which are intangible and immeasurable. The costs of these luxuries—not to the individual or the economy—but to the environment, are exceedingly high. “The average bite of food an American eats has traveled fifteen hundred miles” (47). This ensures that we have a greater variety of food at a lower cost; we can eat raspberries in New York in the middle of winter, but what are the *external costs*? The international cuisine described in *Aloft* exemplifies the part of globalization that Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton explain as, a “*stretching* of social and political and economic activities across frontiers” (67). McKibben explains the problematic nature of this *stretching*. The external cost for these imported foods can be seen

in terms of how much oil it requires, and how much greenhouse gas it pours into the atmosphere, and how much tax subsidy it receives, and how much damage it does to local communities, and how many migrant workers it maims, and how much sewage it piles up, and how many miles of highway it requires. (89)

In *Aloft*, these external costs are merely alluded to—Chang Rae Lee is more concerned with the dissolution of family and community. But in Barbara Kingsolver’s novel, as I will discuss later, *external costs* are an overt and obvious theme.

Jerry observes a “cultural sentiment of the moment, which is basically that You and Everybody Else Can Kiss My Ass.” He explains: “this is the natural evolution of the general theme of self-

permission featured in recent generations (mine foremost) but it's all become a little too hard and mean for me" (Lee 31–32). Jerry's "self-permission" similar to what Bill McKibben labels *hyper-individualism*. Because of the competitive nature of capitalism and the focus on efficiency and growth, we have become *hyper-individuals*, and "cost is all that matters. I'll get the cheapest possible electricity and not worry about its effects" (McKibben 148). As the novel progresses our narrator becomes increasingly lonely and dissatisfied until he is forced to rethink his initial reasons for flight. In the end he is compelled to come back down to earth and rejoin his family. Not all of this is his choice; his son and daughter-in-law's insatiable appetite for more have brought down the family landscaping business and forced them to rent out their McMansion. The final scene of the novel has all of Jerry's family members, his father, son, daughter-in-law and their spouses and children living together under one roof. No longer "aloft," Jerry is back in the very house he was escaping on page three of the novel. This is one form of community and it may help to alleviate some of the "meanness" Jerry speaks of, while reducing the environmental footprints of every member of the family. In the last hopeful, if ambiguous, lines of the novel Jerry is standing in a hole in the dirt, "the earth cool and still moist...And as scary and unnervingly quiet as it is to be even this far below ground, I do like the smell...I breathe in as deeply as I can bear" (Lee 364). Jerry Battle is grounded both literally and figuratively.

III

Animal Dreams follows a similar trajectory. The first-person narrator, Cosima Noline starts off dissatisfied, floating between jobs and cities. During the course of the novel she goes through a transformation as she allows herself to become a part of every aspect of the community—both social and environmental—in the small multi-cultural town of Grace, Arizona. During the first part of the novel, when Cosima, or Codi, leaves Tucson and returns to Grace (pun intended) she describes herself at one time or another as all of the following: "invisible," "lost," "crazy," "unsure," "doubtful" and "fearful of being recognized."⁵ Like Jerry Battle, she is detached—unlike Jerry, she is admittedly scared. Codi refers to herself as a squirrel caught in the headlights. She is used to the protection that the mask of anonymity provides in a city and feels stripped and vulnerable when she returns home to this small town, where everyone recognizes her.

Just as Jerry cannot remain “aloft,” Codi cannot remain detached. She reveals early on a desire to be a part a of something, “I’d sell my soul and all my traveling shoes,” she says, “to *belong* some place” (Kingsolver 31). During the celebration of the Day of the Dead, Codi begins to appreciate the tight community of Grace, where “Golden children ran wild over a field of dead great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers and the bones must have wanted to rise up and knock together and rattle with joy” (165). As the novel progresses, Codi allows herself to forge meaningful relationships with her students, a childhood friend, a lover and the land itself. In this novel, as in *Aloft*, the attachment to a community is part of the resolution.

Community, for Barbara Kingsolver, is much more than people. It is about the animals, the land, the dirt, the water—and the micro-organisms inside the water—as much as the human characters. Kingsolver’s writing style is gentler than Chang Rae Lee’s; she is less sarcastic and more compassionate to her characters. But her criticism of the current injustices we humans are committing against the earth is much harsher. Seven out of eight of the principals for the deep ecology platform, or DEP, are identifiable in *Animal Dreams*.

The first three planks of DEP are concerned with ideas of ecocentrism, including “the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth)” are shown in Kingsolver’s characters (Zimmerman 24). In *Animal Dreams* people are animals, too. There are over twenty-five metaphors and similes—many of them extended—turning humans into animals. “Animal” is in the title and the first line of the novel. Kingsolver’s prose reads as if in direct opposition to anthropocentrism; she never elevates humans above animals. Sometimes she does the opposite. Loyd’s dog, Jack, for example, is more memorable and loyal than Codi’s long-time, part-time boyfriend, Carlo. In comparing her characters to animals, Kingsolver suggests the deep ecological notion that we should subscribe the same *intrinsic value* to animals as we do to ourselves.

There are also similes that connect humans to land and vice versa. When our narrator visits the Jemez Mountains, she describes the volcano: “twisted black ridges of old lava flows ran like varicose veins down its sides” (Kingsolver 220). The land is personified, and the reverse happens, too: people become the land (though we have no word for this in English—landified?). After Codi makes love to Loyd, that ultimate human connection, she compares herself to the

land: "I felt like a patch of dry ground that had been rained on" (130). In Kingsolver's world, we are the land.

Animal Dreams centres around two major ecological disasters. The first is in Grace, where the water in the river is polluted by the local mine. Trees in the surrounding orchards are poisoned by this water and will not bear fruit. If the people of Grace do not address this problem, their entire way of life is threatened, along with their fragile ecosystem.

The second ecological disaster takes place in Nicaragua, where our protagonist's sister risks and ultimately gives up her life to work with locals on co-op farming. All this takes place amidst political turmoil and corruption, where Nicaraguan girls picking fruit are gunned down by "American citizens, active-duty National Guards" (Kingsolver 180). This relates to the sixth plank of DEP, which states that government policies must be changed (Zimmerman 25). Policy change is not something that is successful in *Animal Dreams* and the U.S. government remains a threat throughout the course of the novel.

The eighth plank of DEP says that we "have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes" to aid the environment and this manifests itself in our narrator's role as a science teacher and a conscientious citizen in Grace (Kingsolver 25). As the novel progresses, Codi begins to try to save the river in Grace. The problem with Grace's river shows itself in her classroom. When her students sample water in order to learn about microorganisms, they look through the microscope and see nothing. This is when our narrator first comes to the disturbing realization that "Our water was dead" (110). Kingsolver purposefully chooses to write about some of the smallest organisms in the ecosystem and in this way highlights the importance of *all* forms of life, even those that we need a microscope to see. This mode of thought is consistent with deep ecology. Zimmerman writes that "Microbes, bacteria, tiny insects, and other 'lower' forms of life are *not* less valuable than higher forms, though other life-forms may be more complex and in various ways richer" (25). In this science classroom passage, Kingsolver shows us that even the smallest organisms are intrinsically valuable.

Neighbors in Grace, unlike neighbors in most of contemporary America, know each other. As our isolated narrator becomes a part of the social and environmental community of this small town, she develops a new and profound respect for the earth and a need to implement change in order to protect the environment. Like Jerry, Codi becomes increasingly grounded as the narrative progresses. By

the end, *Animal Dreams* clearly shows the intrinsic link between the environment and local community.

IV

While both works of fiction critique the current globalized world we live in, *Aloft* paints a picture of the detached, consumerist muddle we have found ourselves, living in contemporary suburban America, whereas *Animal Dreams* warns us against anthropocentrism. These fictions are both drawn back down to earth, to the land, both literally and figuratively. The resolutions in these stories offer a positive step towards aiding our land and our dirt, which is, as the deep ecologists tell us, a living organism in need of the same respect as human beings. The books in this paper connect global warming caused by humans to the disappearance of local communities and the solutions to these problems go hand in hand as well.

Held and McGrew write, "...under conditions of contemporary globalization the truth of power no longer resides in the locales in which it is immediately experienced" (8). In localizing our economies, we do not need to become provincial, but we do need to return some of the power lost to the decentralizing nature of globalization to local economies. This is no easy task. We have become accustomed to getting our food and goods for cheap prices and we are used to living in a disposable anthropocentric world.

The question remains: how do we respond in real life to the messages in these stories? Since this paper was first presented at a conference on storytelling, allow me to end with another story. Three years ago, I was living in a three-story house in suburbia, in upstate New York with my partner and two SUVs. The nearest shop was three miles away. There was no public transport, no sidewalks, let alone bike paths. We were forced to drive everywhere. We heated our three-story house nine months of the year and used a dryer. Our environmental footprint was large and our social life small. Our closest friends lived 50 miles away. Then we had a baby and we had even less social life. I did manage to get out to the local library. But one morning, as I was listening to the news, I heard that downtown Binghamton was in a lockdown. There had been a shooting in a building not a block from the library where I took my daughter. Police, when they finally entered the building, found fourteen people dead.

Not long after, my partner and I decided to emigrate. We now live in Coogee, where buses run every ten minutes to Sydney's CBD. But I do not usually take the bus because I cycle for

transport; there is a seat on the back of my bike for my daughter. We live in a small two-bedroom unit with one small electric heater, no air-conditioning and no dryer. Five other kids live in our block of units. Every evening the kids play in the courtyard together and the parents chat and take turns feeding them dinner. We often cook and babysit for each other. The three year-olds (there are three) learned to swim in the communal pool last summer.

It occurred to me, while writing the paper for the conference, that I have lived my field of study. I do not know if others are affected by fiction, by stories, by storytelling, in the same way, but I can only assume they are and that we must keep telling the stories that are in us; we must keep reading them, writing them and trying to figure out how they apply to the way we live.

NOTES

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- ¹ David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, "Rethinking Globalization, in *The Global Transformations Reader*, ed. David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 68.
 - ² Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Times Books, 2007), 97.
 - ³ Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting the Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1994), 2.
 - ⁴ Chang Rae Lee, *Aloft* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), 1.
 - ⁵ Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

**A COLONIAL ITALIAN STORYTELLING:
POEMA AFRICANO DELLA DIVISIONE
“28 OTTOBRE” BY MARINETTI.**

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Born in Egypt (Alexandria) on the 22 December 1876, Marinetti died in Bellagio (Italy) on the 2 December 1944. Founder of Futurism, he is also an important Italian writer. He did the high school in French in Alexandria until 1893, when he moved to Paris. After he obtained his *Baccalauréat*, he went back to his father's country (Italy) and studied law at the Università degli Studi di Genova, from which he graduated in 1899. He founded *Poesia* (1905–1909), an international review. The relationship of Marinetti with French language and culture is a characteristic of his intellectual life. He published in 1902 *La Conquête des étoiles*, an epic poem in French. Three years later, he published another book in French, *Le Roi bombance*, his first satirical tragedy. Both were still influenced by Symbolism. His “Manifeste de fondation du Futurisme” was published in 1909. It proclaimed a love of speed, war, and danger. Marinetti exalted evolution, destruction of academies, libraries and museums. As he was excited by the war, he went to Libya as correspondent for the newspaper *L'Intransigeant* in 1911. The year after, he was also in the Balkans for the war. This same year, 1912, he published another manifesto, *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura Futurista*, in which he said that punctuation, syntax, adverbs and adjectives had to be abolished. He wanted finite verbs used and words used freely (*parole in libertà*), placed at random. The aim of Marinetti is that the typography of the words in freedom gave the poem expressive pictorial qualities.

Marinetti became involved in politics and in 1914 he supported Italian intervention during World War I. Then, in 1918, he founded the Futurist Political Party. It proposed left-wing policies and was anti-monarchist, nationalist, and anti-clerical. It subsequently

helped Mussolini to rise to power in 1922. Between the two of them there was always a clear type of interest and cooperation: Marinetti became a member of the “Reale Accademia d'Italia,” and he did some propaganda for the fascist regime.

Marinetti published *Il fascino dell'Egitto* in 1933 and in 1934 the *Manifesto del naturismo fascista*. And then in 1935, the poem *l'Aeropoema del Golfo della Spezia*, the first example of Marinetti's “aeropoetry.” In October 1935, Marinetti went to Ethiopia to fight for his country. He was in the “2nd Blackshirt Division 28 Ottobre,” led by General Somma. He enlisted as a volunteer. The division left on the 22th of October from the port of Naples. It was tasked to deal with the plateau of Tembien, region of Tigray, a torrid zone, desolate and full of pitfalls. During the days of war, the poet took notes, and Pino Masnata, also a famous futurist, helped him to write. Marinetti recited that poem to the soldiers when they were still in Ethiopia.

The poetry of Marinetti can be divided into three phases. In the first, which lasted until 1908, he usually used free verse, almost entirely in French, including the poems *Les vieux marins* (1897), *La Conquête des étoiles* (1902), *Destruction* (1904), the drama *Le Roi Bombance* (1905) and the direction of the international journal *Poetry* (Milan, 1905), in which he promoted an international investigation on the verse. The texts of this period are characterized by a redundancy of images, the influence of Victor Hugo and the influence of symbolists and the values of naturalists.

The second phase can be identified by the publication of the *Manifesto del futurism* on the 20 February 1909 in the French newspaper *Figaro*, and the novel *Mafarka il futurista* in 1910. The futurists *Manifesto* contains propaganda, allegories, as well as works of art. During this period he formulated the theory of free words and he wrote *Zang Tumb Tumb*, and *Dune*.

The third period began in 1920, when Marinetti adheres to the “Fasci di combattimento,” and lasted until his death. It's the name of the political movement founded in 1915 by Mussolini with the name “Fasci di azione rivoluzionaria” (Beams of revolutionary action), transformed in 1919, with Michele Bianchi, into “Fasci italiani di combattimento” (Italian Beams of combat). It became a party in 1921 and constituted the regime under which Italy lived from October 1922 until July 1943.

Many scholars, such as Arrigo Lora Totino, Brunella Eruli, Giovanni Lista, Cinzia Sartini Blum, Gaetano, Luciano de Maria, have published monographs and studies on Marinetti, usually about the first and the second phases of his poetry. To my knowledge, no

researcher has worked specifically on *Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre"*. This paper will focus on that poem, which is situated, as I said before, in the third phase of Marinetti poetry. Marinetti's acceptance of fascist ideology brought him the friendship of Mussolini and the membership of the Italian Academy. His situation changed, as well as the style of his poetry. The free word register fades in favour of the traditional. There are continual exchanges and osmosis, and the lyric mitigates. The works of this period is characterized by sensuality and the profuse use of symbols and synaesthetic effects. He was especially interested in those methods that would blur the borderline between the dimensions to create a synesthesia. By evoking all of the senses, the work would have a more profound impact. Marinetti wanted to wholly engage the senses, and hold the beholder enthralled.

How did Marinetti speak of his participation in the Ethiopian war? Describing the Ethiopian war story in Marinetti includes the physical and mental magnitude of events and also the representation of sound: "Ma subito uno striiidere striiidere di grillo—Ziiittoziiitto ziiitto implora questo poeta noto ignoto pronto viiiivo di siiiiilenzio bianco ziiiiitto"¹ of what he heard: "tic tic tic è la docile serena macchina da scrivere."² In *Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre"* you can notice his fascination with warfare and technology. This prose poem written in Italian is unusual in that you can find some French words: "le ciel est d'un bleu limpide la temperature idéale."³ This is a sign that he was still linked to French Symbolism. Another peculiarity is the absence of punctuation, which is characteristic of free verse where usually punctuation may be absent or it may be used to place greater emphasis on specific words.

Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre" contains 319 pages and was published by Mondadori in 1937. Marinetti came back to Italy in May 1936 and published the book one year after: in February 1937 the first edition, and in May 1937 the second one. After a hard review by the well-known Italian critic Giacomo Debenedetti, Marinetti threatened to act against him, but he seems to have done nothing.

Telling his story, one of the mechanisms Marinetti used to avoid suffering is to bury painful incidents; he didn't mention them at all. This is very common in *Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre"*; instead of painful incidents, he described the landscape and nature. He is very impressed by it because it's so different from the Italian one. On the other hand, it reminded him Egypt: "Domani sempre a uguale distanza dal fertile Nilo e dal fecondo Mar Rosso"⁴ you can

find several elements about his native country: “A uguale distanza dal Nilo.”⁵ Marinetti, who experienced war, tried to pull the reader into the environment of Abyssinia (59).

Poema africano della Divisione “28 ottobre” can be considered as part of futurist literature, which was intent upon increasing the expressiveness of language. Marinetti projected words from the page like a machine gun firing bullets. He did it with a variety of techniques both visual and aural. Futurist elements are manifested in his *Poema africano della Divisione “28 ottobre,”* which he called a poem that “segna la vittoria definitiva delle parole in libertà sul verso tradizionale o libero sintattico logico e a chiusure stagne di punteggiatura.”⁶ The “avenging sea” is still represented as a symbol of revolution. Marinetti embraced technology, the machine, dynamic energy and speed.

Marinetti wanted to try to reinvent life as it was being transformed by new technologies and conceive of a new race in the form of machine-extended man. That is what can be experienced in his “*poema africano.*” Marinetti considers words as material things with a dynamism all their own. The founder of futurism, with his love of war, tactics and proclamations was an inspiration to Mussolini. Marinetti praised the Ethiopian war: “l’unica bella avventura sentimentale (24). And also “la Guerra ha una sua bellezza perché realizza l’uomo meccanico perfezionato dal muso antigas del megafono terrorizzante dal lanciafiamme.”⁷

Marinetti restrained his emotion and established a dry objective tone to his writing. There are many examples of this lack of emotion: “la Guerra ha una sua bellezza perché guarisce definitivamente gli uomini dalla paura.”⁸

Another characteristic of Marinetti is the great admiration that he had for the sights and sounds of war. He celebrated war as “the world’s only hygiene,” he made machine guns a subject of *Poema Africano*. The title refers to the 2nd Blackshirt Division, “28 October.” It was an Italian *Camicie Nere* (Blackshirt) militia unit formed for the Ethiopian War. The date is that of the March on Rome (28 October 1922). The aim of this name is to honour that fascist March. Marinetti wrote this poem after his return in Italy from the Ethiopian war where he was a volunteer. In Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the inventor of the future, the “machine” is the supreme symbol of progress without morals, of a technological development that will result in praise of war pure and simple. That is why “*Poema africano*” is dedicated to brave men and the leadership of war machines.

With Futurism, Marinetti wanted to try to reinvent life as it was being transformed by new technologies and conceive of a new race in the form of machine-extended man. That is what you can experience in his "*Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre."* The poem simulates the atmosphere, the speed, the energy of the battlefield. There is some onomatopoeia: the airplane noise: "Tuum Pluum Pla Pla" (224) and the sea noise: "Ah naà neghella hà Ah naà neghella hà Ah naà" (272).

The storytelling style of Marinetti in *Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre"* is characterized by the burying of traumatic experiences. It's possible to see what is stated by Kai Mikkonen in reference to Marinetti's whole African oeuvre: "Marinetti's Africa is a combination of different kinds of non-European spaces set in a timeless present."⁹

There is no problem of the dulling of experience through memory loss because Marinetti wrote his book while he was still in Abyssinia. On the other hand, it was a work of propaganda: "Non vi è nulla di meglio da fare che combattere per l'Italia in Abissinia."¹⁰ Marinetti wanted to contribute to the search of "a place in sun" of his country. He employed different rhetorical skills and provided examples of propaganda and support to the colonial adventure of Mussolini: "Mussolini guardiano del Faro Italiano."¹¹ And also when he says: "Mussolini altoparlante apre innaffia gli echi L'Italia avrà finalmente il suo Impero viva il Re Imperatore di Etiopia."¹² As Cristina Della Coletta says, in *Poema africano della divisione 28 ottobre*, Marinetti championed the opposition between European dynamism and African immobility, and viewed colonialism as a way to bring technological progress to countries otherwise doomed to stagnation.

The demoralization inflicted by the war is absent not only because Italy won but also in a certain way because Marinetti loved war. Usually, after a person experiences war, there are profound personal changes. This is not the case in Marinetti. Although he went to many wars, he kept on wanting to "sing the love of danger, [and] the habit of energy and rashness".¹³ Nowhere in his "*poema africano*" does Marinetti give any sympathy or pity or compassion to the wounded during the war. The only thing he is interested about is: "perchè serve la Potenza della grande Italia Fascista."¹⁴ As Sartini-Blum argues, Marinetti shows, Africa as "simultaneously a space of ambivalence and phobia."¹⁵ Marinetti showed drastic indifference to the human being; the most important thing is the machine. He narrated war stories without any pity for the death it caused. The war didn't change Marinetti nor his sense of morality,

in his writing he didn't feel guilty nor demoralized by the war. *Poema africano* shows the battle in which Marinetti and his division were involved (Tembien). Marinetti talked about the task assigned to his division (Volunteers). It was mainly defensive duty and the execution of essential work for the war, such as construction of roads and fortifications.

Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre" shows how Marinetti chose Africa as the stage on which to perform the speed, modernity, action, and violence of his Futurist poetics. This can be seen when he says: "Macallè stracotta cittadina Africana sotto cenere e oro di gramigna abbrustolita ma fiera di alcuni tetti metallici europei."¹⁶ Also "Gloria a questa solenne geometria marciante che il Quadrumviro De Bono guida alla conquista."¹⁷ Why Africa? Maybe he saw it as a place where he could project his fantasies, a come back to home and a country of exile and escape. He was looking for a place to put into practice his desire for modernism. Since it was an "uncontaminated world" for him, it was the better place for technology and progress. As McKeever said, «use of African, "primitive" and "barbaric" elements in [...] the literature of F. T. Marinetti, was a key aspect of the Futurist relationship with the past, present and future."¹⁸

NOTES

- ¹ My translation, "But now squeak-squeak of cricket silently begs this poet known unknown ready alive of silence white silently hush of silence ready to live," Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Il Poema africano della Divisione "28 ottobre"* (Milano: Mondadori, 1937), 58.
- ² My translation, "Tic tic tic is the docile, calm typewriter," *Poema africano*, 91.
- ³ My translation, "The sky is clear blue temperature is ideal," *Poema africano*, 212.
- ⁴ My translation, "Tomorrow always at the same distance of the fertile Nile and from the fecund Red Sea," *Poema africano*, 212.
- ⁵ My translation, "At the same distance of the Nile," *Poema africano*, 45.
- ⁶ My translation, "Marks the final victory of freedom in words to the traditional or free syntactic logical and sealing of punctuation," *Il Poema africano* 17.
- ⁷ My translation, "War has its own beauty, because it realizes the mechanical man perfected by megaphone by the muzzle gas by the terrifying flamethrower," *Poema africano*, 28.

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- ⁸ My translation, "War has its own beauty, because it definitely heals men from fear," 28.
- ⁹ Kai Mikkonen, 'Artificial Africa in the European Avant-Garde: Marinetti and Tzara,' *Europa! Europa?: The Avant-Garde and the fate of the continent*. Ed Sascha, Jan Baetens, Benedict Hjartarso, Peter Nicholls, Tania Orum, Hubert van der Berg, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 398.
- ¹⁰ My translation, "There is nothing better to do than to fight for Italy in Abyssinia," *Poema africano*, 24.
- ¹¹ My translation, "Mussolini, keeper of the Italian lighthouse," *Poema africano ottobre*, (Milano Mondadori 1937), 309.
- ¹² My translation, "Mussolini opens speaker, waters these echoes Italy will finally have his empire long live to the king Emperor of Ethiopia," *Poema africano*, 312.
- ¹³ *The Futurist Manifesto*, 1909.
- ¹⁴ My translation, "Because it's useful for the power of the great Fascist Italy," *Poema africano*, 29.
- ¹⁵ Patrizia Palumbo, *A place in the sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, November 2003), 138–63.
- ¹⁶ My translation, "Macallè overcooked African town under ash and gold grass browned but proud of some European metal roofs" *Poema africano*, 56.
- ¹⁷ My translation "Gloria in this solemn marching geometry that the Quadrumvirate De Bono guides to conquer," (56)
- ¹⁸ Rosalind McKeever, "Futurism's African (A)temporalities," *Carte Italiane*, 6 (2010): 97–115.

**THE TASK OF STORYTELLING:
RETHINKING WALTER BENJAMIN
IN THE AGE OF COMMUNICATION**

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We are now without doubt entering an age of communication. Its current stage, however, is dominated by the massive explosion of information. Not only are our economy and social process fundamentally reorganized around the center of information production and distribution, but also indeed our entire life is more and more saturated and relentlessly shaped by the overwhelming flood of information. Communication, to a remarkable degree, tends to be reduced to information alone. This over-saturation in and over-exposure to information, according to Jean Baudrillard, results in a mythical state of obscenity: “All events, all spaces, all memories are abolished in the sole dimension of information: this is obscene.” However, “[i]t is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more-visible-than visible; it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication.”¹ For him a world of such vicious transparency is virtual rather than real. In this sense, our time is in fact witnessing a “*virtualization of human beings in their core*.”² The final accomplishment of this virtualization, he admonishes, will witness the total control of a homogeneous and oppressive system over the living world and free humanity.

Baudrillard's work, as Douglas Kellner cogently argues, can be read as scientific fiction. It reveals in shocking images the darkest future that may become true if we do not rise urgently to fight against that fatal tide already beginning to devour us.³ Then, if we are not to accept virtualization simply as destiny and if we still believe that—as the title of Dominique Wolton's intriguing new work announces—“*To Inform is not to Communicate*,”⁴ we must be able to think of a mode of communication that is fundamentally different from information—an alternative that not only grounds genuine existence since time immemorial but also anticipates a truly revolutionary future. This paper, as an effort in this direction, suggests that Walter Benjamin's profound thinking on storytelling may provide us invaluable illumination on thinking such an alternative. For this purpose, it explores three internally related areas in Benjamin's writings. It first examines the idea of communication discussed in his notoriously difficult early writings on language, representation and translation. On this basis, it then interprets specifically his very original thinking on story and storytelling with particular contrast to information. Finally, it suggests a possible form of storytelling under the condition of technological reproduction with reference to his esoteric understanding of film as discussed in that famous essay on artwork and mechanical reproduction.

Communication as Re-presentation

Benjamin approaches the problem of communication in his early work on language. For him, nature simply communicates. “The existence of language,” he believes, is “with absolutely everything. There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of each one to communicate its mental contents.”⁵ In such an understanding, the world in fact amounts to being-in-communication. Communication is endowed with ultimate ontological necessity. It is not only universal but also fundamental.

Every spiritual being must be in communication and every material existence must be in some way the communication of its own being. The defining characteristic of such communication is particularly “that this mental being communicates itself in language and not through language” (Benjamin, “On Language” 63). Natural communication is immediate rather than mediated. Such immediacy, however, should not be confused with identity. Benjamin warns quickly “that the mental entity that communicates itself in language is not language itself but something to be distinguished from it” (Benjamin, “On Language” 63). Whereas in natural communication the absolute and unconditioned expresses itself in the material and conditioned, Benjamin emphasizes, such expression can only be incomplete and to a large degree non-manifest. Natural communication, in other words, is free but insufficient within itself.

Degraded human communication, on the contrary, is mediated. Instead of being the direct expression of internal significance, material existence becomes the sign of external meaning transmitted arbitrarily *through* it. If initially languages have no speaker, now man becomes this speaker. For Benjamin, “the Fall marks the birth of the *human word*” (Benjamin, “On Language” 71). In such word what remains communicable is ultimately only the abstract either/or of good and evil according to human interest. “In the Fall, since the eternal purity of names was violated, the sterner purity of the judging word arose” (Benjamin, “On Language” 72). Following Kierkegaard, Benjamin would name such a degraded condition of communication “prattle”: “in the Fall, man abandoned immediacy in the communication of the concrete—that is, name—and fell into the abyss of the mediatedness of all communication, of the word as means, of the empty word, into the abyss of prattle” (Benjamin, “On Language” 72).

Prattle thus marks the dominance of man over nature. “The enslavement of language in prattle is joined by the enslavement of

things in folly almost as its inevitable consequence” (Benjamin, “On Language” 72). Ironically, however, this control is at the same time inevitably out of control. In prattle, rather than being properly named, things are instead overnamed. For Benjamin, it is the true allegorist who most bitterly reveals this overnamed world as a mess of profound confusion. In allegory, “Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else.”⁶ Thus the sad view of the angel over history depicted by Benjamin in the famous “On the Concept of History” is actually that of the allegorist: “[w]here a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet,” and that “pile of debris” “grows toward the sky.”⁷ Things are not only unfulfilled and unrecognized but also misrecognized and wasted. The dead world is speechless. In that “deliberate muteness,” nature resists in non-communication within over-communication.

The task of true human communication, which is essentially redemptive for Benjamin, is therefore both to overcome the degraded over-communication and to accomplish the incomplete natural communication. Distinguished from the immediate presentation and the mediated representation, it may be properly called re-presentation. Re-presentation thus bears a special double structure. On the one hand, it is essentially the re-presentation of the ideal and absolute; on the other hand, it is nevertheless “based on historical codification” (Benjamin, *The Origin* 27). Re-presentation, in other words, strives “to establish the becoming of phenomena in their being” (Benjamin, *The Origin* 47). This amounts particularly to elevating the original from its conditionedness and reintegrating the purified fragments into a new totality. For Benjamin, furthermore, “[t]he re-presentation of an idea can under no circumstances be considered successful unless the whole range of possible extremes it contains has been virtually explored” (Benjamin, *The Origin* 47). In fact, “the concept of being is not satisfied by the phenomenon until it has absorbed all its history”

(Benjamin, *The Origin* 45). Thus the accomplishment of communication as re-presentation depends on both the micro diversity and macro integrity of the totality it constructs. Re-presentation, as actualization of full being-in-communication, strives towards a kind of “universal and integral actuality.”⁸

This somewhat abstract idea of re-presentation is concretely embodied in Benjamin’s designation on translation. For him, in fact, “[i]t is necessary to found the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory” (Benjamin, “On Language” 69). Translation, according to him, is neither mere reproduction of the original nor purely free creation. Rather it has the responsibility for the fulfilment of the communication of being initiated in the original. Thus to some degree “[a] real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.”⁹ For this purpose, such translation is a kind of interlinear reading. It explores between the lines of the original to release the initially unexpressed. As a result, on the one hand, “the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding” (Benjamin, “The Task” 255) in endless new translations. And on the other hand, an integrated whole arises in that growing diversity. “Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another,” argues Benjamin, “[i]n the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel” (Benjamin, “The Task” 260).

Story against Information

Modernity, for Benjamin, opens the scene of the worst condition of non-communication in terms of over-communication. Benjamin

regards modernity as a force and process of dis-embedding. In modern times, people and things are incessantly and irresistibly lifted from their original and local contexts to be thrown into a state of constant floating, piling and confrontation. Modern cities, for him, are essentially sites of concentration for such uprooted fragments. They are in every moment crowded to the brim with a passing mass. Life in modern cities is therefore an existence in the middle of an endless flow of contingent, transient and fugitive meetings. It is exactly this mode of existence that Benjamin depicts with the famous term of “shock.” Moving through “the traffic of a big city,” observes Benjamin, “involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery.”¹⁰ The modern man faces his world as the one besieged by an infinite series of shocks.

In correspondence to the thriving of shocks, Benjamin observes, a mode of reflexive experience or *Chockerlebnis*, rises into dominance. For him, it is a kind of protective mechanism, which achieves determinacy and efficiency at the cost of disconnectedness and abstraction. On the one hand, “Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense is the way it assigns an incident a precise point in time in consciousness,” and thus turns it “into an isolated experience” (Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 319). *Chockerlebnis* only belongs to direct situations and grasps the world in terms of isolated and superficial appearances. On the other hand, its efficiency is achieved further by fixing concrete things into predetermined and rigid categories and types. Multiplicity and singularity are of little importance or even dangerous and for this reason must be subjected to radical simplification. The function of *Chockerlebnis* is therefore more to avoid facing the world than to engage with it actively. It fabricates a rationally organized reality consisting only of immediately present, understandable and thus also controllable facts. It is thus the “alienating, blinding experience of the age of large-scale industrialism” and of “the standardized,

denatured life of the civilized masses” (Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 314).

The explosive proliferation of information in modern times, according to Benjamin, is understandable only against this background. For him, “[t]he replacement of the older relation by information, and of information by sensation,” exactly “reflects the increasing atrophy of experience” (Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 316). The definitive characteristic of information, Benjamin points out, is that it is rigidly fixed within the immediacy in which it arises. “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time.”¹¹ It seems self-evident simply because in it “no event comes to us without already being shot through with explanations” according to the order of the current reality (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 147). In its instant newness, abstract clarity, and blind segregation between various items as well as in its layout and style, the flood of information supplied by modern media suffocates our imagination of the ideal and the alternative. Information helps to produce and reinforce dominant reality and exclude anything that cannot be accommodated within it. The explosion of information in modern times, therefore, manifests not the burgeoning of true communication but its unprecedented decadence.

For Benjamin, what stands squarely in opposition to information is story. “Every morning brings us news across the globe, yet we are poor in noteworthy stories.” In fact, “by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 147). Story has nothing to do with immediacy. On the contrary, it concerns specifically with what is far away—both in the sense of space and time. A true storyteller, Benjamin argues, is “at home in distant places as well as in distant times” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 145). This distance is guaranteed most prominently by death: “[d]eath is the sanction for everything that the storyteller can tell” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

151). Life, the concrete material for story, breaks in death the abstract clarity and integrity forced upon it by its empirical situatedness and stands out into story as undetermined fragments. And story passes down these concrete materials without trying to grasp them. "Actually," Benjamin argues, "it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one recounts it." "The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connections among the events are not forced on the reader." In fact, the reader is summoned to "interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks" (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 148). In this way, whereas information is exhausted within the immediacy of here and now, "story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 148). What is passed down by story "is like those seeds of grain that have lain for centuries in the airtight chambers of the pyramids and have retained their germinative power to this day" (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 148).

There is, however, another distance. The listener to story is distanced from his direct life context in a state of distraction. "The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory" (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 149). In this distraction as heightened attention, he responds to the counsel of the story. "Counsel," however, "is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is in the process of unfolding," emphasizes Benjamin (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 145–6). Story penetrates the wrap of reality and elevates the listener from restrictive requirements of his immediate life into creative intervention for the task of the communication of the ideal. Such intervention obviously embodies true translation understood in Benjamin's sense. Story is the medium of creative repetition: "[f]or storytelling is always the art of repeating stories," he asserts (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 149). The

one who learns from story repeats it, however, with his own particular contribution. The listener is constantly transformed into storyteller, the learner into educator. Story “does not aim to convey the pure ‘in itself’ or gist of a thing, like information or a report. It submerges the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 149). Story is translated and its communication achieves further accomplishment in every new telling.

In the endless repeating of storytelling, therefore, tradition is opened and maintained. In a 1917 letter to Scholem, he argues that “[t]radition is the medium in which the learner changes *continually* into the teacher ... in tradition all are educators and to be educated.”¹² This is, however, not the tradition of finished treasures for admiration but that of unfulfilled dreams and tasks requiring redemptive intervention. Such tradition is not local but universal. In particular, it is absolutely equalitarian and does not exclude anything, even the most humble ones: “[t]he mineral is the lowest stratum of created things. For the storyteller, however, it is directly linked to the highest” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 161). In story, tradition gathers the whole universe into an integrated structure of network which Benjamin depicts in the image of a ladder— “[a] ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 157). This is re-presentation—connecting the ideal and the concrete penetrating the surface of false representation. Story is the network of re-presentation and will not stop growing until it reaches that “universal and integral actuality” like a perfect handicraft—“that slow piling up, one on top of the other, of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate image of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of various retellings” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 150).

Storytelling in Film

Story as Benjamin understands it therefore provides a challenging model of alternative communication against information. However, as an ancient art, can storytelling survive the tide of technological reproduction of modernity? The answer seems to be negative. Benjamin laments that “the art of storytelling is coming to an end. One meets with fewer and fewer people who know how to tell a tale properly. More and more often, there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed” (Benjamin, “The Storyteller” 143). Modernity witnesses the death of story. Nevertheless, for Benjamin death does not simply mean disappearance. Rather, it is the starting point of rebirth, the beginning of an afterlife that translates the original into a totally new form of existence. Specifically, Benjamin discovers in film that afterlife of storytelling. The two famous essays—“The Storyteller” and “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility,” which both first came into print in the same year of 1936—are therefore not contradicting each other as the standard interpretations claim. The former is not simply a nostalgic attitude towards the past and the latter not naïvely a technological optimism towards the future. The two complement each other for a more comprehensive and dialectic view of the possibility of communication beyond information.

In opposition to the common view that film represents reality, Benjamin proposes a kind of filming that destroys that very illusion of reality. For him, “[t]he illusory nature of film is of the second degree; it is the result of editing.” In fact, “The equipment-free aspect of reality has here become the height of artifice, and the vision of immediate reality the Blue Flower in the land of technology.”¹³ Benjamin discusses the intervention of the camera with a revealing reference to the contrast between the operation of the surgeon and that of the magician. Whereas the magician maintains a natural distance between the sick person he treats and himself, mystifying it with his authority, “[t]he surgeon does exactly

the reverse: he greatly diminishes the distance from the patient by penetrating the patient's body, and increases it only slightly by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs" (Benjamin, "The Work" 115–16). Film, therefore, like story as ladder, is not horizontal but vertical. It does not follow the surface of apparent and "natural" appearances, but penetrates it for what is disguised and unexpressed. Compared with story, however, its power of destruction is even more impressive. With the intervention of the film, in fact, the whole world repressively surrounding us is exploded into pieces—"with the dynamite of the split second":

Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its farflung debris. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. (Benjamin, "The Work" 117)

In the film, consequently, a space of infinite dimensions emerges. Into such a space, Benjamin announces, anyone can participate with his own image. In fact, "[i]t is inherent in the technology of film, as of sports, that everyone who witnesses these performances does so as a quasi-expert Any person today can lay claim to being filmed" (Benjamin, "The Work" 114). Like story, film is totally open. Such a space, Benjamin argues, is that of "optical unconscious"—"a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious" (Benjamin, "The Work" 117). It is a space of deep dream like what is discovered by psychoanalysis. Everything enters such a space loses its normal figure and its normal place. All the fragments move constantly without obvious rational control, coming and disappearing in shocks. As in the story, distance and nearness lose their mutual exclusion. They meet and merge and transfigure each

other. Furthermore, like in story, the one who participates in that space falls into a condition of distraction—"the distracting elements of scene and focus ... have a percussive effect on the spectator," argues Benjamin (Benjamin, "The Work" 119). In fact, for him, "Reception in distraction—the sort of reception which is increasingly noticeable in all areas of art and is a symptom of profound changes in apperception—finds in film its true training ground" (Benjamin, "The Work" 120).

Film, however, is not merely the site of dream but also that of its awakening into clearly re-presented image. In other words, it not only destructs, but also constructs. Its mode of construction, for Benjamin, is definitively montage. In montage, the initially separated fragments form a constellation. They are reorganized into and become visible as a totality—an image. Such an image, according to Benjamin, is graspable most easily with contrast to that of the painting: "[t]he painter's is a total image, whereas that of the cinematographer is piecemeal, its manifold parts being assembled according to a new law" (Benjamin, "The Work" 116). Unlike the classical painting but like the story, in film every participating element is equal. Everyone plays a mutually complementary role to determine the totality: "[t]he finished film is the exact antithesis of a work created at a single stroke. It is assembled from a very large number of images and image sequences that offer an array of choices to the editor; these images, moreover, can be improved in any desired way in the process leading from the initial take to the final cut" (Benjamin, "The Work" 109). For Benjamin, "[t]he film is therefore the artwork most capable of improvement" (Benjamin, "The Work" 109). The result is a film that is so rich that it is without limit. Obviously Benjamin is here proposing a universal film in equivalence to the story he understands. Both are therefore modes of communication that target the re-presentation of a "universal and integral actuality."

Obviously, such a universal film has never existed in actuality. It is, in other words, an ideal film, just as the story proposed by Benjamin. However, it provides valuable suggestions on how true communication may be imagined under the condition of technological reproduction. In proposing such a film, he in fact imagines a totally different mode of technology which is not the enemy of storytelling but its ultimate soil. Benjamin names such technology simply second technology. In contrast to first technology which exploits man and nature, second technology encourages and hosts play. Play, as Benjamin deliberately points out, is not “a ‘doing as if’ but a ‘doing the same thing over and over again’.”¹⁴ “‘All things would be resolved in a trice/If we could only do them twice’. Children act on this proverb of Goethe’s. Except that the child is not satisfied with twice, but wants the same thing again and again, a hundred or even thousand times” (Benjamin, “Toys” 120). To start again, to have the chance to remedy what has gone wrong and on this way up to the final achievement of the ideal, is the special right that is respected and performed in play. Man always keeps young when he stays in a tradition that passes down to every generation the same dream of utopian being and the chance as well as task of retrieving what the past has missed. In play we tell stories and in telling stories we play. Both, however, are not necessarily anti-technology, but on the contrary could and should be technologically opened.

To conclude, Benjamin’s unique thinking on storytelling provides an illuminating way of thinking true communication beyond information. Today, with the coming of the internet and network global existence, this thinking stands out as of particular relevance. Whereas the information explosion leads to a state of virtual reality which enwraps our field of free action and suffocates our desire for the truly ideal, Benjamin teaches us that in story and film a space of “universal and integral actuality” is opened which transcends unobtrusively but intransigently the limit of our restrictive reality. In our arduous but never desperate struggle for a

truly liberating future, we are fortunate to have this message on the secret of storytelling as an urgently needed hand which may lead us bravely through the myth of ever “new” technologies and “communication” and orient us into that still uncharted space of truly utopian global second life.

NOTES

- 1 Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988), 24, 22.
- 2 Jean Baudrillard, “Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality,” *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artifact* (London: Sage, 1997), 20.
- 3 Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 13.
- 4 Dominique Wolton, *Informer n’est pas communiquer* (Paris: CNRS, 2009)
- 5 Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” *Selected Writings*, volume 1 (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 62.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998), 175.
- 7 Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings*, Volume IV (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.
- 8 Sigrid Weigel, ““Body- and image-space”: Traces through Benjamin’s writings,” *Body- and Image-space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 1996), 29.
- 9 Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” *Selected Writings*, Volume I (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 260.
- 10 Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Selected Writings*, Volume IV (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 328.
- 11 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” *Selected Writings*, Volume III (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 148.
- 12 Quoted in John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca; NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 77.

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- 13 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility," *Selected Writings*, Volume III (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 115.
 - 14 Walter Benjamin, "Toys and Play," *Selected Writings*, Volume II (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 120.

STORYTELLING AS “HISTORYTELLING”: THE ITALIAN RISORGIMENTO IN MARCELLO FOIS’S CRIMES SERIES

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Through his historical crime series, Marcello Fois (b. 1960) investigates the Risorgimento, a crucial period of Italian history when the Italian State as we know it was first formed. The new Italian Kingdom, established in 1861 and ruled by the Savoy family, brought with it a centralisation of power that disregarded regional, cultural, and economic differences. This generated deep resentments, especially in the South of Italy and on the Italian islands. Many patriots who fought for a unified Italy felt their ideals of freedom and social justice had been betrayed.¹ Fois’s historical crime series is set on the island of Sardinia and returns to the origins of still unsolved issues related to the relationship between central and regional powers, and North and South of Italy, which the political success of separatist parties in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s brought to the surface.² The detective, lawyer and poet Sebastiano Satta (who in the novel is addressed with the Sardinian name Bustianu)³ investigates cases of innocent people wrongly accused of crimes by a repressive and authoritarian State. Fois’s crime stories thus vividly show the “colonial” attitude that characterises the annexation of Sardinia and the South of Italy. By tackling Sardinia’s troubled relationship with the mainland, Fois underlines ongoing weaknesses in contemporary Italy: the North-South divide; social inequalities; and corruption. In this way, Fois’s crime story becomes a powerful “historytelling” of the elusive Italian national identity.

Before analysing the book, it is important to discuss briefly how crime fiction in particular relates to history. Robin W. Winks and Carlo Ginzburg draw a parallel between the works of a historian and of a detective.⁴ According to these scholars, both collect,

interpret and then explain their evidence in order to find the truth. Their search becomes an investigation into society at large and their digging into the past often gives light to the present. A crime story is therefore a particularly suitable medium to tell history with a perspective that Luther Blisset/Wu Ming (a collective of Italian artists and novelists) would define as hypocaliptic: that means a micro story that illustrates a macro story or history.⁵ As Ray B. Browne, Lawrence A. Kreiser and Robin W. Winks put it, historical crime fiction can “register the action of the people of the past recording how they influenced, for both good and bad, their future—and our present.”⁶

As mentioned, Marcello Fois’s crime series is particularly interesting because it takes place in the aftermath of the Risorgimento at the heart of the foundation of the Italian State. One of the most debated topics in Italian politics and society in the last few years has been the rise of secessionist and xenophobic political parties, such as the Northern League, and which have long advocated the separation between the North and the South of Italy. As Anna Cento Bull argues, nowadays the success of new political sub-cultures unveiled the persisting weakness of the concept of national state as it was created through the Italian Unification.⁷

As mentioned, the centralisation of power following the Risorgimento generated deep resentment especially in the South of Italy and on the Italian islands. The new Italian state disregarded regional, cultural and economic differences and imposed—not negotiated—new laws. These issues have long been neglected or hidden in the official history of Italy, which focussed on the rhetoric of patriotism and nationalism and the glorious birth of a nation. Literature has appropriated the topic of Risorgimento from a critical point of view, expressing the voice of the oppressed and delivering a counter-history of this crucial historical period.⁸ In more recent times, crime fiction has also tackled this sensitive topic spurred, I argue, by the rise of secessionist and xenophobic parties, such as the Northern League. In dealing with this sensitive issue, Italian crime fiction carries on its tradition of political and social commitment.⁹ Several crime writers, such as Andrea Camilleri (b. 1925), Lorianò Macchiavelli (b. 1934), Piero Soria (b. 1944), Massimo Siviero (b. 1942) and Giorgio Todde (b. 1951) engaged with the Risorgimento highlighting the crimes performed by the central Government.¹⁰ Among the authors dealing with the Risorgimento, Marcello Fois is particular relevant because not only does he stress the distortion of a less-than-perfect Unification of Italy, but he also engages in a complex discourse on Italian identity.

This paper focuses on the first book of Marcello Fois's series, *Sempre caro* (1998, translated as *The Advocate*, 2004), which was published in a period when the issue of secession was a hot political topic, and deals with the (still persisting) weakness of the concept of national statehood as it was created through the Italian Unification.

Marcello Fois was born in Nuoro in Sardinia in 1960 but lives in Bologna. He is a writer, a playwright and a screenwriter. He has won several literary prizes, such as the prestigious Calvino and Grinzane Cavour Prizes. Most of his books have been translated into other languages, including English. In 1990, he joined the Gruppo 13, a literary association that aims at promoting the culture of crime fiction in Italy. He is mostly known for a trilogy of detective novels set in contemporary Sardinia and for his historical detective stories set on the island in the nineteenth century, with poet-lawyer-detective Sebastiano Satta as the main protagonist.

The Advocate is the first book of a trilogy, which also includes *Sangue dal cielo* (1999) and *L'altro mondo* (2002).¹¹ It is a very interesting series, characterised by a poetic and evocative style and the use of the local dialect. The stories are also told through different points of view, adding complexity to the storytelling. In *The Advocate*, a prosperous farmer is shot dead in his olive grove and the man's hired hand, a young man called Zenobi, is found guilty in absentia. Zenobi has gone to ground earlier after being wrongly accused of stealing from his master's flock. The young man is now a bandit with a price on his head. Only Zenobi's mother is convinced that his son has been framed, but nobody wants to help her, except lawyer Sebastiano Satta who starts investigating the case.

This story is a classic detective fiction with a crime and investigation, several clues scattered along the story and a final and positive resolution of the case thanks to the acumen and perseverance of the detective. As Giuliana Pias has demonstrated, it is also an historical novel.¹² First of all, because the action takes place in a real Sardinian town, Nuoro, which is widely and realistically described throughout the book. Second, several characters are historical figures, or people who really existed at the time, first and foremost the detective protagonist Sebastiano Satta. Most importantly, the novel reflects real issues of the time, especially the troubled relationship between the central Government and local culture and people, characterised by hostility and prejudices. In the novel, the cultural and political clash is mainly represented through the relations between three key

characters of the story who also represent three key roles in a crime story: the (supposed) villain—in this case Zenobi—the policeman, Staff Sergeant Poli, and the lawyer-cum-detective Satta.

Zenobi is poor, uneducated and incapable of defending himself. Most people know he is innocent, but nobody does anything for fear of retaliation. The old Sardinian social and economic system that sees a poor population in the hands of a few powerful landowners fails Zenobi, but the new Italian State also fails him, as accepts the status quo and is not interested in delivering justice. Zenobi ends up being a bandit:

The more time passed the higher rose the price on Zanobi's head. He was seen everywhere. If you believed all the rumours he was a member of every gang of bandits, even the worse of them. On occasions he had been sighted in two different places at once. Like Billy the Kid. The pretty boy of Nuoro, the legendary brigand, angelic to look and pitiless at heart. [...] They said that with his infallible aim he had done to death at least ten people without even been seen.¹³

Zenobi as a bandit mirrors the destiny of several young Sardinians forced by poverty to become outlaws. The new Italian government never effectively addressed the issue of the unequal distribution of wealth and social injustice, worsening the phenomenon of brigandage already present on the island. As a response to brigandage, Rome promulgated new repressive laws that allowed an extreme use of force and arbitrary arrests, causing wide discontent among the population.¹⁴ “[P]itiless at heart” Zenobi also symbolises the prejudices the rest of Italy held against Sardinians, synthesised in so-called scientific papers of the time that claimed the existence of a hereditary genetic disease that inevitably turned all Sardinians into criminals.¹⁵

The cultural misunderstandings between representatives of the central government and local Sardinians and the expectation that a sense of national identity can be imposed from above are shown to have tragic and ongoing consequences in the novel. Staff Sergeant Poli, the Nuoro representative of the government, embodies the Italian central power that expects everybody to conform to new rules, regardless of regional differences:

“By making distinctions, as you put it, one runs the risk of finding oneself up a gum tree. People here have to understand that if they go along with these scoundrels they have put themselves on the wrong side of the law. They must

understand that they are now part of a nation, they are Italians, in short that they are not the only pebbles on the beach.”

“And who tells them so? The Piedmontese army? Or the king’s royal tax-collectors?” Bustianu [Satta]’s questions hung in the air of the salon of Café Tettamanzi. (Fois, *The Advocate* 40)

Satta believes that this attitude of imposing (as epitomised in the expression “they must understand”) instead of negotiating is also the consequence of prejudice against Sardinia, which is seen as different from the rest of Italy, as he points out to Poli:

“Exploiting hunger and insecurity to sway the people cannot lead to any lasting results. None of them are. Take your own case, Sergeant. When you opened the letter posting you to this place stuck out in the middle of the sea didn’t you think: “What have I done? Why are they punishing me? Why are they packing me off to live among savages? You see what a long way we have to go? We are not just any old citizens, we are not Italians like the rest of you. We are beasts of burden and dogs of war.”

“You tell me this...”

“But have you any idea what this place was like? And these people? How can one expect them to understand if no-one explains?” (Fois, *The Advocate* 42)

Between the young bandit Zanobi and the man of law and order Poli, lawyer Satta stands in the middle. He is well educated and has spent many years on the mainland before coming back home. The people in his town consider him eccentric for his habit of taking long walks in the summer heat and his inclination to defend poor people without asking for money. He is able to mix with different social classes and environments, a trait typical of detectives in crime fiction.¹⁶ Being now “a mainlander living on an island” (Fois, *The Advocate* 36), as he defines himself, he is also able to analyse the historical juncture in which the new Italian state stands. He can detect the ultra-conservatism of the Sardinian landowners, who opposed any change; but, and above all, he can detect the “colonial” attitude that characterises the annexation of Sardinia and the South of Italy. Indeed, several studies of the time show that the intellectual élite from the North of Italy considered the South and the islands as Africa, an area to be conquered and exploited, not to be understood. As Nelson Moe explains, following the annexation of Southern Italy into the new Italian nation, these élites wrote

elaborate essays on an area that most of them had never visited. These studies, which expressed colonial and denigrating points of view, produced stereotypes that continue to influence contemporary Italian society.¹⁷ Consequently, as Paolo Bagnoli puts it, the birth of the Kingdom of Italy did not bring with it an Italian identity of shared values and mentality,¹⁸ but only shaped an “identità melliflua” (mellifluous identity).¹⁹

Questions of national and regional identity are present in most of Fois's books. As Margherita Marras points out, there is a common thread between Fois's crime series set in nineteenth century Sardinia and his contemporary crime trilogy written between 1992 and 2001.²⁰ Indeed, through detective fiction Fois seems to write a history of Sardinian identity: in the historical series, as mentioned, the main topic is the colonial nature of the relations between Sardinia and the mainland, while in the contemporary series he gives an account of new forms of dependency caused by active participation in a corrupt political and economic system. Particularly interesting is a passage in *Dura madre* [A Hard Mother] (2001), the third book of Fois's series set in contemporary Sardinia, where the author comes back to the Risorgimento.²¹ Commenting on a fraud against the European Union, Sardinian warrant-officer Pili tells Inspector Sanuti from Rimini, in the North of Italy, an invented episode of Savoy Prince Carlo Alberto's historic visit to the island in 1829. He tells his colleague that the Sardinians presented the prince with a dwarf. In the following chapter the narrator comes back to this episode and comments:

We presented him with a dwarf, and we sneered at ourselves as our worst enemy would have done. They always treated us like dwarves. And we let them treat us like dwarves. When they wanted to treat us as human beings, we rebelled. We only fought to keep our status of dwarves. We begged for alms. We pretended to be shepherds to get a pension. We built monstrosities with regional funds. We were dwarves with the souls of dwarves. With our precarious pride and jealousy for whoever is not a dwarf. [...] This is our disease: seeing ourselves as dwarves even when we are giants (Fois, *Dura madre* 191).²²

While detecting the colonialist nature of the Savoy rule (“[they] treated us like dwarves”), the narrator does not hide responsibilities of the Sardinians, in terms of subservience and bribery (“we let them treat us like dwarves”), vividly illustrating the limits of a

mellifluous Italian identity. However, through his historical and contemporary crime stories Fois goes beyond the representation of a “perverse” unification of Italy providing a possible solution. He suggests a profitable dialogue between different cultures. This is symbolised by the clash of cultures—that evolves into an exchange of ideas and finally becomes collaboration—between the investigator Satta and the policeman Poli in *The Advocate*, and between Northern Inspector Sanuti and Sardinian warrant-officer Pili and Judge Corona in *Dura Madre*. He also advocates for an Italian identity in flux, respectful of diversities. This concept appears for the first time in *The Advocate* in the words of Satta:

“It may surprise you to know that a fixed identity, an idea you seem to attribute to me, is in my view an aberration. I believe in a provisional identity, one in a state of flux, that finds in itself the mechanisms to prevent its being erased altogether ...”(Fois, *The Advocate* 79)

Satta decides to save Zenobi (and symbolically with him Sardinia) from his past of oppression and his present of colonialism and prejudices. He saves him because the young man embodies this identity in flux. With it, he also embodies the future of Sardinia, a future that Satta hopes will see a new Italian identity emerging from mutual understanding that still preserves regional identities and cultures. Satta realises this while observing a revealing photograph of Zenobi:

...he [Zenobi] is not wearing full local costume. From the waist down he is dressed like a middle-class country gentleman, his muscular legs clad in a pair of continental-style trousers, his calves enclosed in leggings fastened with straps. This mixture of dress has a strange effect on me. But it marks him out as a man divided, half in half out, half Sardinian and half mainlander. That's it—split between tradition and the future. Not like me, who have seldom worn Sardinian costume. Who am what I have become: middle class, a graduate, a mainlander living on an island. Because I have crossed the sea, I have! And read books, perhaps too many. I have made a choice. Not so Zenobi. Who nevertheless wears drainpipe trousers such as in the fashion and sold by tailors to the gentry. This perplexes me. Maybe he has picked up a message that I have missed. A message that gets across to the younger generations in spite of all. Despite the silence imposed by an overwhelming past, the very myth of its own

self. Despite the shackles, despite the isolation of being ... an islander. (Fois, *The Advocate*, 36–7)

Wearing a traditional local shirt with “continental” trousers, Zenobi fulfils what Satta cannot accomplish, what seargent Poli cannot understand and what the Sardinian landowners oppose. He embodies a new Sardinia and a new Italy which embraces different cultures and crosses social classes. In this sense Zenobi echoes historian Luciano Carta’s argument that the coexistence of old and new, of tradition and the opening towards the outside world was fertile ground where the idea of Sardinia was born,²³ as opposed to the famous “costante resistenziale sarda” [Sardinian resistance trait] formulated by Giovanni Lilliu.²⁴ This identity in flux is Fois’s proposition for an inclusive national identity and his personal antidote against the political agenda of xenophobic and secessionist parties at a crucial juncture of contemporary Italian history.

In conclusion, by highlighting a troubled relationship with the mainland, political, social and economic problems and cultural misunderstanding, Fois goes back to the causes of some persisting weaknesses in contemporary Italy, in terms of the North-South divide, social inequalities and political corruption. In Browne, Kreiser and Winks’s words he, like a historian, “registers the action of the people of the past recording how they influenced, for both good and bad, their future—and our present” (xiv). In the final analysis, Fois’s storytelling becomes a vivid history-telling of a still-fragile Italian identity.

NOTES

¹ For a detailed history of the Risorgimento and the relation between the North and the South of Italy, see Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); *Italy from Risorgimento to Fascism*, ed. A. W. Salomone (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1971); and *Italy’s Southern Question*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

² Lega Nord (Northern League), whose complete name is Lega Nord per l’indipendenza della Padania (Northern League for the Independence of Padania), is a federalist and regional political party in Italy founded in 1991 as a federation of several regional parties of Northern and Central Italy, most of which had arisen and expanded their share of the electorate over the 1980s. Its political program advocates the transformation of Italy into a federal state, fiscal federalism and greater regional autonomy. Its original political agenda advocated secession of the North, which it calls Padania,

- while, more recently, it has assumed a very strong anti-immigration stance. In alliance with Silvio Berlusconi's People of Freedom, Lega Nord has been in power in 1994, 2001–2006 and from 2008 to 2011. A useful history of the Lega Nord and analysis of its political agenda can be found in Adalberto Signore and Alessandro Trocino, *Razzia Padana* (Milan: BUR, 2008), 224–41.
- ³ Sebastiano Satta (1867–1914) was a Sardinian lawyer, poet and journalist. He is famous for his collections of poems, among which *Versi ribelli* [Rebel Verses] (Sassari: Gallizzi, 1893) and *Canti barbaricini* [Barbagia's Poems] (Cagliari: Nuraghe, 1910).
 - ⁴ *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Carlo Ginzburg, "Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario," in *Crisi della ragione*, ed. Aldo Gargani (Turin: Einaudi), 57–106.
 - ⁵ See Luther Blisset/Wu Ming, *Q* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999) as an example of a micro story that illustrates a macro story.
 - ⁶ Ray B. Browne, Lawrence A. Kreiser Jr. and Robin W. Winks, *The Detective as Historian: History and Art in Historical Crime Fiction*, Vol II (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), xiv.
 - ⁷ Anna Cento Bull, "Challenging the Nation State: the Northern League between Localism and Globalism" in *The Politics of Italian Identity*, ed. Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 11.
 - ⁸ Among other Italian writers, Arrigo (1843–1918) and Camillo Boito (1836–1914), Emilio Praga (1839–1875), Giuseppe Rovani (1818–1874), Federico De Roberto (1861–1927), Giovanni Verga (1840–1922) and Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) had the merit of delivering an alternative history of the Risorgimento in their books. More recent writers, such as Emilio Tadini (1927–2002), Luciano Bianciardi (1922–1971), Anna Banti (1895–1985) Antonio Tabucchi (1943), Vincenzo Consolo (1933), Gesualdo Bufalino (1920–1996), Raffaele Nigro (1947) and Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (1946), have used this historical setting to investigate some evils of Italy's contemporary history.
 - ⁹ Several scholars argues that Italian crime fiction is notable for its investigation into Italian politics and society. See Ernest Mandel, *Delitti per diletto. Storia sociale del romanzo poliziesco* (Milan: Marco Tropea, 1997), 181–85. See also Giuseppe Petronio, *Sulle tracce del giallo* (Roma: Gamberetti Editrice, 2000), 118; and Massimo A. Bonfantini, "Il nero senza paura" in *Quattro lezioni dal giallo al noir*, ed. Massimo A. Bonfantini and Carlo Oliva (Bormio: Sistema bibliotecario Alta Valtellina, 2005), 61–77.
 - ¹⁰ See in particular Lorian Macchiavelli's *La balla dalle scarpe di ferro* [The Bale with the Iron Shoes] (Milan: Rizzoli, 1983); Andrea Camilleri's *La stagione della caccia* [Hunting Season] (Palermo: Sellerio, 1992), *Il*

- birraio di Preston* [The Preston's Brewer] (Palermo: Sellerio, 1995), *Un filo di fumo* [A Wisp of Smoke] (Palermo: Sellerio, 1997), *La concessione del telefono* [The Granting of the Phone] (Palermo: Sellerio, 1998), *La mossa del cavallo* [The Move of the Horse] (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999) and *La scomparsa di Patò* [The Disappearance of Patò] (Milan: Mondadori, 2000); Giorgio 'Todde's *Lo stato delle anime* [The State of Souls] (Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2001), *Paura e carne* [Flesh and Fear] (Milan: Frassinelli, 2003), *L'occhiata letale* [Lethal Gaze] (Milan: Frassinelli, 2004) and *Quale amor non cambia* [What love does not change] (Milan: Frassinelli, 2003); and Piero Soria's *La primula di Cavour* [Cavour's Primrose] (Milan: Mondadori, 2002).
- ¹¹ Marcello Fois, *Sangue dal cielo* (Milan: Frassinelli, 1999), translated as *Blood from the Skies* (London: Vintage, 2010); and Marcello Fois, *L'altro mondo* [The Other World] (2002).
 - ¹² Giuliana Pias, "La Sardegna 'nuorese' à la fin du XIX siècle. Marcello Fois *Sempre caro*, *Sangue dal cielo*, *L'altro mondo*," *Cahiers d'études romanes* 15 (2005): 527–41.
 - ¹³ Marcello Fois, *The Advocate* (London: Vintage, 2004), 82–3.
 - ¹⁴ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy. 1871 to the Present* (London: Pearson Longman, 2008), 84–88.
 - ¹⁵ In particular Alfredo Niceforo (1876–1970) was an Italian sociologist, criminologist and statistician who, under the influence of criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), argued that Sardinians were criminals by nature. See Alfredo Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna* (Palermo: Sandron, 1897).
 - ¹⁶ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature. An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 84.
 - ¹⁷ Nelson Moe, "'This is Africa': Ruling and representing Southern Italy, 1860–1861," in *Making and Remaking Italy. The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 119–53.
 - ¹⁸ Paolo Bagnoli, *L'idea dell'Italia. 1815–1861* (Bologna: Diabasis, 2007), 17.
 - ¹⁹ Giorgio Rumi, "Ma lo storico non è buonista né giustiziere," *Il Corriere della sera* 6 October (2004), 37.
 - ²⁰ Margherita Marras, "Connessioni e rilettura delle dinamiche politiche nazionali e regionali nell'opera di Marcello Fois," *Narrativa* 29 (2007): 81–94.
 - ²¹ Marcello Fois, *Dura madre* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).
 - ²² *Dura madre* has not been translated into English. This translation is mine.
 - ²³ Luciano Carta, "Storia e identità," in *Radici e ali: contenuti della formazione tra cultura locale e cultura globale*, ed. Gabriella Lanero and Cesira Vernaleone (Cagliari: CUECC/IRRE Sardegna, 2002), 185.

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- ²⁴ Giovanni Lilliu, *Costante resistenziale sarda* (Cagliari: Stab. Tipografico editoriale Fossataro, 1971). In this book, the historian argues that Sardinians kept their culture unchanged in time in spite of the numerous invasions from foreign countries.

NARRATING IN THE VOICE OF THE OTHER: HUBERT AQUIN AND J. M. COETZEE

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References to canonical texts of the West, combined with a sense of estrangement from the tradition they represent, are not infrequent in many literatures of the New World. Even more common, especially in colonial or postcolonial contexts, is the interplay of languages in writing, which presents the writer with an opportunity to exemplify and possibly untangle the complexity of his or her political situation. Both strategies feature prominently in the fiction of Hubert Aquin and J. M. Coetzee. My intention in this paper is to sketch a parallel reading of two of their novels, Aquin's *Trou de mémoire [Blackout]* (1968)¹ and Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990),² while focussing on the issue of the Other's voice in narratives.

The pairing of writers I am proposing here is certainly unusual: even readers familiar with both might not spontaneously think of considering them together. While Coetzee has been familiar to an international audience for about three decades, the same has not been true of Hubert Aquin. Aquin was born in Montreal in 1929 and committed suicide in 1977. While he is considered a major literary figure in Quebec, and while he is amongst the very few writers whose life story has been appropriated as a cultural myth, he is not widely known outside of French Canada, except by specialists of Francophone literature and, to a modest extent, by the English-Canadian reading public.³ Yet Aquin was a fascinating figure on many levels: as a television journalist, as a filmmaker, a public intellectual, a novelist, a publisher and even a would-be terrorist during the revolutionary Sixties. In fact, one might argue that Aquin's importance as a participant in Quebec's Quiet Revolution exceeded at times the recognition he earned as a writer, but he is nevertheless primarily remembered nowadays as a novelist. While

Aquin and Coetzee belong more or less to the same generation, Aquin, because of his untimely death, could not have been aware of Coetzee's career, and is unlikely to have heard even of his first novel, published in 1974.⁴ Coetzee, who doesn't have any connection with Quebec (at least that I am aware of), is equally unlikely to have come across Aquin's novels. Therefore, the comparison I intend to draw doesn't rest on any such factual grounding. Both writers are nevertheless similar in many ways and share many references. For instance, both are, to some extent, indebted to the aesthetics of modernism; both have demonstrated in their fiction a concern for the political which owes nothing to the Sartrean ethics of commitment; and, on a more anecdotal level, both have often thematised in their novels disturbing aspects of male sexuality.

I will use as a starting point the question famously asked by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the subaltern speak?⁵ Obviously, I can't address in this short paper the full range of issues raised by Spivak. My intention is to take her question literally and to frame it in narratological terms. In other words, to what extent can the Other be given a voice in fiction? Is it possible to narrate in the voice of the Other? As a matter of fact, the practice is hardly uncommon. Bakhtin's definition of the novel rests precisely on the intuition that the novel is nothing but the appropriation of the voice of the Other, its staging and refraction by the voice of the author. But Bakhtin was reflecting on the tradition of the Western novel. It goes without saying that the otherness he was referring to is the *Other within*: not a purely abstract and metaphysical Other (i.e. the Other as opposed to the Self), but the Other within the confines of European society, which is to be understood in terms of social class, religion or national identity. In other words, a manageable Other, that can be if not unproblematically, at least plausibly appropriated. Whatever distance existed between Self and Other, between the Author and his/her object, could be negotiated, measured, mapped out: in effect, this distance is precisely at the core of Bakhtin's understanding of the (Western) novel.

But would this understanding retain its validity when the Western author is confronted with the colonial Other? Is it still possible, in such a case, to make the Other speak? At the very least, one can say it *has* been attempted—but the implications are definitely murkier. The question is whether it can be achieved without reinforcing existing hegemonies, without in effect erasing the colonial subject by the very gesture that would be supposed to give him or her a voice.

This problem arises on many occasions in the fiction of both Coetzee and Aquin, and is in fact a recurring feature of their writing. Aquin started experimenting in this direction in his second published novel, *Trou de mémoire*, and continued doing so in his last two novels. In fact, he had himself noticed that *L'invention de la mort*⁶ (a posthumously published early novel) had been a failure in part because it was exclusively written from the perspective of the male protagonist, while the female protagonist had not been given any voice.⁷ *Trou de mémoire* goes to the extreme opposite: the novel comprises a succession of first-person narratives by a variety of characters, all of whom can be described as “Other” from the perspective of the mysterious main protagonist, a white male French Canadian pharmacist who is also a rapist and an assassin, and arguably a projection of Aquin’s self-image. One of the recurrent narrators is an English Canadian woman, while another is also a pharmacist from postcolonial Ivory Coast. (West Africa serves as a backdrop for an important section of the novel). The African pharmacist goes so far as to introduce himself explicitly as a double and polar opposite of the French Canadian protagonist. As for Coetzee, anyone familiar with his writing knows that he is fond of “impersonating” characters’ voices. *Summertime*,⁸ the latest volume of his decidedly anti-autobiographical memoirs, is composed of imagined interviews with people who seem to have been selected (or invented) for their particularly negative views of the supposedly dead author. There is, of course, a strong humorous side to this book, and it could be argued that the “voices” so recreated are nothing but playful variations of Coetzee’s own voice. The same thing could be said of *Diary of a Bad Year*⁹ and a few other texts; however, this playfulness has not always been present in Coetzee’s writing. I do not sense it at all in *Age of Iron*, for instance—which is a sombre story taking place in South Africa in the last days of *apartheid*, and is entirely written from the perspective of an elderly classics professor, Mrs Curren. In fact, the “Other” impersonated by Coetzee in his fiction is very often a female voice.

At this point, some distinctions should be emphasised. Because I took as a starting point Spivak and her notion of subalternity, it is important to keep in mind that Spivak herself has warned against considering the subaltern as co-extensive with the “Other,” even the “oppressed Other.” Subalternity to her doesn’t so much refer to domination as to a complete erasure, exclusion from representation and agency: the subaltern in Spivak’s writing is primarily the colonial Other. Very often it will also be a female

Other, but this does not entail that every instance of gender inequality falls under the scope of subalternity. Therefore, it is important to notice that Aquin and Coetzee diverge precisely in the way they deal with the colonial Other. Aquin, for instance, has no qualms both giving a voice to his Ivory Coast pharmacist and writing entire sections of the novel from his perspective. But then, Aquin was a French Canadian with limited knowledge of Africa. He had travelled there a few times as a journalist, and met with writers and political figures: yet, the African context was distant enough from his cultural experience that he could approach it without second thoughts, with naive enthusiasm. The naivety does show in the writing (the character's voice is not always believable), but at the very least Aquin's intentions were rooted in a consistent and theoretically informed understanding of the colonial phenomenon. French Canadian writers of the Sixties were well aware of the writings of Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Jacques Berque. In fact, there was a consensus at the time amongst writers of the Left to analyse the Québécois context as a colonial situation or at least to use colonialism as an analogy to describe it. Aquin's naivety has to be understood against this intellectual background. Of course, as a White South African, Coetzee could not have claimed this sort of innocence; however, his knowledge and understanding of Africa (or South Africa) are also considerably deeper, and more relevant.

One of the striking features of *Age of Iron* (but also of *Disgrace*) is how little the African characters speak.¹⁰ Not only are they not given a voice—they are given almost no lines of dialogue, and therefore come across as entirely opaque. The point is often reinforced by the story itself: for instance, in *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren has a telephone conversation with Mr Thabane, who is a mentor to young Bheki and his friend, both attracted to political activism. Mrs Curren makes a passionate and rhetorically elaborate plea against violence from her perspective of enlightened liberalism. Mr Thabane is unmoved: he is given a rare paragraph in direct speech to make a brief point, but the rest is cut short. Mrs Curren writes: "More passed between us, but I won't repeat it" (Coetzee, *Age of Iron* 150). After all, this is Mrs Curren's show, she is in control (at the very least as narrator). Hers is a rhetoric of expansion, almost of verbal flourish. Mr Thabane is a man of few words: earlier, Mrs Curren guesses he is a teacher because "he speaks so well" (Coetzee, *Age of Iron* 98) and his paragraph has perhaps more impact for being contrasted against the rambling discourse of the elderly academic; yet they do not cancel each other out. *Disgrace*

offers some other examples: David Lurie, the protagonist, well conversant with French, is unable to make any sense of African voices in Sotho and Xhosa on television.¹¹ And Petrus, Lucy's neighbour, is even more opaque to Lurie than Mr Thabane was to Mrs Curren. Spivak has commented on this point. To her, what is vital is the narratives counterfocalisation on both Petrus and Lucy which balances out Lurie's inability to relate to the colonial Other:

in the arrangement of counterfocalisation, within the validating institution of the novel in English, the second half of *Disgrace* makes the subaltern speak, but does not presume to give voice, either to Petrus or Lucy. This is not the novel's failure, but rather a politically fastidious awareness of the limits of its power.¹²

Aquin, as I said, doesn't display this sort of awareness. But that doesn't mean he is simply reproducing in his writing existing patterns of domination, or that the strategy behind his writing is entirely ineffectual. Positing from the outset the permeability of all voices, Aquin's fiction ends up undermining their very stability. All narrators in *Trou de mémoire* are at some point under suspicion of being impostors or impersonators, and for the reader the challenge is to anticipate who will be the last one to say "I" and therefore control the meaning of the entire story. (Such a solution is offered in the last section of the book, but it is not clear that it should be accepted at face value). One might be reminded here of *Pale Fire*,¹³ which appeared precisely as Aquin was attempting to formulate the concept of *Trou de mémoire*. (Aquin was excited but also disappointed that Nabokov took away the novelty of his idea).¹⁴ In any case, such challenges to the authority of the narrating subject are not without political implications. There is a radical edge to what Aquin is doing, but its effect is perceptible on a more abstract level: it is not rooted in any concrete situation, nor does it automatically lead to any political course of action. To borrow a phrase from Derrida (via Spivak), one might say he is "rendering *delirious* that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us."¹⁵

Thus, Aquin and Coetzee appear keenly aware of the context they are speaking from and eager to transcend its limitations. Fiction, to them, is a space where boundaries between voices can be tested, where the distinction between self and other is in question. In other words: a space where the political can be wrestled and experimented with.

NOTES

- 1 Hubert Aquin, *Trou de mémoire* (Montreal: Cercle du livre de France, 1968). In English: *Blackout*, trans. Alan Brown (Toronto: Anansi, 1974).
- 2 J. M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, 1990 (London: Penguin, 1998).
- 3 Hubert Aquin's first and most famous novel, *Prochain Épisode* [*Next Episode*], was featured in 2003 in a popular literary competition organised by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. This contributed to raise Aquin's profile in English Canada, but the effect seems to have been short-lived. Hubert, Aquin, *Prochain Épisode* (Montreal: Cercle du livre de France, 1965). In English: *Next Episode*, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: McClelland, 2001).
- 4 J. M. Coetzee, *Dusklands* (London: Secker, 1974).
- 5 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.
- 6 Hubert Aquin, *L'Invention de la mort* [*The Invention of Death*] (Montreal: Léméac, 1991). Not available in translation.
- 7 Hubert Aquin, *Journal. 1948–1971*, ed. Bernard Beugnot (Montreal: Bibliothèque québécoise, 1992), 244. (Entry dated 12 August 1962.)
- 8 J. M. Coetzee, *Summertime. Scenes from Provincial Life* (London: Harvill, 2009).
- 9 J. M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harvill, 2007).
- 10 In fact, the observation could be extended to many of Coetzee's novels. An extreme example is Cruso's slave Friday, in *Foe*, whose tongue has been cut off. J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 1986 (London: Penguin, 1987).
- 11 "He is sitting in the front room, watching soccer on television. . . . The commentary alternates between Sotho and Xhosa, languages of which he understands not a word." J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 1999 (London: Vintage, 2000), 75.
- 12 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," *Diacritics* 32.3–4 (2002): 17–31.
- 13 Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Putnam, 1962).
- 14 "26 octobre 1962. . . . Je suis deviance—et par celui qui, un été, m'a révélé l'efficacité de l'écriture verbigératrice pour rendre l'obsession sexuelle. Ce que j'imaginais en secret, et avec un sentiment certain d'être bien axé, voilà que j'en deviendrais en quelque sorte le plagiaire apparent" (Aquin, *Journal* 248). My translation: "26 October 1962. . . . I am outrun—and by him who, one summer, taught me the efficacy of verbigenerative [sic] writing in the rendering of sexual obsession. What I imagined in secrecy, secure in my feeling of being on the right track, I would now appear to have somehow plagiarised".

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- 15 Jacques Derrida, *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie*, 1983 (Paris: Galilée, 2005). In English: "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy," trans. John P. Leavey Jr, *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 25–72. I am using Spivak's translation of the passage ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 89), which is slightly different from Leavey's.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN HEALING, SOCIAL ACTION, AND CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION?

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In an age where national and international media and dominant cultures can easily drown out local elements, it becomes necessary to actively seek out the artistic traditions of a given region or locality in the hopes of establishing a social, political, and cultural balance. Knowledge, according to Richard J. Bernstein, stands caught between objectivism and relativism.¹ Objectivism assumes a firm foundation for knowledge; relativism, that there is none. He suggests that this false dichotomy exists because our approach to knowledge has been epistemological rather than hermeneutical (172). Where can we, as investigators of truth and constructors of reality, find balance between these two approaches? At its core, hermeneutics means interpretation. And the longest-standing, arguably most powerful vehicle for fostering interpretation, communication, and understanding, is the tradition of storytelling. Speaking of the “philosophical guidance we think of as knowledge and might once even have called wisdom,” Julie Cruikshank explains that:

Storytelling [...] is open-ended rather than didactic, allowing listeners to draw independent conclusions. Medieval storytellers recounted events without imposing interpretation [...] Stories allow listeners to embellish events, to reinterpret them, to mull over what they hear, and to learn something new each time, providing raw material for developing philosophy.²

In this paper, although I am concerned with the oral tradition of storytelling, it should be noted that storytelling takes place in most,

if not all, of the arts. Film, music, dance, and ceremonial objects all embody significance in narrative. Furthermore, the act of storytelling is not passive, but active: storytellers and listeners, as I will suggest, engage in constructive social action, community-building, cultural development, and healing when they connect with both sacred and personal stories. This action, troubled as it is by representations and interpretations of culture, across cultures, bolstered by the healing of peoples in the face of historical inequalities, dependent on a certain understanding between teller and listener, holds serious implications for the future.

Let me begin by considering storytelling as a constructive, collective act of understanding, healing, and, most especially, *creation*. In this context, storytelling becomes the social landscape where our reality is investigated, truths are formed, uncovered, or recovered, and the requisite adjustments of thought and action are framed, discussed, and decided on. As Lample states, “when consensus in a community breaks down, as in the case of questions of rightness or appropriateness, then this type of practical discourse is needed to re-establish the collective agreement upon which further action depends (172).” In the Nlakapamux oral traditions, *speta’kel* means creation stories, and *spilaxem* means personal narratives. These two kinds of storytelling are instrumental in answering the three questions: who are we, where do we come from, and where do we want to go? Storytelling is a tool that can provide the focus necessary to a community that desires change, or, more commonly, that has had change thrust upon it and is now searching for a way to carry itself whole through that change.

Healing and Identity

One major function of storytelling is its contribution to healing, in the context of the formation, recovery, or preservation of identity. The Pewenche people (People of the Pine) from the Andes Mountains of Southern Chile use storytelling as a way of preserving their culture in the face of hydro electricity developments, which are forcing them to move from their ancestral lands. In this situation, the Pewenche people are not included in the policy-making process of the Chilean government, and part of the reason they tell their stories is to raise awareness, a function of storytelling addressed in section two. However, they also use their stories as a method of healing from the pain of forced removal and the flooding of their land “by holding onto traditional sacred practices in which they tell themselves who they are, where they come from, and what is important.”³ The Pewenche actively fashion their

culture that, heretofore augmented and entwined with the lifestyle inspired by the physical landscape, now depends in part upon storytelling for its preservation.

In terms of the recovery of identity, a story from Louise Profeit-LeBlanc can illustrate better than anything else to power of storytelling. Profeit-LeBlanc, a presenter and organizer of the international Yukon Storytelling Festival, shares a story that is located in the ancestral home of her people, close to Mayo, in the Yukon: “there are three little lakes. [...] And the smallest little lake, it’s the center lake, they call it Asuah Mun, Old Woman Lake, and this is the story.”⁴ Profeit-LeBlanc goes on to relate the story of an old medicine woman who lived by the lake, and who had a little boy with her. As they walked by the lake one day, the little boy threw a stone into the lake, and a big fish came out and grabbed the boy away into the lake with him. The old woman found a way to bring the fish to the shore, and cut it open, only to find the skeleton of her son inside. She takes some moose skin, lays out the bones in the shape of a body, wraps it up, and then begins to sing:

They say this old woman, she never ate or slept for four days and four nights. She sang over her little boy’s bones. And they say on the fifth morning, that little boy came out. And the people of Mayo are this little boy’s descendants. And that’s one of the stories. So that’s how I look at us. We’re the bones. We have to sing. We have to cry. We have to realize that we’re going to put the flesh back on this skeleton, this framework of all of us as a human. And so there are all these little bits and pieces that come together for healing. (63–64)

In this story, the recovery of the boy can function as a metaphor for the recovery of cultural identity, represented by the old woman giving life to the young boy and all his descendants by singing over him.

This reclamation and recovery of self is represented as an intensely active process. In the same way, storytelling can function as an active, rather than a passive, process, which often takes place in the context of social or political hardship or injustice. As well, we can see from the nature of the story, that heritage, a mental imaging of a person’s *place* in the world, is also intimately linked to *space*: the boy’s descendants inherited the old woman’s determination to sing meaning into the world, but the story also explains how they came to be there, in that particular physical space, the land, which as Profeit-LeBlanc explains, ranges from “Beaver River, north and

south McQuestin, Bonneplume, up to Kwan Mun, up around to Frasier Falls way, up to Lansing, over to Ethel Lake [...] that was our playground” (63). In this sense, storytelling functions as a signal marker of a person or group’s place and space in the world. As many indigenous peoples are forced to leave their traditional space, storytelling becomes even more important, and by many is used as a tool for active social and political change.

Community and Social Action: Recovering and Preserving Space and Place

In order to function with fairness, the body politic must recognize and affirm the rights and the experience of its citizens by taking them into account in the formation of policy. (Leseho and Block 182)

Space can be defined as the physical landscape or area in any given location, but it can also mean the invisible space of self-determination: freedom of movement in the world of policy-making, political action, and autonomy. In the same way, *place* can be defined as a space which has been inscribed with specific meaning over time, through history and association. Place can also be given meaning by the “tangible and intangible property owned by the clan: songs, stories, artistic designs, personal names, and land” (Cruikshank 60). In this sense, both space and place play an important role in modern storytellers’ agendas for their communities’ social action initiatives.

Many indigenous groups, over thousands of years, have inscribed meaning into the physical landscape, transforming *space* into *place*, linking the land to their customs and lifestyles in intimate ways. One example of this process, as already mentioned, is the Pewenche people. Another example is the self-defined group of Mexican-American “Chicanos,” who reclaimed a previously derogatory term and used it to describe themselves and their attempts to gain recognition during the 1960s. One story, about the region of Northern Mexico and the Southern United States, describes the ancestral land of the Aztecs known as “Aztlán,” which though originally may have also referred to paradise, came to represent a physical space connected to the history of the Chicano peoples. For many peoples who no longer possess defined boundaries of physical space, the stories about land inspire various groups to preserve and actively defend their languages, customs, and political rights: “[t]he story has helped to ignite the desire of

recovery, a belief that preserving cultural, political, and economic self-determination can only be achieved through the control of the spaces Chicanos occupy.”⁵ As well, let us recall that control of space applies to physical land and resources, but also to political rights, inclusion in government policy-making processes, and similar kinds of invisible space. This process of storytelling connects people to a sense of place, and assists in the active preservation of the culture and those spaces upon which it inscribes meaning, especially in terms of active involvement in present-day policy-making.

As Julie Cruikshank points out, the choices facing groups who wish to establish their autonomy are difficult. In the case of indigenous groups in the Yukon, should they “work within terms of the dominant society, using the language of policy making that increasingly dominates public transactions between indigenous Yukoners and non-Natives, or [should they] reject those terms and insist on asserting positions using their own paradigms” (58)? It is a question that may be answered differently by different groups, or even within the same group. One example of the two different approaches can be found in comparing presentations of various indigenous storytellers at the international Yukon Storytelling Festival.

Jessie Scarff’s presentation dealt explicitly with land-claims issues.⁶ She distributed and read out copies of government letters between 1915–1960, outlining systematic attempts to displace First Nations peoples who lived near the banks of the Yukon River. As a Kwanlin Dan elder, she recalled stories from her childhood relating to the space around the Yukon River. By 1994, as land-claims issues began to be processed and settled in the Yukon, the Kwanlin Dan First Nation were concerned that the government would leave their land-claim until the end, as it was very complex, since the contested area was used by a variety of people and institutions, unlike some other First Nations claims areas. As well, Cruikshank points out that land-claims of different First Nations groups would inevitably overlap, making the settlement process even more difficult (63). As a result of this explicit storytelling, which was a conscious community-focused effort for social action, newspapers and radios in the region interviewed several Kwanlin Dan people about their claim to space and place. Although members of other First Nation groups in the audience debated on the validity of Jessie Scarff’s claims, most non-First Nations members, according to Cruikshank, were disturbed by the overtly political tone of a presentation that to them, should have followed the conventional

form of storytelling (63). Here we find contrasts between the teller and the listener, their expectations, motivations, and interpretations, which brings us to a discussion of issues involved in the cross-cultural interactions of storytelling, and the controversies and troubling questions engendered by an active representation of culture in such a context.

Issues in Representation: Listeners and Tellers

Representations of culture, such as storytelling, can be useful, in that they may celebrate elements of that culture, but they can also lead to the stereotyping, and in some cases, the petrifying of culture as well. A large part of the impact of storytelling, for example, depends not just upon the motives and perspective of the teller, but also on the listeners, the audience: “audiences participate by inscribing meaning on what they see and hear” (Cruikshank 65). Many forms of indigenous storytelling in particular assume some kind of relationship between the teller and listener (Cruikshank 59), and although tellers can attempt to establish this connection with any audience, these conditions are not always met at larger events or events outside of the local scope, such as the Yukon Festival. The Yukon Storytelling Festival is a good example of an audience composed of international Aboriginal guests, indigenous Yukoners, tourists, and non-Native Yukoners (Cruikshank 65). As such, the teller may have to accept that in their telling, some subtleties related to prior knowledge may be lost on those who have no strong connection to them; some tellers choose to abridge or adjust their stories depending on the composition of the listeners, and some may not. The result of Jessie Scarff’s presentation, for instance, “violated shared perceptions of some audience members about the kind of storytelling appropriate at a cultural festival” (Cruikshank 63). Perhaps this attitude, that storytelling, and indeed, all tangible or intangible forms of culture, should follow certain patterns of presentation, rises from what Bakhtin terms the “aesthetic architectonic.”

In his book, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin defines the two worlds that exist at the point of any act, deed, or performance. First, there is the actual world of the performed deed, and second, there is the intangible world of interpretation and meaning ascribed onto the performed act or deed, which we can relate to the world of culture. The first world he refers to as “Being-as-event,” that is, the moment of the event, everything which is part of that event, all exist in that moment as a unified whole. The second world is the world of the “aesthetic architectonic,” the world of the onlooker,

audience member, or viewer who is not directly involved in the deed or act. Of this second world Bakhtin states that “aesthetic activity is a participation of a special, *objectified* kind; from within an aesthetic architectonic there *is* no way out into the world of the performer of deeds, for he is located outside the field of objectified aesthetic seeing.”⁷⁷ According to his definition, then, aesthetic contemplation objectifies the act or deed, and one cannot understand it fully if one is simply an onlooker. When we apply this idea to the act of sharing culture through storytelling, it becomes very easy to see where the concerns about stereotyping and petrification come in, and why the audience at Jessie Scarff’s recital were so disturbed; they expected a different kind of story, a story which did not explicitly state any objective other than the sharing of a traditional tale: to go further, they did not accept the story because it was not delivered to them in the expected form. In fact, this tension comes from the audience’s expectation that their role is grounded in the aesthetic architectonic rather than the world of Being-as-event. As Bakhtin states, “to contemplate aesthetically means to refer an object to the valuative plane of the *other*” (75).

This “contraposition of *I* and the *other*” (74), which Bakhtin insists is valid even in the world of the performed deed itself, represents both the space of tension and connection in terms of cross-cultural communication. Some tensions surrounding storytelling as a cultural act are that one teller may tell a story in different ways at different times; unless it is a sacred story, the story can change each time, it is not static. With listeners grounded in the aesthetic architectonic, the danger of “essentializing” the voice of that culture increases, and listeners may expect “all people from one community to say the same thing”. What makes one storyteller more “authentic” than another? The creation of a distinct cultural voice is overcast with worries about a kind of cultural typecasting. As Cruikshank states, the stakes become very high for indigenous groups working in the field of social action previously mentioned; for their interactions with government and society, a distinct culture can become “a marker of authenticity in political negotiations” towards self-determination (Cruikshank 65), but it can also become a barrier to fluidity, change, multiple representations and individual interpretations. How does a listener enter the world of the teller and create a space of connection rather than a space of tension? According to Bakhtin, the shift from tension to connection is simple: one must actively participate in the world of the deed rather than sitting on the outskirts, in the world of the aesthetic architectonic. He terms this state one’s “answerable

participation” (18). This answerable participation implies accountability and responsibility on the part of the listener as well. Listeners become active witnesses to the story.

For example, the Ilianen Manobo storytellers, indigenous to the Philippines, begin a story, and as it progresses, the audience calls out, commenting on key points. This “call-and-response” serves to underscore the cultural values of the story, but it also allows the listeners to actively enter the world of the performed act. In a story with one rude sister and one polite sister, the audience will call out: “Na inteng kew ve! Layun ma imbe menanew sikandin! (Now just look at that! She’s always so polite!).”⁸ A teller may choose strategic moments in the story to shift from the third person pronoun (she or he) to the more direct “you”: thus at a point of action, instead of the polite sister receiving a bag of grain, “*you* [the listeners] receive a bag of grain” (Wrigglesworth 45, 46). It is upon this theory of active connection on the part of both teller and listener giving birth to a third space, a space of cultural, community, and individual reflexivity, that the Playback Theatre attempts to function.

Playback Theatre attempts to address some of the tensions inherent in the form of storytelling by examining the intention for diversity and inclusive practice “that makes community-based storytelling and performance political in nature, raising questions about social location, control, authority, and authenticity. [...] Who performs, whose material is performed, and who decides?”⁹ One issue with storytelling and the preservation of culture is the danger that we will simply be told what our traditions are, “and come to know ourselves through mass-mediated and manipulated stories” (qtd. in Dennis 184), rather than examining them for ourselves. Playback Theatre’s focus on community-based performance recognizes the potential in local narratives; it creates “a space where we might encounter ourselves and The Other outside the protocols of everyday life, and in this encounter, see ourselves and our interactions between and with The Other in a way that is removed and with the potential for insight” (Dennis 191). In Playback Theatre’s approach to storytelling, this reflection leads to an “ethics of recollection” (Dennis 191), where the teller takes part in Bakhtin’s answerable deed, which allows tellers and listeners to face “positions that might challenge and interrogate [their] own location[s]” (Dennis 190). In this way, Playback Theatre attempts to create a community-based reflexive space, “a shifting ground” (Dennis 189) where dominant paradigms can be challenged and reconstructed, and new interpretations of culture can be created.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the listener has to make an active choice to join the teller in the world of the performed deed. Storytelling contributes to healing and the formation of identity by the active acknowledgment of voice; to social action initiatives by creating space and place; to cultural exchange by involving both teller and listener, if willing, into Bakhtin's world of the performed deed, gathering the 'I' and 'Other' into one unique moment where it is possible to step outside boundaries into the unity of Being. When applied appropriately, it creates a reflexive space where individuals and communities can consciously and systematically investigate and re-construct their realities. Stories can challenge dominant narratives, and for those who are comfortable with dominant narratives, this can be a threatening process. However, the reflexive space created by storytelling does not necessarily discount a dominant narrative's value, just as a personal narrative does not nullify the value of a sacred story, or an individual experience threaten the experience of the community. Rather, the reflexive space allows for that multiplicity of voices and expression which embraces a relativist approach to truth, while grounding participants in the objectivist reality of their individual and group starting-points. This balance between objectivism and relativism is made possible through storytelling: identity and culture become at once fixed and fluid, like "a raft on the water" (Lample 173).

NOTES

- ¹ Richard J. Bernstein, qtd. by Paul Lample, *Revelation & Social Reality*, (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications, 2009), 172.
- ² Julie Cruikshank, "Negotiating with Narrative: Establishing Cultural Identity at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival," *American Anthropologist* 99 (1997): 56–69.
- ³ Joanna Leseho and Laurie Block, "Listen and I tell you something: Storytelling and Social Action in the Healing of the Oppressed," *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 33 (2005): 175–84.
- ⁴ Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, "The Transformative Power of Story for Healing," *Arctic Anthropology* 40.2 (2003): 59–64.
- ⁵ Andres Peralta, "The Art of Storytelling: the Co-Construction of Cultural Knowledge," *Art Education* 63.2 (2010): 25–30.
- ⁶ See Cruikshank, "Negotiating with Narrative," 56–69.
- ⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, (Austin: Texas University Press, 1993), 73.

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- ⁸ Hazel J. Wigglesworth, "The Function of Ilianen Manobo Storytelling in the Preservation of Culture," *Oral and Written Narratives and Cultural Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 43–58.
- ⁹ Rea Dennis, "Your Story, My Story, Our Story: Playback Theatre, Cultural Production, and an Ethics of Listening," *Storytelling, Self, Society* 3.3 (2007): 183–94.

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE KING WHO DIED IN THE NIGHT: AN INSTRUCTIONAL STORY

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In Egypt, during the period known as the Middle Kingdom, (c.2040–1674 BC), a genre of writing emerged known as “instruction literature.” This style of didactic writing took the form of instructions given by a father to his son. The words of wisdom imparted revealed the concepts inherent in the Egyptian code for right behavior—Ma’at—the necessity to adhere to the virtues of truth, justice, kindness and generosity and abjure the vices of lying, deceit, greed and theft. These positive concepts needed to be actively realized by society if order was to be maintained in the world, and it was the responsibility of the king to exemplify these concepts and maintain societal order in the world’s natural tendency to chaos.

The previous times of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, c. 2700–2040 BC, had seen the genres of the prayer for offerings and the personal autobiography appear as inscriptional writings on tombs. The king himself had no such public autobiographical memorial. The inscriptions in his honour were spoken as utterances by the priests on behalf of a dead king and were intended to bring about a safe passage for the king to his place in the sky alongside his father Re. The text chosen for this paper, the *Instruction for King Amenemhat*, exemplifies the break away that occurred from these previous static textual forms to a written culture that could be disseminated. There is now a royal autobiographical element that was missing previously. King Amenemhat, the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty in c.1938 BC, is advising his successor, his son Sesostri. His words contain the description of his assassination, and this paper looks at the way in which the writing conveys its message by utilizing the scenario of a

king's fallibility in being unable to maintain order at a personal level, and allowing himself to be assassinated. The autobiographical style provides a more human, less idealized picture of a king as he instructs his son with a pessimism based on the story of his own experiences, combining the descriptive with the didactic.

Questions arise, however, regarding the king's death, due to ambiguities in language and translation. Did the assassination fail and the king is addressing his heir through a writing commissioned while he was alive? Or did the assassination succeed and the king is speaking, as it were, from "beyond the grave" through a writing commissioned possibly by his son?

In the opening lines the speaker provides advice related to the concepts of Ma'at/right behaviour, and the king's role in this regard. He addresses his son saying:

Listen to what I tell you,
that you may be king of the land... (1d) ¹
increase Good. (1e)

He advises him on how he should view his subjects and cautions him against being too trusting:

Be prudent concerning subjects who prove non-existent, (2a)
Do not trust in a brother! Do not know a friend! (2d)

Here a non-existent society represents the chaotic force of non-being set against the lone figure of the king. The king describes how he has attempted to fulfill his proscribed role of restoring order to this natural chaos of humanity as represented by negative individuals:

I gave to the beggar, I raised the orphan, (3c)
And I made the man who had not end up like someone who
had. (3d)

But the positive actions resulted in the antithesis of further chaotic negativity.

Who ate my food made complaint. (4a)
One to whom I gave my arms was creating fear there (4b)

After these opening injunctions, the king moves on to narrate the circumstances of the attack made against him. This would have

been an event in total contradiction to the belief in the divine king, and to the Egyptian concept of the divinity of their ruler. As the divinely appointed instigator of order in the societal structure, their king should have been able to successfully counteract such a threat. The king makes his apologia based on his human fallibility and weakness. The picture drawn is of a figure alone, lying in the dark, almost asleep, regretting his inability to take his weapons and fight off the attackers:

I awoke to fighting, (7a)
and I found it was an attack of the bodyguard. (7b)
If I had quickly taken weapons in my hand,
I would have made the back-turners retreat with a charge.
But no one is strong in the night; no one can fight alone...
(7e)

He continues with a further description of his solitary state addressed to his son:

Look, my passing happened when I was without you (8a)
For I was not prepared for it, I did not foresee it... (8d)

This solitariness is what has made him vulnerable. His position has been at the centre of society, now he seems “almost a social outcast because of his solitariness,” an antithesis to the “social solidarity” of Ma’at “to which individuals are integral, so that solitariness is generally viewed as a deficiency.”² His position in society should have been one of absolute power, and he searches for reasons to explain such a unique and unprecedented occurrence:

And my heart had not thought of the servants’ negligence. (8e)
Had women ever before commanded troops? (9a)
Are people of tumult ever brought up in the Residence? (9b)

His inclusion of women in the conspiracy symbolizes the extremity of the chaos that has overtaken the established social order, although the reference could be part of the overall rhetorical nature of the passage rather than the reality of a “harem conspiracy.”

He counterbalances this negativity by reflecting on what he had achieved by wielding such power, not in a detailed manner but in one reminiscent of the style of a funerary autobiography:

...my time was as a doer of valour (9f)
No one hungered in my years; no one thirsted then.

Men could relax through what I had done, and talked of me.
 (11d)
 I subjugated Nubians, and I captured Medjai. (12b)
 I made Asiatics do the dog-walk. (12c)

Now with his death he sees chaos returning:

... the children of the masses are in the street,
 the wise say “it is so”, the fool that “it is not”. (14a, b)

The “children of the masses” / *jw ms msyt ASat* are the general populace in confusion over the state of the succession, not knowing whether it is a fact or not. The phrase has also been rendered “much hatred”⁴ and “many lies,”⁵ following Helck who suggests that *msyt* should be read as *msD*. While these alternatives still suggest the chaos that needs to be overcome, *msyt* seems to fit better with the statement that follows regarding confusion over the succession.

In the climax to his instruction, he finally addresses his son by name, *s-n-wsrt Anx wDa snb sa,j* as the person who must assume the responsibility for society, assuage the doubts and return the land to an ordered state:

O Sesostri, live, prosper, be well, my son...
 You are wearing the White Crown due to the offspring of the
 god. (15c)

Additionally the fact that Sesostri's name is enclosed within a cartouche is suggestive of the status of Sesostri as king, and not as co-regent, that only now is he assuming kingly duties.

The question that arises is whether the king is dead or alive. Did the attackers succeed or not? Going back to the beginning of the Instruction the opening lines read:

Beginning of the teaching
 made by the Majesty of Upper and Lower Egypt Sehetepibre
 (1a)
 the Son of Re, Amenemhat, the justified... (1b)

The transliteration *maA-xrw* “justified,” literally translated “true of voice,” is recognized as a connotation for the deceased, possibly originating with the use of the expression in the “justification” of the god Osiris, the Egyptian ruler of the dead, before his tribunal in the Underworld when he pleaded the cause of his son Horus

against his brother Seth. It has also been suggested, however, based on interpretation of references in the Pyramid Text inscriptions of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty, that it is the designation of the *living* king.⁶ The two viewpoints immediately introduce this question of whether the king is alive or is, as it were, speaking after his death.

The following lines read

when he spoke in a revelation of truth
to his son, the Lord of All. (1c)

The words *m npt maAt* have been translated, as here, as the king speaking “in a revelation of truth”⁷ (Quirke 127, Lichtheim 136). They have also been translated as “in a revelation,” “in a dream,” “an account of the Truth” or “true facts.”⁸ The translation of the whole phrase as “dream” was an early interpretation. A more recent idea is that the writing represents poetry, “dream” being one of the essential elements used in defining this genre.⁹ “An account of the Truth” or “true facts” provides a simplistic translation. (Foster 36) The translation of *m npt maAt* as “in a revelation” (Parkinson, *Tale of Sinuhe* 206) is more specific. It shows a connotation of knowledge being revealed to men by a divine or supernatural agency, an implication of the unreality of the king’s presence, confirming that it is a dead person speaking. However “in a revelation of truth” (Quirke 127) gives an even deeper meaning. Adding the translation of *maAt* as “truth” indicates the social responsibility of the king to provide the example of right speech, and enforce *maAt* on earth.¹⁰ While *maAt* may have been overcome by the chaos of previous times it could return thanks to the assiduous work of the ruler.

However, Anthes argues that the words *m npt maAt* are being used in a legal fashion by Amenemhat to “determine the right” of his son Sesostri to the throne. He points to the verb *npti* being used in circumstances where its meaning can be rendered as “to determine.” His conclusion is that the phrase should read “[h]e spoke (thus) in determining the right for his son.”¹¹ He believes that this is not a posthumous document, but based on his translation Amenemhat’s own (living) statement of the legal enthronement of his son as co-regent (Anthes, *Original Meaning* 21–51).

Another component is thus the mystery of whether the king is alive or dead. He has addressed his son as “Lord of All,” a phrase suggesting Sesostri is already enthroned and the title is one that “presents him as the king in his most divine aspect” (Parkinson, *Tale of Sinuhe* 209, n.1). On the other hand, the expression has been

seen as indicating total supremacy when connected to divinities but rare when speaking of a king.¹² However a similar phrase is used by Amenemhat himself later in the text when he refers to the fact that he was “Lord of it, of All,” himself associating the words with kingship.

The *Instruction* continues:

He said “Appear as a god!
Listen to what I tell you,
that you may be king of the land, and rule the Two Banks, (1d)
increase Good. (1d)

𓂏𓂏 *m ntr*/ “Appear as a god”¹³ can be read either as Sesostri being addressed by the dead king as his successor and being told to appear on the throne with the duality of the Sun god or as the living king raising his son to the status of co-regent.¹⁴ The verb 𓂏𓂏 has been translated, as here, as an imperative “appear,” which raises this ambiguity of whether Sesostri is now the king or being assigned the role of co-regent. Alternatively it has been translated as a participle so that the line reads “he said, who has appeared as a god, Listen to what I tell you” referring to a *dead* king who himself is now a god (Foster 46), in which case Sesostri is being instructed as the new king. Again the mystery of whether the king is alive or dead.

Later in the text, when Amenemhat is describing the attack made against him, he says it was:

when the entourage had not yet heard that I would hand over
to you, (8a)
when I had not yet sat with you, that I might make plans for
you (8b)

One interpretation is that the attack took place earlier in the reign and the above lines are referring only to the instigation of a co-regency after a failed attempt on the king’s life. In this case, the attack on the king having been unsuccessful, he lived to commission the writing himself. In support of this premise Thériault questions the idea of his son Sesostri instigating the writing, surmising what his motivation could be (Thériault 151–60). From a propagandistic point of view, she notes that his name is hardly mentioned in the text, and focuses on the lack of eulogistic references in comparison to, for example, his Building Inscription in the Temple of Atum at Heliopolis. She concludes that the

“highly personal and autobiographical nature of the piece strongly suggests that Amenemhet was the commissioner of the writing”(Thériault 157). The unfulfilled meeting in which the king had intended to clarify Sesostri's position, when he was going to advise the entourage of his intention to hand over to his son, can be seen as an adjunct to the role of the king in maintaining established order. The fact of being the eldest son is seemingly not sufficient to assure Sesostri of an uncontested succession. There has to be an official designation of the heir to the throne before the court.

As mentioned in previous lines the king described how

my heart had begun to follow sleep.
When the weapons at my disposal were wielded...
I would have made the back-turners retreat with a charge

Anthes, as previously noted, believes that the epithet *maA-xrw* designates a living king, and additionally supports his argument here by offering a translation of the last line as “I turned back” rather than “would have turned back” the attackers. His turning of a conditional into a fulfilled action presupposes the Late Egyptian grammatical construction of a “particle which introduces an emphasis by anticipation” (Anthes, *Legal Aspect* 189 and note e). His conclusion is that “[a]ll the available evidence confirms that the Instruction represents a legal enthronement of Sesostri I as co-regent” (Anthes, *Legal Aspect* 190).

However, a Middle Kingdom narrative, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, tells of the hastening of Sesostri back to the royal Residence, seemingly occasioned by the need to assert his kingship after the untimely death of his father the king. The additional statement that appeared in the first introductory lines:

That you may be king of the land, and rule the Two Banks,
(1d)
increase the Good (1e)

appears as a further injunction that his son become king in his own right.

As mentioned previously, in the closing lines when he addresses his son by name, Sesostri's name is enclosed within a cartouche, a recognized portrayal within a text of confirmation of kingly status. He is also addressed as “you wearing the White Crown” (Quirke 129, Parkinson, *Tale of Sinuhe* 208), again an indication of

the status of Sesostris as king, and not as co-regent, that only now is he assuming kingly duties. (Foster 46):

Finally the king declares
 I have descended into the barque of the Sun God.
 (thus he is now with Re in the sky)
 Ascend to the kingship created aforetime (15c-h)

These are words appropriate to a deceased king instructing his living son to take on the role of his father.

There are thus two possible solutions to this “curious incident of the king who died in the night.” The speaker is the deceased king speaking in a “revelation of truth,” telling his son to rise up and become king in his place after a successful attack on his life at the end of his reign. This occurrence has happened before he could advise his entourage of his successor, Sesostris. The *Instruction* was therefore written after the king’s death and possibly commissioned by Sesostris as a means to ratify his succession.

Alternatively, the speaker is the living king and he is telling his son to rise up as co-regent. The attack he describes has been unsuccessful and took place before he had advised his entourage about his wish to make Sesostris joint ruler. The *Instruction* was therefore commissioned by Amenemhat himself to announce this and as a warning to his son to beware in the future. There is a reference to the king’s achievements in Nubia, mentioned earlier, which dates the writing to the end of the reign. The explanation offered for this anachronism is that the *Instruction* is an autobiographical piece from an aging king drawing on his past experiences as an example to his son as to what might occur when he takes on the kingship.

I feel that the attack was successful, that the king is dead, the victim of an attack at the end of his reign, and is, as it were, speaking after his death to ratify his son as his successor. The variances in translation and interpretation have raised the possible alternative that the assassination was unsuccessful, but they have not been definitive in establishing this. In both cases, the king, whether Amenemhat or Sesostris, would not have been the author of such an *Instruction*. Royal sanction would have been given to its writing and circulation, but from the creative point of view, royal iconography is not seen to contain allusion to a king’s writing. Therefore the text itself must be considered pseudepigraphic.

A possibility regarding the identity of its actual writer appears in a Ramesside manuscript of around 1200BC, Papyrus Chester Beatty

1V. In this passage “the scribe Akhthoy” (Khety) is named as recipient of offerings with the declaration:

It was he who made a book as the Instruction of King Set-epibre when he had gone to rest, joining heaven and entering among the lords of the necropolis.¹⁵

This question of authenticity arises from the modern perspective—the need to determine whether this is indeed a posthumous writing and to understand how correct it is from an historical point of view. It cannot be known whether the Middle Kingdom audience was concerned about whether the *Instruction* was commissioned by the living Amenemhat himself or by Sesostriis after the king’s death. The message they were receiving fulfilled a dual purpose. It was both a memorial to Amenemhat and a ratification of their new king Sesostriis. From the perspective of ancient Egyptian society it showed how equilibrium in the social structure needed to be maintained by the stability of the role of a king who is able to restore Ma’at, create order out of chaos and avoid the fallibility demonstrated by the story of assassination.

Initially, there is the instructional advice to his son regarding his subjects and the role of the king, but the text quickly becomes reflective rather than didactic as the king embarks on the story of his assassination, describing his fallibility, even though he counters it with examples of his achievements. There is thus a mixture of *genres* in a writing that is designed not as a totally educational piece for its contemporary and future audience, but as a reflection that kingship, despite its divinity, can suffer from the same life experiences as the people. However it is unknown what percentage of the population would in fact be able to read such a written communication, and the question of oral dissemination is also speculative. Its most likely recipients would necessarily be the literate elite, comprised of the royal entourage and higher officials. This would also be the audience attending Court gatherings around the king where readings from such texts would also have taken place. This evokes a possible scene of Sesostriis, surrounded by his courtiers, listening to words spoken seemingly by his father’s ghost. This somewhat theatrical scenario contributes to the consideration of the text as a “performance as well as an “educational process.”¹⁶ The two combined show how the template of “storytelling” has been used to create a text that has within it a more serious purpose—the story as instruction.

Transliteration note

In case the transliteration font used for Egyptian hieroglyphs is not available, those words in transliteration appear using the standard *italic* equivalent. Below are listed those equivalents being used.

a = aleph
 A = ayin
 h = h
 H = dotted h
 x = round h
 X = flat h
 s = s
 S = sheen
 q = dotted k
 k = k
 t = t
 T = tcheen
 d = d
 D = djandja

NOTES

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- ¹ Text and line references (in brackets) from Faried Adrom, *Die Lehre des Amenemhet* (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2006). Translation, unless otherwise noted, Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 206–8.
 - ² Richard B. Parkinson, “Individual and Society in Middle Kingdom Literature,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, ed. Antonio Loprieno (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 147.
 - ³ See above on this page for note regarding transliteration style.
 - ⁴ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol.1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), 138.
 - ⁵ Stephen Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800BC: Questions and Readings* (London: Golden House, 2004), 128.
 - ⁶ Rudolf Anthes, “The Original Meaning of *maA-xrw*,” *JNES* 13 (1954): 50–1.
 - ⁷ Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and other Ancient Egyptian Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 206.
 - ⁸ John L. Foster, “The Conclusion to *The Testament of Ammenemes, King of Egypt*,” *JEA* 67 (1981): 36.

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- ⁹ Carolyn A. Thériault, “The Instruction of Amenemhet as Propaganda,” *JARCE*, 20 (1993): 159.
- ¹⁰ Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 131.
- ¹¹ Rudolf Anthes, “The Legal Aspect of the Instruction of Amenemhet,” *JEAS* 16 (1957): 180–3.
- ¹² Georges Posener, *Littérature et politique dans l’Égypte de la XIIe Dynastie* (Paris: Editions Champion, 1969), 70.
- ¹³ The translation of $\propto A$ as “appear” rather than “rise” following Loprieno’s definition relating it to the semantic realm of “morning” i.e. the *first* occurrence of brightness. Antonio Loprieno, “On the contribution of phonology to Egyptian philology” ...ir a buscar leña. *Estudios dedicados al Profesor Jesús López*, ed. Josep Cervelló Autuori and Alberto J. Queredo Álvarez (Barcelona: Aula Aegyptiaca – Studia 2, 2001), 107–8.
- ¹⁴ Hans Goedicke, “The Beginning of the Instruction of King Amenemhet,” *JARCE* 7 (1968): 20.
- ¹⁵ Alan H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Vol. 1* (London: British Museum, 1935), 43.
- ¹⁶ Richard B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London, New York: Continuum, 2002), 52.